



**CITIESRISE**



TEEN MENTAL HEALTH

# **FINDING HAPPINESS**

**DURING A PANDEMIC**



# CITIESRISE



We ran a mental health essay competition for teens on Finding happiness during a pandemic-my Covid-19 story where they highlighted their coping skills



*I focus on daily routines such as exercising, family activities and reading books which helps in building a positive environment for my mind, soul and body.*



*Ernest - Form 1*

*I help my parents with the house chores, help my younger sibling with her assignments and share light moments at night before bedtime.*



*Elly - Form 1*



*I avoid watching too much news and instead focus on listening to music, reading books and talking to people close to me.*

*David - Form 1*

# THE NAIROBI TEEN MENTAL HEALTH ESSAY COMPETITION

This essay competition has been organized as part of the Cities Rise teen mental health literacy Program in Nairobi.

## RULES FOR ENTRY

The competition is open to these 10 schools ONLY;

**Loreto Msongari, Jamhuri High School, St Michael's secondary school , Nembu Girls, Ndururuno Mixed Secondary School, Ofafa Jericho High School, Tree Side Special School, Upper Hill School, Mutuini Secondary and Ruthimitu Secondary School.**

By entering the competition you are also giving CitiesRise permission to publish your essay.

## ENTRY CATEGORIES

Junior category (form 1 and 2) and senior category (form 3 and 4)

## THE TOP TEN STUDENTS IN EACH CATEGORY WILL BE REWARDED AS FOLLOWS:-

- a) Overall winner - Textbook centre voucher worth KES. 10,000
- b) First runners-up - Textbook centre voucher worth KES. 8,000
- c) 8 runners up- textbook centre voucher worth KES. 5,000 each

**The school with the highest number of entries will be awarded an LCD projector**



## INSTRUCTIONS

Typed essays to be sent to [teenmental@basicneedskenya.org](mailto:teenmental@basicneedskenya.org) before 20<sup>th</sup> June 2020. Write your FULL NAMES, LEVEL OF STUDIES (ie form 1, 2, 3 or 4) and the NAME OF THE SCHOOL on your essay document. ESSAYS WITH INCOMPLETE IDENTIFICATION MAY BE DISQUALIFIED.

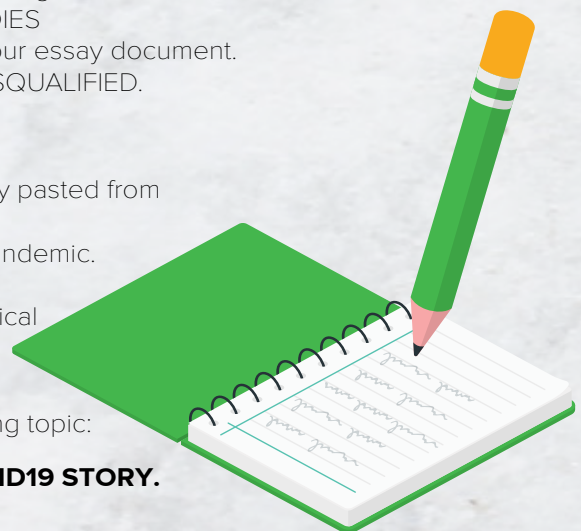
## Marks will be awarded on the basis of the following:

- a) Originality and creativity; essays found to have been copy pasted from online sources will be DISQUALIFIED.
- b) A demonstration of an understanding of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- c) Ability to link Covid-19 and mental health.
- d) An understanding of ways of coping with the psychological effects of Covid-19.

## ESSAY TOPIC

Write an essay of approximately 400 words on the following topic:

**FINDING HAPPINESS DURING A PANDEMIC: MY COVID19 STORY.**



# HOW I AM COPING DURING THE PANDEMIC



Mental health is very important in all aspects of our lives. Lately mental health awareness is rising. Mental health can be affected by many aspects of our lives be it our pasts, present, or even our future, it could be something someone said or even a picture we saw on Instagram. It is not a new topic for me and I hope to share with you some of my thoughts.

Covid-19 has brought a standstill to our day to day lives. This could be stressful and can cause fear and anxiety. Matters of mental health resonate close to me. Prior to the pandemic I was used to going to school and playing with my friends, all of a sudden this changed when the government ordered schools to close down. Fortunately, this coincided with the April holiday and it was a welcome season of rest after a busy first term. Soon the holiday was over, and we were informed of the online schooling. Initially, we had a few challenges settling into online school but as we adjusted to the new normal, I realized that I actually enjoy online school.

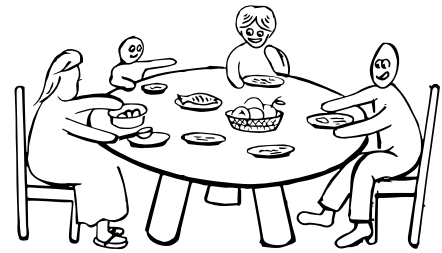
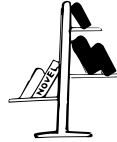
It all started on the 13th of March when Kenya recorded its first case of COVID-19. Honestly, I was scared. But my parents sat my siblings and I down and talked to us about how we would handle the situation. We shared our fears and even discussed what we would do if any of us got infected. It was very helpful to know that we were going through it together. I was also reminded that as a family we are as strong as our weakest member. We agreed to keep ourselves abreast on the latest information and the status of the COVID-19 outbreak by watching the daily ministry of health briefing. We also agreed to develop a routine that would work for us during this period.

To support a healthy mind, one needs to live a balanced lifestyle. I have developed a routine that I adhere to daily which has helped me remain calm, collected, and healthy. Therefore, here are some habits I have adopted: Sleeping and waking up early, meditating and practicing mindfulness, sharing meals with family, eating healthy, exercising, reading, and spending quality family time. I will extensively

explain the importance of all of these practices.

We will start by discussing sleeping and waking up early. Mason Cooley once said, "Every day begins with an act of courage and hope: getting out of bed." People who sleep early are more likely to sleep the recommended 8 hours. They also are more energetic when they wake up. I was used to sleeping late and waking up late but ever since I changed my sleeping habits, I have been more productive and creative. I have also been more organized. I am also focused and never late for my lessons.

Secondly, we will discuss meditation and mindfulness. Once I wake, I say a prayer then I write on my gratitude journal a list of 10 things I am thankful for. After that, I assert myself with positive affirmations which helps me be positive throughout the day. In conjunction with that, I share my meals with my family. I spend mealtimes talking about my dreams and ambitions. Especially my love and talent for music. I sing and play the piano for my family after meals and they give me feedback



on the songs I have written. The title “Reveal yourself to me,” to one of my songs reminds me that I am living proof of God’s work.

Furthermore, healthy eating is a habit I have been trying to stick to. Luckily, I have family around who hold me accountable for my diet. Studies show that it helps keep you in a better mood and also improves your memory. I have been able to remember what I am taught in class and I perform much better in my assignments. These supplements the benefits of exercising. Exercising raises metabolism in one’s body. After exercising, I feel energized, happy and it makes me more productive throughout the day. Studies show that exercising helps improve one’s brain health and memory. It also improves my quality of sleep and keeps me relaxed. This distracts me from thinking about the pandemic. Reading novels has always been a hobby of mine since childhood but I have certainly been enraptured by different articles and books. I am currently reading an e-book by Darius Foroux, “The road to better

habits.” It is very interesting and encourages self-growth. I have also been studying for my upcoming checkpoint examinations. Reading reduces stress, expands my vocabulary, improves my writing skills, focus, and concentration.

I don’t think quantity time is as special as quality time with your family’- Reba McEntire. I enjoy spending time with family because I can share my thought processes and lessons learned throughout the day. My family members are always there to give me advice or correct me in different situations. I love my family and would not trade anything for the time spent with them. Family time also creates a huge impact on my memories and changes my whole perspective of life. I have learned that you cannot be too serious with life but enjoy each precious moment you live and spend with those you love.

In summary, I have grown mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually during this period

of the pandemic. I have learned to appreciate myself more and I have learned a lot about myself than I ever have. I have taught myself life skills like time management which is not normally taught in schools. I would like to take this opportunity to appreciate my school and all organizations that are spreading awareness of mental health. For a long time, mental health was disregarded by many. It is time for a change. Mental health is not a crime, and sometimes it is okay not to be okay. I would like to appreciate all the facilitators of this program for this opportunity to share with you my experiences.

