



# FAMILIES

TACKLING TOUGH TIMES

# TOGETHER



FAMILY

YOUNG ADULTS

## Our Family Can Do This! Sharing a Positive Outlook

Let's just be real — this pandemic sucks. It's scary and heartbreaking and has turned so many things upside down. It has also led to mountains of loss: there have been big losses, like the loss of lives and the loss of jobs. We are faced with multiple losses such as: loss of resources, loss of freedom, loss of social contacts, and loss of experiences and opportunities we were all looking forward to. And many of us feel that we have no control.

**But we do.**

True, we may not be able to control the spread of COVID-19 or the economy or whether we can return to school or our jobs. But we do have control over our actions and how we respond to what we are thinking and feeling. To shift our focus on finding moments of gratitude throughout our day. To learn some ways through which we can get a greater sense of control, we will focus on **letting go of "mental pollution"**.

### Mental Pollution (Hope, optimistic bias; confidence)

*Story from Heather, one of the team members for Families Together:* During a particularly rough time in my life, I gained an insight that has stayed with me. I was distractedly washing dishes and looked up to see the bottle of soap alongside the sink. As my eyes flashed to the label, I literally saw the phrase "mental pollution." It struck me hard. I thought — that is what I am experiencing right now. I am overwhelmed with mental pollution. After turning the bottle slightly I could see the "environ-" at the end of line above, but hey — I went with it. Since then, the phrase has served me well.

Human beings are truly hard wired to hold on to negative experiences.

When we get negative thoughts about our missteps, failures, defeats, and even disasters stuck in our minds, the mental pollution can become so thick that it, clogs the rivers of our thoughts, and chokes our creative ideas. Rather than dwelling on it, we need to find ways to identify, pick up, and throw out the trash. Will the rubbish be gone for good? Likely not — it is an ongoing process. But I believe you will find, as I have, that practice makes it easier to sift through the junk and find the gems and to practice gratitude.

### Video Resources

- [The Surprising Science of Happiness](#)
- [Want to Be Happy? Be Grateful](#)

### *Internal Actions*

- Take control of your thoughts by setting aside a block of time, such as 10 minutes, to consider them fully.
- When **good** things happen, pause and think about them — your brain needs more time for the positive experiences to sink in.
- Every time you experience a setback or failure — challenge yourself to consider at least five accomplishments, achievements, and/or truly good things in your life. The research indicates a 1:5 ratio of negative to positive is what our brains need.

### *External Actions*

- Direct your productive energy outward by going outside and picking up physical garbage, exercising, or helping others from afar.
- Write a small note to everyone you live with or a short email to friends or family members if you're living alone right now to share something about them that you're grateful for.

In addition, if you're having a moment when you feel like things are too out of control, try a grounding activity like this one suggested by [Dr. Sarah Allen](#): To begin, find someplace comfortable to sit, then (if you feel comfortable) close your eyes and take a couple of deep breaths. Breathe in through your nose (count to three) and out through your mouth (count to three).

Now open your eyes and look around you. Name out loud:

- 5 – things you can see (you can look within the room and out of the window)
- 4 – things you can feel (the silkiness of your skin, the texture of the material on your chair). What does your hair feel like? What is in front of you that you can touch?
- 3 – things you can hear (traffic noise or birds outside). When we are quiet and actually listening, things in our room constantly make noise, but typically we don't hear them.
- 2 – things you can smell (hopefully nothing awful!)
- 1 – thing you can taste. It might be a good idea to keep a piece of food handy when you are doing this grounding exercise! You can always leave your chair for this one and when you taste whatever it is you have chosen, take a small bite and let it sit in your mouth for a couple of seconds as you savor the flavor.
- Take a deep breath to end.



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College of Health and Human Sciences

## Welcome to Families Tackling Tough Times Together!

We hope you find the enclosed ideas and suggestions helpful as you care for your family during the pandemic. We know the pandemic is a very big challenge. How families cope can affect both parents and children for a long time.

We are scientists, educators, and students from Purdue University, and we are here to help! For nine weeks this fall, we will provide weekly collections of ideas for families to use to build on their strengths.

These tools are free, flexible, and informed by science. They are designed for families of all types, with tailored suggestions for children, youth, young adults and older adults, and suitable for both civilian and military families. We hope that your family will try one activity each week!

### Would you like to earn financial rewards?

We especially welcome families living in the continental US who are interested in trying out project materials and telling us about their experiences. These families can earn financial rewards by sharing about one hour of their time over the next two months. Sign up now at the link below!

[https://purdue.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_3vK1BJq2EiUksAJ](https://purdue.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3vK1BJq2EiUksAJ)

For more information

- Join the Families Together Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/HHSFamiliesTogether/>
- Or visit the project website: <https://www.hhs.purdue.edu/families-together/>