

New hobbies, quality family time, zero commutes: The unexpected benefits of lockdown life



Silver linings can be few and far between during the coronavirus pandemic. The crisis has brought upheaval to countless lives — but some folks are getting through it by focusing on the unexpected positive changes they’ve experienced since entering lockdown mode.

Aisha Moore, a health educator and self-care expert, tells Yahoo Life that being around her husband of nine years 24/7 has allowed the couple to resolve communication issues, be more mindful of their relationship and spend more quality time together at home. Hypnotherapist Penny Ling is sleeping better at night and feeling more productive since replacing her commutes into the office with virtual therapy sessions. And Michael James Nuells, who works in the entertainment industry, says that the lockdown helped him sever ties for good with an “extremely toxic” relationship he had before stay-at-home orders were implemented; by quarantining separately, he’s been able to cut off contact, heal through activities like yoga and journaling, and focus on “getting back to self-love and self-worth.”

“Heather,” a therapist who prefers not to disclose her real name, is also using her time in self-isolation to move on from a break-up. In her case, it’s her impending divorce after a year and a half of separation. Going into lockdown, during which she shares custody of her two children, she’s pursuing new passions, including gardening with friends. This coincided neatly with her transition to the “happily divorced” stage of life. When her kids are with her ex, she gardens with a friend at a safe distance, listens to empowering, women-centric podcasts and cooks. (“Now I kind of get why people love to cook, for the first time in my life,” she laughs.)

“I’m appreciating a simple life,” she tells Yahoo Life. “I’m appreciating not being in the car, and doing pickup/drop-off, running around with my head cut off. I am not generally a homebody, but I am enjoying being in my home and not having the pressure of going here, there and everywhere.”

Working remotely by offering online therapy sessions — something she hopes to continue post-pandemic — has offered a nice escape from her typical rushed routine, but it also hammers in just how good she has it compared to others.

“I’m very aware of my privilege,” she says, adding, “I do feel a little guilty about it when I talk to people who are miserable. We are in a pandemic, which is challenging, and I would like it to end. However, here we are, and it’s not ending anytime soon.”

Ruth Bienstock, who owns a jewelry boutique, also admits juggling conflicting feelings about how quarantine has impacted her life. Running a small, non-essential business during a pandemic has been a challenge, and like everyone else, she’s anguished by the grim news headlines. But having less work and more time with her two children — who were forced to come home from college and are now quarantining with Bienstock and her ex-husband, who has also moved into her home — has been a blessing.

“I know what’s going on,” she says. “I know the tragedy. It’s not that I’m totally removed from the reality of this thing. But I also know that two realities can happen at the same

time. I feel the pain of everyone else. I miss certain things about life from before.”

But working to the point of exhaustion while missing out on quality family time is not one of them.

“Having a retail business for six years has meant us working practically every single weekend,” says Bienstock, who runs her shop with her ex. “So it’s been years of me having to leave the kids on a Saturday morning, having to leave the kids on a Sunday morning, and just watching people be with their kids over a weekend and not having that. All those weekends, we’re getting them back with our kids.”

In quarantine, the former couple has established a “happy family unit in a ‘new normal’ weird sort of way.” Bienstock is soaking it all up and picking up new hobbies, from painting to online Scrabble to becoming a culinary goddess.

“I would get home from work exhausted at 8 o’clock, and then all you would hear is a symphony of beeps from the microwave,” she tells Yahoo Life. “Now I’m cooking, which is unbelievable ... I am now like Harriet from *Ozzy & Harriet*. All I want to do is nurture and feed.”

Family dinners aren’t the only “blissful aspect” she’s experienced. Despite running a fashion business, Bienstock has embraced a new life free from worrying about outward appearances (“I don’t think I could ever wear a zipper again,” she quips) and has made her spirituality a priority, through meditation.

Dr. Jen Hartstein, a psychologist and Yahoo Life Mental Health Contributor, says it’s natural that the “forced downtime” of quarantine would prompt people to press pause and reflect on the positive changes — more family time, a more rewarding career, a better relationship — they can make in the long term.

“The quarantine has its host of challenges for many of us, and, at the same time, does offer us some benefits,” she tells Yahoo Life. Most of us do not expect to have as much time with family, with ourselves, just quiet, in our lives as we might have now. This opportunity allows us space to think about what we want to do with our time differently, now and moving into the future.

“Forced downtime, which many of us have because we aren’t commuting or running around like we did, allows for increased connection and creativity. It allows us to reflect on our life and figure out what is working, and what is not. Although there is a lot out there to create anxiety and worry, inside, take the time and see what positive changes you want to make in your life and begin to make them. As you practice these changes, you can bring them into your life as a whole.”

Finding silver linings may at times feel selfish, but focusing on the positive aspects of this experience can help people cope during a trying time.

“There’s no need to feel guilty about making changes,” Dr. Hartstein says. “They may be exactly what you need and want.”

Bienstock says she tries to count her blessings and cut herself slack for enjoying certain aspects of her life in lockdown.

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Excerpted from an article by Erin Donnelly*