**By Natalie –Loreto Convent Msongari**



**FINDING**  
**HAPPINESS**  
**DURING A PANDEMIC:**  
**MY COVID 19 STORY**



Covid-19 is a blessing in disguise. This may not be a good way to start an essay or any piece of writing for that matter but when you really think it through, it actually is. Picture this we are currently three months into a global pandemic and during these trying times, the nation is on the edge of another health crisis, with daily death, loneliness and anxiety causing widespread psychological trauma. The virus has contributed to depression, drug abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder and perhaps the worst of all, suicide. All this as a result of deteriorated mental health.

The closure of schools has brought ambitious plans for the future to a halt with students wondering whether they will ever get back



to their 'normal' routine. There has been underlying anxiety and uncertainty. Basically, everyone is struggling with this virus in one way or another. This is more than enough reason for you to question my 'blessing in disguise' theory. The world has literally come to a halt with everyone's goal set on surviving. It is safe to say that no one is genuinely happy or at least at peace. It is quite evident that the virus has stopped us all in our tracks, but what if that was what we needed? What if we needed a snap back into reality? What if we were so far gone and consumed in things that didn't matter to the point where we had lost track of ourselves?

Covid-19 has for sure woken us up. We have focused on things that matter the most to us. It has reshaped our personal relationships forcing us to live close together with some people and further apart from others. In a BBC article by Yi-Ling-Liu, he says that "Life in lockdown has necessitated close contact with our families and partners". If we are being real, Corona Virus has deteriorated our mental health, there is just too much to worry about, whether it is financially, mentally or even socially having led to the psychological distress that Kenya's larger population faces today. With less people on the sidewalks, vehicles on the highways, shops closed,

and flights grounded, the day-to-day noise that fills our lives has for sure decreased. What about our inner noise? If we look at all this as a blessing in disguise we shall eventually find inner peace and happiness. Our mental health is our own responsibility during such times. Positivity is key. Let us all yearn for happiness amidst everything happening in Kenya.

**By Stephen – Mang'u High School**



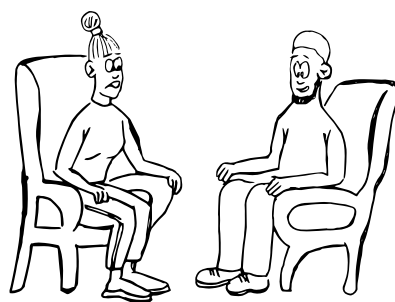
**FINDING**  
**HAPPINESS**  
**DURING A PANDEMIC:**  
**MY COVID 19 STORY**



The coronavirus disease is a communicable respiratory disease, which was discovered in Wuhan, China late last year. The virus has made its way to several nations of the world making it a global health crisis. This is one of the greatest challenges of our time the world has faced. It is clearly evident that the pandemic has had devastating effects on nations and its people all over the world. Not only has the pandemic had health effects on us but also socio-economic effects. Every day, we hear of people succumbing to the disease. Though no one is safe from this killer disease, the elderly and little children, are the most vulnerable to it.

Every day, people are losing jobs and income, with the uncertainty of when everything will go back to normal. Nations that were heavily dependent on areas such as tourism have been hard hit by the virus. Many countries have resorted to nationwide lockdowns





as a containment measure of the virus. With the crashing economies, several families have been affected by this pandemic; some are not able to provide for their families.

The Covid-19 outbreak has its effects on all segments of the population and different social groups. As a result, there has been an increase in mental health issues in the community at large. These fraught and overwhelming circumstances have led to a mixture of emotions. Fear, anxiety, depression and stress among others have reigned supreme all over the world. Other than the fear of contracting the virus, this new norm where we have to adapt to several changes in our society like the restricted movements, working from home, home-schooling, temporary unemployment and even lack of physical contact with family and friends are some of the defining factors causing mental health problems.

The fear of one's health and that of his/her loved ones at this queer time leads to fear, worry and even anxiety. It also leads to worsening of chronic health and mental health conditions. The stigma associated with people testing positive for Covid-19 also contributes to deterioration of a person's mental health as a person feels alone and far away from society. These feelings of isolation, depression and stress increase the risk of suicide.

However, there are several ways to cope with these psychological effects on our mental health. One has to make time to unwind and do activities they enjoy instead of constantly thinking of the negatives. This can be done through practical ways to relax like exercising, taking a break from social media and doing things you enjoy. As a teenager, I have not been left out, but instead of worrying, I took interest in scrapbooking and put to good use my God-given talent of art. I also found taking a break from social media very calming.

One should try and talk to people they trust and connect with them and speak about their feelings. Keeping everything bottled up does not help at all. It will also be good to take a break from all the media stories repeatedly talking about the pandemic. Nevertheless, one should know when to get help whether from a counsellor or even a peer and can be assisted immediately. Soon, positive results will be seen within a person.

I am positive that this is yet another obstacle that we can get through by the power of the Almighty Deity.

**By Zena – Moi Educational Center High School**



**FINDING**

**HAPPINESS**

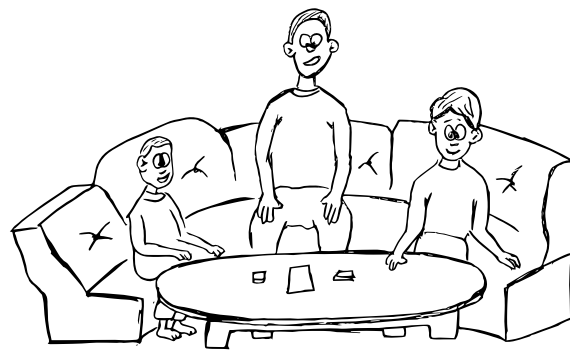
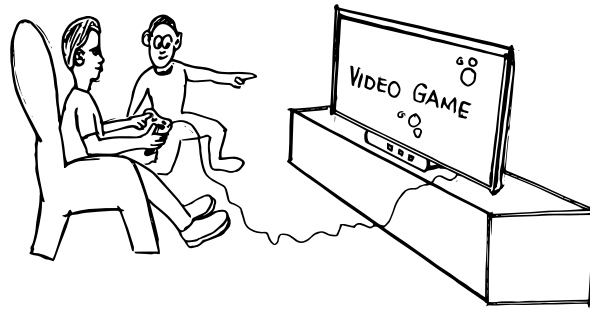
**DURING A PANDEMIC:**

**MY COVID 19 STORY**

By Wayne –  
Sunshine Secondary School

It was a Friday evening when our class teacher entered the classroom and informed us of the situation. He started off by saying the parent teacher meeting that was to take place the following day had been cancelled due to the new uprising pandemic (Covid-19). At first, we students were conflicted because we were told our parents were not going to come to visit us. Later, we were informed that we were going to be picked up by our parents the next day as the school was breaking for a while.

Upon hearing this we were all overfilled with joy, we were told to pack all our books and clothes and



go to sleep. In the morning we were all restless and excited to go home. That morning we all woke up bid the teachers goodbye and drove home with our parents.

In the early stages of this pandemic I personally did not care as much I was just happy that I had been given a break from school. I used to go out and hang out with my friends till late. I did not follow the basic instructions of social distancing. As this went on the cases kept on increasing it was like the way fire spread its blazing heat in a forest. The amount of people that kept on contracting the virus increased steadily but surely. This forced our president to come

up with a plan to slow down this virus. He and the board of health found it best to come up with strict measures. He initiated the 30-day quarantine program.

This came as a surprise to most of us. The adults who would have normally stayed up late clubbing or partying were forced to put this habit on hold as they monitor how the virus will react. This quarantine program affected me because now I could not go outside and hang with my mates. I was to stay indoors all day every day for 30 days. During this time our school came up with online classes.

During this time the happiness I got came from chilling with my family and playing video games with my friends daily. Video games for me became like a safe space where I could escape and hang out with my friends although it was not face to face it was nice to hear their voices.





**FINDING**

# **HAPPINESS DURING A PANDEMIC:**

## **MY COVID 19 STORY**

**By Nickson – Upper Hill School**

No one would have anticipated that social interactions, a vital necessity to mental well-being, would come to a halt. Suddenly, we are advised to stay away from our loved ones in order to protect them. Many have been completely isolated from friendships, emotional support systems and safe spaces. We are left completely at the mercies of the hope that this crisis shall soon pass.

