

## **SELF-ISOLATING DURING A PANDEMIC: A Family Therapist's reflections**

*Diane Marshall, RP, RMFT-SM April 4, 2020*

As we all are learning during this strange time in history, and throughout the world, there is much to learn in the experience of living into what we are called to do to protect one another and ourselves.

In my case, I am now semi-retired – after 45 years in practice in Toronto – and have moved to be near my family and grandchildren in B.C. But now I'm left to visiting them on FaceTime, and talking on the phone, the technology for which I'm very grateful. And an unexpected surprise is having my film-maker daughter living with me, as she was caught when here "for a short visit" when the stay at home (and don't fly) directives were given, provincially and federally. So after 30 years we're learning to live together again in a small condo! Two adult women with distinct patterns of our lives trying to find a new rhythm and balance together...

This has made me reflect on many of my clients and the struggles I've so often heard throughout the years in my office, and as a supervisor mentor to other therapists with whom I now consult over ZOOM. Challenges of configuration, change and managing anxiety within the framework of family relations are common themes. There are some families facing issues of addiction or mental health, others the insecurity of loss of employment, financial constraints, fear of impoverishment. For still others, the fear of increased family violence, spousal abuse and child abuse, when under threat. Then there are those who have faced the terror of upheaval of war or famine and the displacement to a new country, with the consequent challenge of adjusting now to new realities, a new language, new culture, new systems of health and education.

In comparison, my own adjustments are minimal, yet living with global anxiety and sometimes contradictory instructions from public figures, can be confusing. Several of my friends and acquaintances back in Toronto are seniors in their 80's, and some are living alone. So I call, and it is always good to hear their voices. Meanwhile, my daughter and her colleagues are on hold as premieres at film festivals, for projects they've worked on for years, have been necessarily cancelled. The plight of artists at a time like this has a whole different dimension when they can't easily earn income and they can't show their films (or make new ones) or display their paintings or dances. Musicians are finding creative ways of doing home concerts, which my daughter and I have been enjoying: classical, folk, opera, choirs.

Spring has never seemed so lovely, as this season of living with CoVid-19. On our daily walks (each of us with a mask covering our mouth and nose) we are filled with the scents and beauty of new life surrounding us as cherry tree blossoms and forsythia, heather, azaleas and trees in new leaf fill our hearts with the colour of hope – as do the mallard ducks and geese in the duck pond as they busily make their nests, with the eagles soaring above from their grand view from the fir and cedar trees. The ocean waves crash or lap, depending on the winds, and yet their constant rhythm is the pulse beat

of Mother Nature herself, reminding us of the gift of life and of the companionship and love we too often take for granted.

I know, from my own experience so many decades ago of being a single parent to three energetic children, that being alone with children can be a very stressful and exhausting time for parents. If families are nearby, perhaps it is safe to have an occasional visit, keeping social distance, but even then it may be discouraged by medical authorities. Fortunately there are now good programs for children on T.V. and on the internet, if a parent has access to them - and particularly if they are non-violent and fun or educational so that children don't become aggressive or exposed to upsetting material. Parents need to watch carefully the online internet access, and be sure to download parental controls. For example, Netflix Kids is password controlled by parents, so those shows and programs are safer. **Kindness** is what is required more than anything, so Kids Help Line, and parental support lines are crucial.

As parks, community centres and sport fields are shut down here on the Coast where I live, teenagers are having a difficult time. If they have access to their friends through phone, text, and all the forms of connecting, they seem to be happy but they desperately need to be wearing off their energy by physical exercise. One of my grandchildren is able to go for a walk through the woods with his Dad, and a hike along the waterfront, with barely another person in sight. But I am mindful of the many children cooped up in apartments in a big city, and the high risk of family violence that may ensue with so few options for play or socializing or being outside in nature. Tempers flare between children, too, when they are under stress.

This unprecedented time in our history is going to bring suffering and loss in many ways, and yet also, hopefully, there will be new learnings of what it means to love and show care for one another in our homes and in society. May it be so.

[Kids Help Phone](#)