Nonetheless, there is a silver-lining to this dark cloud. Recently we had an interesting conversation with my mother. She pointed out that she never had any serious family bonding moments with us since we joined kindergarten. It was only then that I took a trip down memory lane and came to the one awful conclusion: despite the fact that we genuinely loved each other and shared the same blood, that did not necessarily make us friends. Being that we are a family of six, this was truly alarming.

At the onset of the pandemic, with all its mind-numbing restrictions and lifestyle shifts, we were all shun from our social circles. From having extremely tight schedules to being confined to the four walls of our humble abode. I remember the deafening silence that echoed in incredible volumes, as we all struggled to free ourselves from our little cocoons. The ones we used to shelter ourselves from social interaction with one another.

The days dragged on, each day flooded with new cases from the global crisis. The sickening reality of this 'new normal' slowly forced us to let down our walls. The instinctive nature of human beings for social interaction shifted communication from being a luxury to being a prioritized necessity; a gap that even social media could not fill. It all began when my six-year-old sister took my mother's hand and insisted that she must go out and play with her. What started out as a comical

pastime to pass the long hours of the day ended up becoming a daily family routine. I had never imagined that the day would come when I would see my ever-serious father laughing his heart out. We all watched in amusement as my younger brother easily outran my mother, who ran out of breath after less than a hundred meters. Through this global pandemic, I have learnt that family offers the best refuge from the depression and uncertainties that life brings, and from it; true happiness.



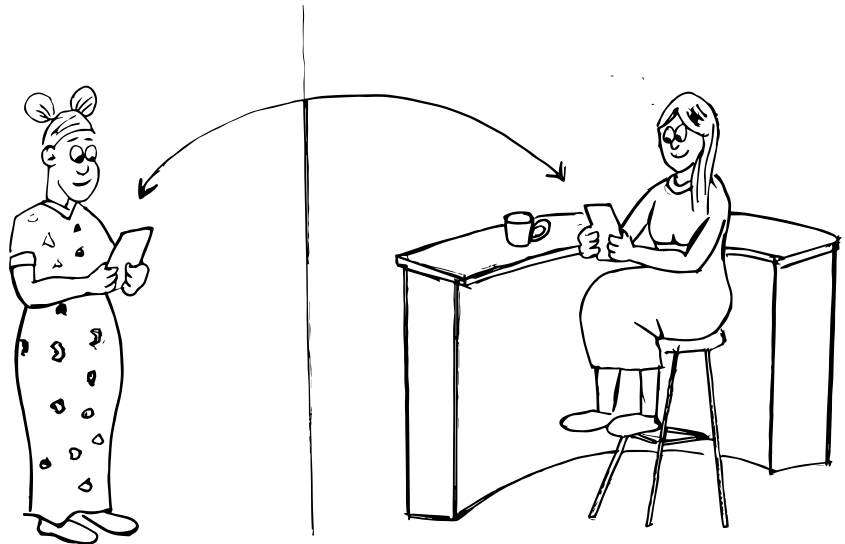
**FINDING**  
**HAPPINESS**  
**DURING A PANDEMIC:**  
**MY COVID 19 STORY**

**'Corona virus is deadly, stay safe and healthy.'**

This was written everywhere. The news was all about the corona virus pandemic that had infected more than five million people in the world. A person having flu-like symptoms and high fever was treated like an alien from another planet. To some people this was a free ticket of leaving this world since it killed people within a short time. Was it just a coincidence that I had the symptoms?

Although I knew that the outcome will be unbearable, I decided to go and be tested because maybe I was just being paranoid. After being tested I felt that fear had engulfed me, and my entire body was shaking. Just as my instincts told me, I was positive. That was it. Everything was over and the only thing that remained was to be locked in a room with an excuse of protecting other people.

Fortunately, I was put under home quarantine and I could still see my family even though very briefly. Staying in that room all day was



so tiring. I felt like my legs were becoming numb. Nobody was allowed to touch my properties let alone coming to my room. The only people allowed were my parents and siblings but then they had to wear masks and gloves before coming.

All these were driving me crazy. Everything seemed to be changing and the tranquility in that room made me to be even more frightened. I felt so despised and abandoned. With nobody to talk to and everybody keeping distance, everything was terrible. Gradually, I also started looking down on myself and I hated my life. I hated who I was and everything around me.

Every day I opened the window and looking outside, I could see the birds singing and insects chirping. I hoped I could feel even the slightest happiness in my heart but no it was all sad and grieving. My mind was telling me that I will never live as others but my said it differently. As long as there was a glimmer of hope I will not give up.

As I tried to cope with the trauma for days, I finally got the idea. “So, what if I was a COVID-19 patient and so what if the whole world abandoned me?” I had to fight for myself. Having a low self-esteem will only damage my mental health. I decided to get inspirations

from the media to keep me going. I chatted with my friends who supported me. I was like a flower blossoming in spring and a seed sprouting.

This was the true happiness that I needed during those tough times. It was about being positive to myself and accepting my situation. With the help from doctors, I managed to survive.

**By Phelisters – Nembu Girls High School**



**FINDING**

**HAPPINESS**

**DURING A PANDEMIC:**

**MY COVID 19 STORY**

It all started as a minor and unimportant issue but now, it is worse than ever. We never knew what fate had in store for us. A disease which so horrendous and dreadful. It is a disease so new that it is almost impossible to tame it. Every day we live with the threat posed by an unpredictable virus. It has changed the way we carry on with our daily activities. People are panic-stricken not knowing if they will wake up one day and suffer from the disease. Economies are deteriorating. Unemployment is rising. Families are breaking apart due to financial instability.

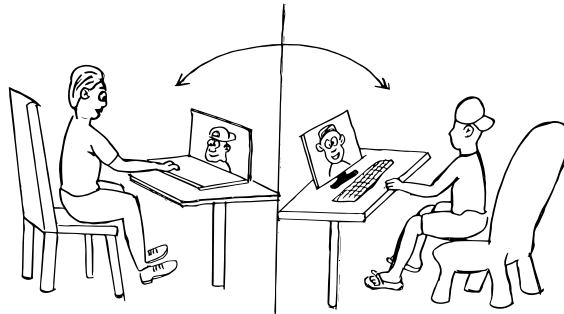
Companies are collapsing, millions of lives lost, the list is endless.

The emergence of Covid-19 as a worldwide pandemic has brought about precautionary measures such as social distancing or in some cases total lockdown in a city or country, social isolation, wearing masks. People have now to deal with such restrictions and have to adapt to new changes where the future is uncertain. Limited social interactions have affected mental health. Friends and family are fearing for their lives as they don't know if their friends and relatives may be the carriers of the virus.

Limited access to daily activities has affected families who are already struggling to acquire livelihood.

Children are affected by social isolation and the mental health issues it triggers. Instead of socializing with others, the pandemic has forced them to stay indoors, limiting their interactions. Schools having being closed, they don't know when they will open. Especially this year's candidates, who fear for their future. They have no clue of how they will do their national exams. They feel confused, stressed, sad, angry and just a mess of emotions.





People in isolation feel secluded. Their caretakers may fear to look after them because of the potential to contract the virus. The COVID-19 develops feelings of loneliness, anxiety, depression and stress due to their uncertainty. These can cause myriads of suicidal thoughts. They cannot pay bills, feed their families and are crumbling financially.

Health workers who are parents fear they may infect their families. They cut off physical interaction with their children. Happy occasions like weddings are no more. People cannot even bury their loved one in funerals because congregating families may increase the spread of the virus. People are afraid to go to the hospital due to the fear of being diagnosed positive for

the virus. As a coping mechanism during this pandemic, people resort to substance abuse.

As the idiom says, every cloud has a silver lining. We now live in an era of digital technology as a part of our lives. Online learning has become increasingly popular. Connecting with friends and family through video calls eases feelings of loneliness. Taking breaks from watching the news about the pandemic because they can be stressful. Finding yourself during this time can be helpful like nurturing talents or even discovering them. Spending time with family and understanding their likes and dislikes can build a good relationship. Taking time to re-connect with lost friendships and mend broken ones.

These are some of the measures that can be practiced to ease people's loneliness and improve their well-being. This can bring back some normality and people may slowly return to their daily lives.

**By Joshua – Sunshine Secondary School**



# **FINDING** **HAPPINESS** **DURING A PANDEMIC:**

By Rebecca – Loreto Convent Msongari

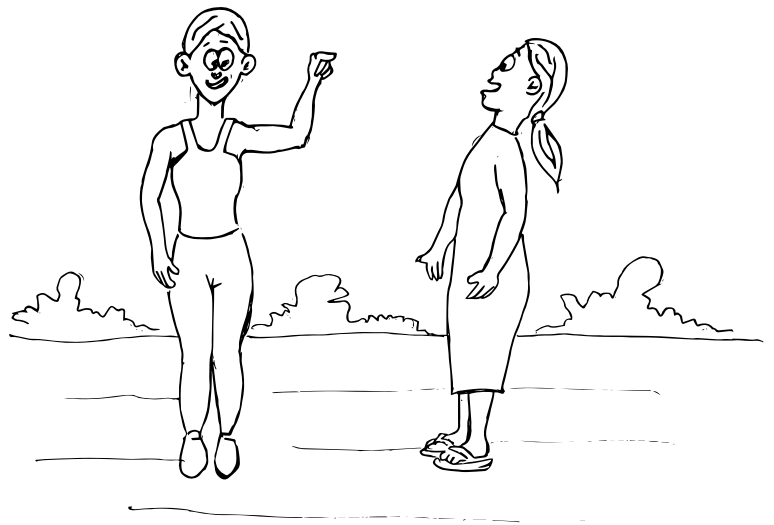
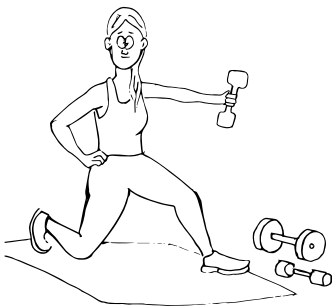
The world is grappling with an invisible deadly enemy. We are trying to understand how to live with the threat posed by the virus known as Covid-19. Ever since the Covid-19 outbreak started, society has been unhinged and usual rules no longer apply.

Now we are walking around the streets with masks on. It is very uncomfortable but that is the way we can protect ourselves from this virus. We have to wash our hands regularly and sanitize. Is this how our life is going to be from now on? Maintaining distance from the people we love? Are we really ready for this?

This virus has really ruined our lives. Every day, people are losing jobs and income, and have no way

of knowing when normality will return. I have found my happiness and joy living with my extended family during this lockdown. I have spent a very long time with them, and I am using every single minute to appreciate them while they are here.

This lockdown has taught me a lot. Each and every day I am learning new skills while also polishing up my old skills. It is not only happiness that I find every day during this lockdown. My heart breaks on seeing images of exhausted and poorly equipped health care workers. Why is it so heavy for me? It is not my family? Also seeing constant reports of the number of confirmed deaths from Covid-19 saddens me.



I know Covid-19 can affect my mental health. Therefore, I always try to stay informed. I listen to the advice we get from the government and local authorities. I also have a daily routine. When I wake up, I always know what to do. I get up at the same time every day. I exercise every day and keep up with my personal hygiene. I give myself a time limit to be on the gadgets. It can be tempting to spend a lot of time on them, but I know I have to balance my activities so that I can maintain my daily routine.

I sometimes have anxiety, but it becomes a good thing when I manage it well. I seize opportunities to share humour with others. Isn't laughter a relief for all of us?

The Covid-19 epidemic is now declared a pandemic. Let us all follow the rules and measures we have been advised by our local authorities. This should blunt the speed of the virus. With all this suffering, let us pray to God that this will not be the new normal.



# **FINDING** **HAPPINESS** **DURING A PANDEMIC:**

COVID-19 is a disease spread primarily through respiratory droplets. When an infected person sneezes or coughs, the virus can be transmitted either directly or via an intermediate surface. Health specialists have therefore advised people to avoid crowded places and observe social distancing, among other measures. These guidelines led to the closure of schools, churches, bars and some offices opting to have employees working from home. This decision despite minimizing the spread of the virus may have undesirable effects on the mental health of members of society.

Humans have evolved to be social creatures. For all the history of humanity, people have been



in family structures and groups; they crave and rely on interaction with others and lack of this has unpleasant effects. Studies have shown that found that lack of robust social connections can raise one's health risks as much as abusing drugs would and significantly increase risk of premature mortality. Being alone interferes with mental development and increases stress and anxiety. Dr. Craig Haney, a professor of psychology at University of California once stated that for some prisoners, solitary confinement precipitates a descent into madness.

The school environment gave students room for socialization hence closure of schools has left them with scarce opportunities to interact with their peers. The

psychological stress resulting from this change can have extreme detrimental effects on a person's mental, emotional and even physical health hence it is important to keep oneself occupied in order to remain sane. It is important to keep in mind this is not a holiday and it is not beneficial to sit around all day with no timetable or routines; one should be disciplined and have established time for things.

A positive attitude towards the whole situation is of great importance. Learning a new skill or even working on perfecting already obtained skills is advisable. Calling friends at least once a week would be helpful, and, despite the fact that it cannot measure up to physical interaction, helps reduce anxiety. If

possible, sit down with family and play board games. To relax and take one's mind off everything, it would be advisable to do physical exercises. Doing an evaluation of personal goals, achievements and strategies is also key. Remember that no matter how hard we may try to change the situation, it is impossible. What we can do, however, is to make the best out of it and remain calm.

**By Ruby – Maryhill Girls High School**





# FINDING HAPPINESS DURING A PANDEMIC:

By Tasnim – Precious Blood Riruta

Happiness is not something you have to achieve, you can still be happy in the process of achieving something. Wise words that comforted me during this dreadful pandemic. Of course, it's absurd for someone to still be happy when the world is in literal ruins. But of course, we can't stay gloomy during this whole situation. We always have to stay positive no matter what.

This whole pandemic era has many negatives as opposed to positives. For instance, Many businesses have failed, schools closing, no freedom of association as well as many artists having to cancel their concerts. Such an occurrence has never occurred since the plague that ravaged humanity throughout its existence in 1920.

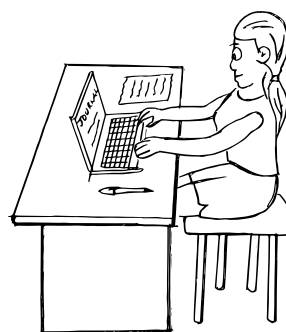
As a result of all these losses caused by Covid-19, it has certainly resulted in decline in mental health of people, especially in

adults. Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Few people have been able to maintain positive mental health. As for me, who has once experienced mental health issues while in school, this pandemic gave me a chance to reflect on my life. The girl who once saw life as a repetitive meaningless task was able to open her eyes and see beyond those negative thoughts that clouded her mind. I was able to see the importance of school, freedom and the beauty of living life. I really would want this pandemic to end so as to test my once neglected abilities. I realized that I didn't have to live my life based on the standards of others.

The dreadfulness of having to live in isolation, financial hardship, and the grief of having lost a loved one could literally ruin someone's wellbeing. The main psychological impact of this pandemic is elevated rate of anxiety or stress. As this

pandemic is definitely stressful one should find ways of coping with stress as it could lead to a decline in someone's health. No doubt your health is your first priority and therefore one should rule out anything that may affect it.

In order to cope with this stress, one should try these healthy ways which includes; Taking care of your body, connecting with others, though not physically, taking a break from news stories which can be upsetting and also trying out new hobbies example; cooking, writing and many more. Always remember even though you're tired and everything hurts, everything eventually goes.



# **FINDING HAPPINESS DURING A PANDEMIC:**

**By Travis – Ndururuno Mixed Secondary School**

For almost four years I had waited for this day. My high school academic trip. It was there just hours away, I could almost taste the sweet snacks I was to carry. The out of class learning experience had caught my attention every year as I watched the form fours board the school bus and leave for their trip. Now, it was finally my year. My dreams came to a halt as I listened to the announcement of the first reported case of a positive patient of the corona virus disease, COVID-19.

Since the president had announced and ordered the closure and lock down of the country, I packed and went to my mum's place, which is where I spend most of my time out of school especially on weekends, holidays and mid-term breaks. I said bye to my mom, my little brother who was then almost three months

old. I looked for my little sister, but she was nowhere to be found. I would have gone the following day but without thinking I just walked out of the door not to see them for the next couple of months. I have never been away for so long. That day I had barely spent an hour at home I had just gotten home from mum's place and now I was going back. I just thought of the nice studying environment mum provides in her house, my second home.

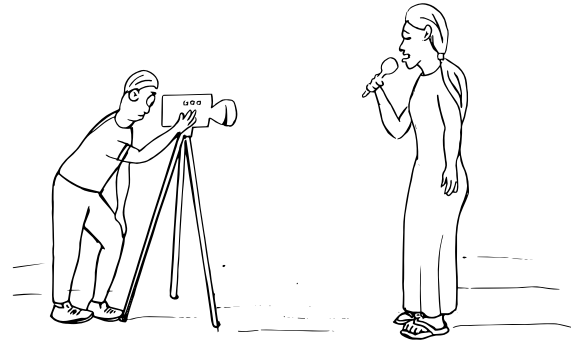
As I'm seated on my seat in the public transit vehicle, I can see the panic as people rush in and out with trolley at a Naivas Supermarket. I meet this nice gentle man who asks me about the announcement, because he was from work and was not really sure about the outbreak, it seemed he did not believe that it was true that there was an outbreak. He was dressed in a nice black

suit and carried a black leather briefcase. I just gave him a list of the things that were being closed.

I finally reach mum's place; I have no blood relation but she took us, me and my other siblings who are just like me, into her home. So much potential without a vision because we haven't been shown any better. She answered her call and took initiative to raise us as her own. She's my role model and her passion for Christ is unmatched. She says that she sees greatness in us. She's absolutely a God sent. I met her almost a year ago and I have seen myself grow at an alarming rate, both academically and spiritually.

My routine was spending every weekend there, then after church on Sunday afternoons I would head home to my biological family. This





time it was different though, I'm used to maximum of five people at the house but I found my older high school graduate siblings. They were to go to a class the next week and by the time the week was ending we were ten people. Good thing is that it is a big house. Mum and Auntie Jenny could have left and flown home to their respective countries, but they chose to stay in Kenya and got stuck in the country while their families were thousands of miles away.

The first couple of weeks were fun until things went horribly wrong, people started growing moods we started getting tired of the same faces every day. I am usually an indoors person but it was too much for me and I could not leave. It was so bad that a big compound grew smaller every day, in addition to that I went days without speaking

to people. I had in house sickness if there is such a thing. On top of everything, I started growing homesick. I have never away from home for so long, I even had my little baby brother who I can't even carry or touch because I'm away from him.

The isolation and being stuck inside in the name of quarantine started getting to people. The fights started becoming more and they grew more intense every day, until a meeting was called for people to talk out their issues before it turned barbaric. We were to air out our problems to find a solution and to find a way to cope with each other. I can say that we actually did it after constant conversation, prayer and worship together, we resolved our problem and worked on living together. I can say that before we called each other family but after we

actually became a family. We were so good that we started shooting videos of songs and messages of encouragement to people in the world who were infected and affected by the pandemic. We shared them online for people to see. I can say we showed good results because we are with God.

After a couple of weeks, we realized that K.C.S.E was around the corner and me and some of my siblings who are candidates were really falling behind. In all that I have been through to this point, I can say that the pandemic has been a transformational period for me. Three months later still alive, still working on improving on myself and preparing for the national exam and even able to take part in academic contests.



# **FINDING HAPPINESS DURING A PANDEMIC:**

**By Chesney – Ofafa Jericho High School**

I remember the day that the news about COVID 19 was abruptly broken to us in school. Most of us as secondary school students were very excited to go home before the end of a normal school term. Only a few had seen the fact that it would not be all joy. As the famous saying goes “A blessing in disguise” I saw it as a “curse in disguise” after weeks started turning to months and we were still at home.

Maybe to some of us who believe in the higher being might have felt that the world was at a rush and so the Lord decided to put it at a halt to show His power. The focus of this essay is mental health, Covid-19 and as a teenager finding happiness during this pandemic.

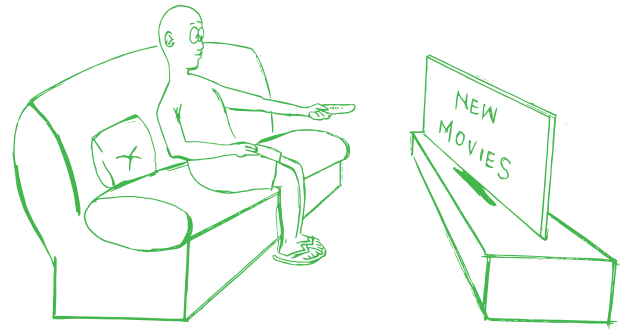
According to World Health Organization Mental Health is a

state of wellbeing in which an individual realizes his potential and is able to make a contribution to his or her community. While Covid-19 as we all know is an infection characterized by high fever and difficulty in breathing if infected. I think Covid-19 has greatly influenced people mentally and this was evident from the beginning.

When the first case of Covid-19 was announced in the country, people became really anxious and everyone rushed to supermarkets to stock their houses with food since they did not know for how long the pandemic would last for. Anxiety was building up on and this increased when jobs started closing down. Fear started creeping into a few individuals and families since they did not know how they would

provide for their families without money. It was again evident that people with small business would close their businesses when the 7 pm curfew was put in place. The decision I decided to make was, despite this pandemic, I would make myself happy.

What kept me going and happy, I decided to have a program for myself on a daily basis. During school holidays I would go to a certain field just in the neighborhood and play some street soccer with other teenage boys who were also on school holidays. Playing football with my friend was one of the things I looked forward to, because I found my happiness there. Due to Covid-19 it is illegal to meet as a group with reference to the government directives, but



we had to adhere to the rules. Teenagers have a lot of energy and they usually look for an avenue to let it out. With all this I decided that my happiness would not be taken away by the current situation.

I would do some exercise the first thing in morning after waking up. Then a will have a quite time reading my bible, which will be followed by taking breakfast by around 9 a.m. From 9.30 a.m. to 1 p.m. I would do a self study on different subjects according to my time table. The afternoons were free for me and I would do anything that I enjoyed doing. On some occasion I got involved working with one of the mason who was repairing our verandah. All this gave me a lot of joy and I would say what is not in my control should not bother me.

Some of the ways to cope with the psychological effects of Covid-19 as a teenager are: To have parents who are ready to listen to our concerns. They should be listening to us actively and have an understanding attitude towards us as the children. As a teenager sometimes I would react differently to an unsettling surrounding due to COVID 19 restrictions from my parents. Feeling anxious, and not being understood when I say something to my parents would make me have frequent mood changes. What helped me to deal with this was watch my favorite movies and series or have a discussion with my elder brother. I would usually feel relieved if my parents would be able to communicate their disturbing feelings in a safe and supportive environment. I look at my parents

as my role model so whatever they said about COVID 19 I would take it seriously. They seemed to be very careful when commenting about it and this helped me to cope better. They also made opportunities in the home environment for us to lay and relax.

In conclusion it is important that when our parents manage their emotions and remain calm as a teenager, I will feel safe and happy. They should listen to my concerns and speak kindly to me and continue reassuring me that all will be well at the end of this pandemic. If I cannot make myself happy now in this situation nobody will do. Let us continue keeping safe as teenagers and be happy.





# **FINDING** **HAPPINESS** **DURING A PANDEMIC:**

By Ernest – Upper Hill School

This year, being the first year of the decade, sparked change, growth and happiness across the world, hence brought into the limelight. In every avenue supporting human life, this was the best time of determination and hard work to be done to achieve success. Yet, the least worry, at the back of our minds, was cast upon a rare virus that is proving to be the most dangerous species of our era.

The Coronavirus, popularly known as Covid-19, has brought the world affairs into a standstill as it is a threat to humanity both in its biological activities in the body and its direct effects to all aspects supporting human life. Tinier than a red blood cell, the virus is transmitted at a higher rate from infected people to those closely in contact with. Furthermore, it brings about the difficulty in tracing the spread, since the timespan of the symptoms of the

disease is 14 days, hence enables passing the virus unnoticed to other people. This makes it an invisible enemy and deadlier threat.

Within five months of the outbreak, millions have been infected and more than tens of thousands perished due to the virus' ability over human immunity. Moreover, the pandemic has severely impacted the world's economic and social status. Businesses are being closed, rendering many unemployed. National restrictions such as lockdowns, social distancing, and cancelation of social gatherings so as to curb the spread of the virus, greatly affect our health; emotionally, physically and psychologically.

These isolation measures have elevated the rates of stress, anxiety and depression in human minds as they fear the virus. These effects poison a person's mental health,

making him or her a safety concern as any drastic deed can be fatal. On May 30th, a newborn baby girl in Murang'a County was found dumped in a pit latrine by the mother who was suffering from Post Maternal Depression. The pandemic had hindered the mother economically, for she could not cater for the baby and her two older children, hence resorting to disposing the baby. Unprecedented actions like that can go unnoticed from other people due to the isolation, which is harmful to children and adults alike. With the right ways carried out to influence positive mentality of handling this pandemic, this phase of life would be smoother than we could imagine.

Firstly, whatever we feed our minds, will greatly affect our actions and characters. In following the updates of the pandemic, we should find



a balance in news feeds so as to reduce anxiety and fear of the virus. In fact, avoid making assumptions about the virus. Do not judge people nor jump into conclusions hurriedly. Be sure it is relevant information from reputable sources.

A busy mind is a healthy mind. Being distracted from the pandemic reduces thoughts of fear and depression as creating new daily routines such as exercising, family activities and reading books helps

in building a positive environment for the mind, soul, and body. Additionally, keeping in contact with friends and relatives through calls and social media deprives loneliness and boredom hence strengthening social bonds in this crisis.

The state of mind during this Coronavirus pandemic is a crucial matter which requires personal and communal support. Positivity, responsibility and accountability are the anchors in helping us overcome all odds during this period and it shall be well in the end.



**FINDING**

# **HAPPINESS DURING A PANDEMIC:**

**By Esther – Moi Girls School Nairobi**

Someone recently asked me when was the last time I was really happy during this COVID 19 period? For the first time, I felt impressed with my answer. Without hesitation, I answered, the day I lately treated myself with kindness since then I was ever happy'. Of course, the journey was not as easy. Experiencing three months already with anxiety disorders, sanity at its lowest and precisely irregular days of contentment.

Firstly, gaining bodyweight happened within the first three months of the period. I was unbothered not until when wearing my clothes was a struggle, and my belly fat was protruding. At the back of my mind I reflected on the stereotypes attached to beauty by the society and social media that thought, 'You are not curvy enough

and that belly fat is noticeable 'and of course that's how cyberbullying starts on social media platforms in this period. My fears stood out but helped me push through anxiety. I was ready to transform. Breaking the monotony was my mechanism. I crumpled my routine and implemented hours of exercises such as morning runs, plunks on a daily basis. This was with the help of YouTube tutorials and my sister. I noticed my body was starting to be more flexible. My mental health was slowly starting to improve. This brought much warmth in my heart. The eLearning system was a new path that had to be adapted. With high hopes that it will replace the normal one on one learning setup. Staying on the screen for too long began to cause addictive behaviors like constant chatting. This caused anticipation of high expectations,





especially from people. On the education sector, COVID 19 stirred up a lot of emotions for me as a student especially before the school calendar was released. It caused unnecessary anxiety and uncertainty. I was draining mentally since there was pressure from schoolwork and the need to do the national examinations. I dealt with the sudden change by practicing coping skills like journaling and coloring which was much therapeutic.

The rise of social emerging issues has been rapid during the period. This including the spread of the Corona Virus, early pregnancies and defilement cases on the edge. The rate at which these cases increased placed me in a bubble since it dawned on me that I was the part of the affected

community. I started taking care of by surrounding myself with positive people. It is clear social connections are important and vibrant. Engagements in projects helped.

In conclusion, how I have improved on my mental health is by valuing myself, exercise, laughter, meditation sessions and breaking monotony in my schedule. I have made sure to help those in need by forming a group called Real Life Talk that encourages teenagers to open up about issues that affect them which is my path to happiness.



# **FINDING** **HAPPINESS** **DURING A PANDEMIC:**

**By Felix – Upper Hill School**

The year 2020 was my year of transition. I remember being very anxious awaiting to join my new school. I had a lot of expectations for secondary school. My uniform was bought, school fees paid and now all that was left was to report to school. The much-anticipated time came and boom, I joined secondary School. This was such a milestone in my life. No sooner had we settled, our lessons kicked off as we adjusted to the new environment. Hardly had we settled with orientation and learning, some mischievous higher level class boys went on a strike because the principle had cancelled our Sunday off.

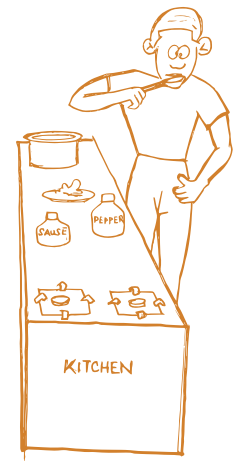
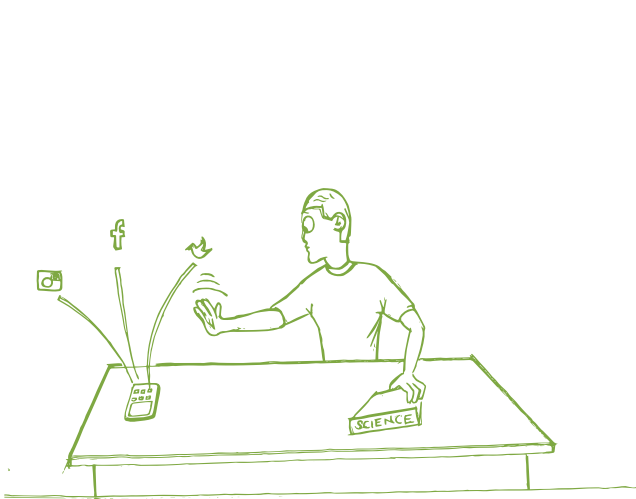
However, when they realized that their grievances were falling on deaf ears, they decided to burn the school dormitory. I had never before experienced strikes not unease in school, this was a shocker and I was somehow traumatized. We were then immediately sent home for the police to carry out investigations to find the cause of the fire and possibly the culprits. After being home for about two weeks we reported back to school.

Six days later again, the Ministry of Education announced a one-week mid-term. Shortly after reporting back from mid-term, a killer disease was said to have landed in our country through a Kenyan who had just flown in from the United States. Immediately all schools were closed, and students sent home. I was very frustrated since I had not yet settled, with all these events taking place simultaneously.

Since I did not know much about this killer disease, I sought to enlighten myself. In the first two weeks at home, I clicked on every website, listened to every update given by the local and national authorities on the radio and television. I got to know that this disease, Corona Virus aka COVID 19 comes from a family causing illness ranging from common colds to more severe diseases such as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). After several researches on the internet and social media, I became depressed asking myself several questions, “What if I have this disease?” Many questions crisscrossed my feeble

mind. When this disease stroke life as we knew it changed drastically. We started home schooling via websites, radio and television stations, parents began to work from their homes and were advised to avoid physical contact with friends, other family members and colleagues to avoid the spread of this virus.

After weeks of almost getting depressed, one morning, as I was watching an NTV morning show Life n’ Style, the presenter was talking about finding happiness during a pandemic. The show was an eye-opener and I started seeing life from a different perspective. I never missed any update briefings on Corona virus by the government. The phrases, “Fellow Kenyans” and “If we continue to live normally, this disease will treat us abnormally”.... had become part and parcel of my greetings lines to everyone. From the show, I learnt that getting glued to news, social media and delving too much into Corona Virus progress across the world could easily get me into dejection. Hence, as we continued to adjust again to the home environment, I found a



number of ways to deprive myself of the near depression I had almost gotten into before.

For starters, I resolved to minimize researching more information on the social media and the internet since it led me to become more and more depressed. The government had issued strict movements, and this prompted me to get in touch with friends and family members by phone voice call or video chat. Slowly by slowly I began to regain control over my emotions and greater ideas cropped my mind during this pandemic. Never had I imagine myself having a passion in cooking. I indulged and enjoyed exploring on different types of cookery from grilled, baked and fried breakfast, lunch and dinner. The provision of all necessary ingredients for my recipes were all provided for by my parents and that kept me more and more thirsty to explore other culinary.

Courtesy of my dad, I also developed an interest in exercising to keep healthy. Every evening from 4.00pm, body exercise became a norm and this entailed wearing sport shoes, tracksuit and protective mask

when embarking on this. My dad and I always covered at least 5kms every day. Apart from exercising, I had prepared a detailed timetable for chores, school-based work and general hygiene. Relaxation being important to the human body, Saturday evenings was a day to kick back relax and enjoy some movies. Since there was a ban on social gatherings, my family members and I would follow Sunday service from the television in our living room. It was being streamed live by the KBC channel from the Holy Family Basilica.

This has since become my new norm. I am no longer feeling dejected, but I learnt that a change is as good as a rest. We have been away from School for far too long, I can't wait to go back to school and ensure my year, in terms of schooling doesn't go away just like that, as it may have been alluded by some leaders that we may resume next year.

In summary, I followed all the government's directives to my level best by washing my hands with water and soap frequently for about 20 seconds, staying at home unless need be to go

outside, wearing protective face mask and keeping a social distance of 1.5 meters from each other and most importantly avoiding all social gatherings since it was said to be the breeding grounds of the virus. Remember prevention is better than cure. In case one is infected with the virus, one is expected to call the local authorities and await further instructions. Truly time and tide waits for no man. If we sit back, relax and carry out our lives as normal waiting for the scientists to burn the midnight oil in order to find a cure, at the end of it all, the cure would be useless since it would not have anyone to be administered to. Indeed young people are also at danger much as we are told the older folks are the most vulnerable, if this old mzees go away, who will hold our hands as we grow and give Solomonic wisdom that is known to be held by the old generation? YOU HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY AND SO DO I AND TOGETHER WE CAN OVERCOME AND CHANGE OUR SITUATION.

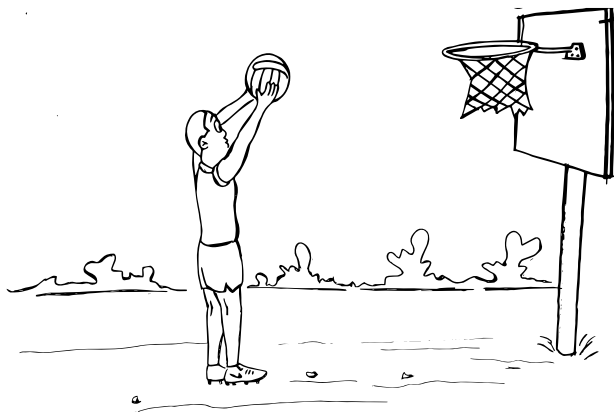
So please.....STAY HOME AND STAY SAFE.



# **FINDING** **HAPPINESS** **DURING A PANDEMIC:**

By Peter – Nairobi School

Finding happiness in previous pandemics was too hard. Many people found it deserving to be sad because, due to a less developed technology, it took a very long time to completely understand the diseases. For that, many people perished as the containment measures were slowly developed. In the COVID-19 pandemic, it might seem hard to find happiness, but it is easy to find happiness during this new normal, even though there exist strict containment measures like “social distancing” and “no gatherings”.



The COVID-19 pandemic is a very serious pandemic. COVID-19 is a new respiratory disease, caused by Corona virus, which is highly infectious and is spread mainly from person-to-person. The signs and symptoms of COVID-19 are flu-like; fever, coughing, sneezing, sore throat, headache and difficulty in breathing which reveal within



14 days of infection. COVID-19 is as an invisible enemy. Research shows that one infected with the virus can spread it, without knowing because signs manifest after 6 days of infection. Though there are mild signs like tiredness, one should not take anything for granted. However, there are ways in which one can avoid contracting COVID-19 like sanitizing hands frequently, wearing a mask and maintaining social distance.

COVID-19 has drastic effects on mental health. Now that schools have been closed and some working places have been closed, people have much time at hand. This can cause boredom. Boredom brings about negativities such as having frequent negative thoughts, mostly sexual fantasies, which may lead to consuming pornographic content and engaging in sexual misuse like masturbation, fornication, and rape. Loss of employment causes depression, which may lead to

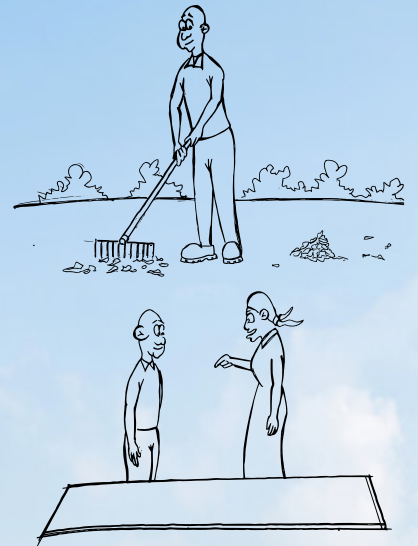
domestic violence or even suicide. It may also lead to engaging in theft and robbery which may result in death.

Although these psychological effects seem hard to escape from, there are ways of coping with them. In this case, one has to be hardworking to achieve the goal. First, one should seize from involving in things that spark up one's drawbacks. For example, one should stop consuming pornographic content so as to avoid indulging in sexual misuse. One should indulge in activities like sports that keep the mind busy. One should try to find satisfaction in everything productive they do. Last but not least, one should keep God first. Let us fight COVID-19 in an impressive way so that we have a greater future.



# FINDING HAPPINESS DURING A PANDEMIC:

By Jesse – Alliance High School



The corona virus pandemic has led to the reorganisation of everyday life. The measures that have been taken to curb its spread have disrupted different aspects of people's lives. In Kenya, some of these measures have adversely affected the lives of many. For example, the curfew which consequently led to police brutality.

Schools were closed as a government endeavour to keep the virus at bay. I'm sure it was a confusing time for many since students had to cope with new practices such as wearing of masks and using hand sanitizers.

Finding happiness during these troubling times has been a bit hard since as the days went by the situation seemed to be going underway. The virus was spreading at a faster rate than most people anticipated. Since I knew that I was nowhere near returning to school I

tried maintaining my structure and routine as much as possible, but my effort seemed to bear no fruits.

The cabinet secretary of education then announced that the students stay at home was to be extended for another month. This consequently triggered the start of online classes. Personally, it was not the same as having my classmates around. I did not feel that sense of structure and stimulation provided by that classroom environment.

I try to avoid much exposure to television media because of every daily update on the virus transmission. Each one scarier than the last. The number of deaths and increase in cases tend to bring an aspect of fear to almost everyone. And the situation got worse when it was confirmed the virus was now spreading through community transmission in Kenya.

Due to lack of social contact with

their friends, many children lack that social support that is good for their psychological welfare. Many children cope with these challenges by trying to maintain their routine, this can help them to prevent their loss of education time.

Children's exposure to the media should also be monitored because the updates on the increase in cases and number of deaths tend to bring worry, anxiety, and fear into the hearts of many. Putting into consideration that depending on how long the situation lasts, sadness and depression may be visible in some children

In conclusion, children should spend a lot of time with their parents who in turn should find time to spend with their children. During this pandemic, a parent's presence, and attention toward his or her child is essential for their mental well-being.



# FINDING **HAPPINESS** DURING A PANDEMIC:

By John – Nairobi School

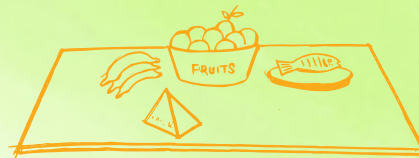


Yesterday at midday, I was preparing to go to the supermarket. Having dressed up, I was leaving and already walking along the road. But then I heard my brother calling, and from the tone of his voice I knew it was urgent. He came running to me handed me a mask. When I arrived at the supermarket, I coincidentally met my cousin who lives in a separate household. We both had to pause awkwardly to assess how to greet each other without the normal hug and extended conversation. Despite being family, we had to act like strangers.

Many people are no doubt having this same experience and are slowly negotiating the evolving social and cultural situation. The incident brought memories of how, in the recent past, I would walk to the place and be part of different gatherings without a mask. I was also reminded that I am a student who is at home because of COVID-19 pandemic. The question I asked myself was: Shall we be back to normal?

Despite of all this, there is a new normal. A life we have never





lived before or never thought of living, is the life we are living now- the new normal. COVID-19 has obliged millions to stay at home after confinement measures taken around the world to prevent its spread. The perception of being cut off from social groups has made us feel vulnerable, triggering a range of cognitive, behavioural and psychological responses geared towards self-protection.

Mental health is the silent pandemic. Lockdown has forced us to stay at home in self-isolation and

become worried about our family members and ourselves not having access to supplies or medication. Many people are facing financial hardships, loss of jobs, loss of loved ones, stigma and discrimination. These concerns have resulted in fear, anxiety, frustration, anger and withdrawal. This has led to stress and worsening of pre-existing mental conditions which provokes the third Sustainable Development Goal of good health and well-being. It is a personal responsibility to find happiness during COVID-19 pandemic. As a student, I have

utilised my time studying, constantly communicating with relatives and friends, reading latest news from reliable sources, taking a break from news, and keeping healthy routines for meals, exercise and sleep. To cope with psychological effects of COVID-19, it is important for us to identify positive coping strategies that have been useful in the past, for example, exploring wellness programmes for meditation and muscle relaxation and asking for help if psychologically overwhelmed by this situation.





# **FINDING** **HAPPINESS** **DURING A PANDEMIC:**

**By Melissa – Loreto Convent Msongari**

Covid-19 is a viral novel disease caused by the Corona Virus, its first case was detected in Wuhan China in December 2019 but has gone global. The WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION (WHO) declared it as an outbreak on 30th January 2020 and then a pandemic on 11th March 2020 after spreading intensely all over the world.

The disease is spread from one person to another due to close contact mostly via small droplets produced when coughing, sneezing or talking and touching of contaminated areas then touching your face. It takes five to fourteen days for one to show symptoms which include fever, coughing,

fatigue, shortness of breath and loss of sense of smell or taste, in complicated cases it causes pneumonia. Currently there is no treatment or known vaccine but only primary treatment and supportive therapy.

Like in many countries, in Kenya, guidelines and precaution to combat the virus from spreading were issued and they include regular washing of hands, covering mouth with your elbow when coughing or sneezing, maintaining social distance of 1.5 meters, wearing of face mask in social gathering, self-monitoring or isolation and mass testing or contact tracing of infected

persons.

Other than causing health crisis covid-19 is also creating devastating social, economic, and political crisis. Leaving the society filled with worry and fear because the future is bleak. The children and adolescents are not spared either and the effect of parents' distress is slowly affecting them in one way or another.

In every hard situation there is a way to conquer it. In order to reduce being overwhelmed with covid-19 news but at the same time be updated on covid19, I have decided to reduce the amount of news I consume regarding this disease. I have realised that the social media



is awash with information some of it not verified. This information is full of negativity instead of positivity thus causing self-worry. In my case I would search online for covid19 updates and I would always end up being so sad and worried that I took a stand and stopped searching for such information. I discussed this with my parents, and they advised that it is safer to get information from the Government and WHO because it is authentic.

This has worked for me and I now focus on other things rather than worrying. I have taken control of my time, I have a well organised routine from morning till evening.

This takes care of my schoolwork, house chores or any other assignments that my parents ask me to undertake.

Identifying something that I enjoy has helped me. I have realized that I prefer listening to music and lo-fi genre clears my mind. It makes me be in a state of self-peace, taking time with nature excites, I take walks, engage in physical exercise to keep my body fit. Journaling has is a milestone for me as I have been writing down my experience during this period.

I have learnt that Interaction with family and friends is therapeutical. I call and have a good chinwag with

them for it is psychological proven that interaction eases the mind.

Covid-19 can be a blessing or a curse depending how you paint your picture. Personally, it is a blessing for I have had time to rediscover myself and give gratitude for the little things I take for granted. I have also become a great cook. Apart from self-care, I have committed to pray for the sick and our country to win this battle and have a solution.

Cleaning my hands and sanitizing is the new normal as I remember the wise words of Cabinet Secretary Mr. Kagwe, "if we continue to treat this disease normally it will treat us abnormally." I choose to stay safe.



# **FINDING** **HAPPINESS** **DURING A PANDEMIC:**

17th November 2019; the day when the first case of COVID-19 was detected in China. A pandemic that has now put the world at a stand-still and everything is on pause. With a number of businesses shut down and people advised to work from home, the negative impact caused by this untimely virus can be seen from the economic effects to the psychological effects it has brought upon us.

The phrase “human beings are social beings” is said to bring out the meaning that social interaction is part of human nature. This however is not possible during this worldwide

crisis with guidelines such as social distancing being set out to curb the spread of the disease. A step further taken to reduce the spread was banning of social gatherings and places of worship and even schools being shut down.

For people struggling with mental health disorders such as clinical depression, anxiety, OCD, ADHD among others, may generally find it difficult to cope indoors. This is because of the increased stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. People living with ADHD which is a condition whereby one of the symptoms is being hyperactive, for

example, may feel frustrated with being forced to stay in quarantine. People who may not even be dealing with mental disorders might as well end up developing some due to perhaps being laid off from their jobs, losing their businesses, broken relationships or the fear and worry on care providers. They are likely to fall into depression, self-harm or worse have suicidal behaviors. Unstable families who are forced to quarantine during this period, can lead to cases of domestic violence which may in turn bring trauma to the children who are at home. The consequences may lead to the abused partner and the



children developing PTSD (post-traumatic stress syndrome) due to the experience.

Being a candidate this year, the news that I would sit for my exams the next year was saddening. The worry and stress that came with the news made me have insomnia, nervous breakdowns, and anxiety attacks. But even with the uncertainty of the future, I found ways which helped me accept the situation and remain calm. Discovering a new hobby or developing ones you already have is a great way to take your mind of everything. For me, I recently

discovered that I could draw. So, during my free time when I am not studying, I draw a few things and it helps me relax my mind.

The Kenya Mental Health Taskforce which was formed to assess the state of mental health in the country, should reach out to the less privileged who may not have funds to seek medical attention from a psychologist. Simple things like checking up on your loved ones may also go a long way. Above all, remaining positive is key.



# CRITERIA FOR JUDGING ESSAYS IN THE CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION 2020

A percent system will be applied in an effort to streamline the writing competition and to make judging less subjective, and more easily understood. The winning essays will be read by 2-3 judges following the criteria below:

Creativity	30%
Structure	10%
Adherence to Topic	
mental health	40%
Grammar	5%
Wow factor	5%
Length	10%
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>100%</b>

These criteria are discussed at length below. For every 10% of the score, there is a corresponding question to be answered—if the answer to the question is “yes,” then that 10% should be awarded. If the answer is “no”, then it should not be awarded. If the answer is maybe half should be awarded.

After the winning essays have been read once by 1 judge, those essays that receive an average of 80% or better should pass on to the second reading. (Those that do not will simply receive certificates of participation.) In the second reading, the judges should read all top 10% essays, and engage in a measured discussion of their content and value before voting on the first, second, and third place essays for each grade level.

## Description of Criteria

### 30% - Creativity

Although this is the most difficult thing to measure, it remains the focus of the competition and the most important aspect to take into account when grading essays. The goal is to reward students who display the ability to think “outside the box”—that is, those who provide something other than formulaic answers, and who can do so in a novel or unusual way. Here are the checkpoints to use for a truly creative essay in this competition:

- (10%) Does this essay express ideas not commonly found in the other essays? Yes / No
- (10%) Does this essay answer the question in an unexpected way? Yes / No
- (10%) Does this essay address the topic in a way that makes the reader think? Yes / No

### 20% - Structure

The way in which an essay is organized helps make it more easily understood and appreciated. High school essays that are, for example, just one long paragraph with no visual breaks are both hard on the eyes and display a lack of maturity in composition.



- (5%) Is this essay organized in a comprehensible way? Yes / No\
- (5%) If the essay adheres to a traditional format, is there a clear beginning, middle, and end or introduction, body, and conclusion? Yes / No

#### 40% - Adherence to Topic

Sometimes essays are cleverly written, but they actually have little to do with the given topic. While creative essays should be able to find many unusual ways to answer a question (questions can be answered as essays, stories, dialog, and so on), they should still, in some way, obviously respond to the chosen topic.

- (20%) Does this essay, in one way or another, address the topic at hand? Yes / No
- (20%) Does this essay display a lot of thought on behalf of the student writing it? Yes / No

#### 5% - Grammar

Although good grammar is important and should not go unrewarded, the goal of this competition is to encourage creative thinking, not drive students to worry about their verb conjugation or spelling. That said, as long as the grammar is understandable and does not hinder a reader's ability to comprehend the essay, this 10% should be awarded.

- (10%) Is the grammar of this essay correct enough that the essay is easy to understand? Yes / No

#### 10% - Length

100 less than or 200 more words can be allowed in the competition; however, most essays that are deemed worthy of a second reading should not be too short (i.e., only a few sentences). This will depend mostly on the student's age and grade, for example:

- (10%) Is the essay of an appropriate length for the grade level of the student writing it? Yes / No



### 5% - “Wow!” factor

This portion is where points are awarded for exceptional essays—those that display an incredible use of vocabulary, clever ideas, mature style, advanced English for the writer’s grade level, and so on. This 10% is to be awarded only to essays that truly impress the readers, and these essays should likely make it to the second reading session.

- (5%) Does this essay “wow” the reader for one reason or another?  
Yes / No

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Adapted from Peace Corps Kenya

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