March 20, 2020

**Fellow Youth Ranch Employees:**

This is our weekly message concerning the coronavirus, COVID-19, and actions being taken by IYR to protect ourselves and our families, our clients and customers, and our communities. As before, ***we ask all supervisors to post this message and to personally share it with any of their staff who do not have a personal work email.***

**IYR Specific Information**

* We launched our Emergency Pandemic Sick Leave (EPSL) program, and a number of our employees are currently making use of that benefit. Our program meets or exceeds the features of the paid sick leave program just passed by Congress and signed by the President. Attached to this message is an explanation of your options for using this EPSL, as well as updates on all other leave benefits, including the provisions of the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA). We will also create a flowchart with this information to help ensure employees understand their options.
* Thank all of you for supporting our efforts to help curb the spread of COVID-19 by:
  + Regularly cleaning and sanitizing our work areas,
  + Observing good personal hygiene practices (frequent and proper handwashing, use of hand sanitizer, covering coughs and sneezes, etc.),
  + Working from home where possible, and
  + Observing our published social distancing practices and travel restrictions.
  + **Please note: Although our Pandemic-Related Meeting Guidelines & Social Distancing at Work did not specify a maximum number of participants in an essential group meeting, IYR is now following the President’s guideline that such meetings be limited to no more than 10 in-person participants**. Please plan those meetings accordingly, and follow the established criteria regarding room set-up, distancing, and disinfection.
* Our dedicated Programs staff continues to deliver therapeutic services to Idaho youth and their families. The need for these services is likely to increase during these challenging times, and these individuals are in the forefront of the effort to help people in our communities heal and keep well. As an additional service On Monday, March 23 we will begin providing telehealth services to clients who cannot or choose not to come to the office for in-person sessions.
* Our Marketing & Communications staff are doing an excellent job of providing messaging to our clients, customers, and donors describing how we are responding to the current pandemic.
* Our Social Enterprise Team continues to provide outstanding service to our customers and the community at a time when they are needed most, while taking extra steps to ensure the safety of our employees, shoppers, and donors through social distancing and sanitization processes.
* ELT is meeting daily to develop and revise our business plans as we receive new information.

**Questions**

* After we announced our Emergency Pandemic Sick Leave program, several employees asked questions about the types of absences that would be covered. Based on that feedback, we expanded the coverage to include employees who either were fearful of coming to work and being exposed to the virus, or people who felt that they were at greater risk of becoming ill.
* If you have questions or concerns regarding COVID-19 or the steps IYR is taking, please direct them to HR at [HumanResources@youthranch.org](mailto:HumanResources@youthranch.org) or call 208-377-2613 and ask to speak with HR.
* Thanks for your attention. We’ll have more soon!

**General Information:** The attached poster from the World Health Organization (WHO) gives some excellent suggestions for coping with the stress of the current pandemic. Here are some additional or expanded ideas for investing in your mental well-being during this stressful time.

**Prioritize Sleep:** Adequate good-quality sleep [helps your immune system fight off infections](https://www.everydayhealth.com/infectious-diseases/explained-how-your-immune-system-fights-off-coronavirus-and-other-germs/) like COVID-19. Parts of the body’s immune response happen only during sleep. [Sleep is also one of the best ways to keep stress in check](https://www.everydayhealth.com/infectious-diseases/explained-how-your-immune-system-fights-off-coronavirus-and-other-germs/), as sleep deprivation makes us more sensitive to the effects of stress, ramping up our reactions (or overreactions) to stressors. Finally, the brain needs sleep to function: Not getting it can make you less patient and focused, and more moody, irritable, and emotional.

**Exercise:** [Physical activity](https://www.everydayhealth.com/fitness/exercise-everything-you-need-know-about-how-physically-fit/) keeps your body healthy (lowering your risk of chronic health issues as well as your chances of acute illness like COVID-19), and improves your mood and general well-being. [Exercise](https://www.everydayhealth.com/fitness/workouts/boost-your-energy-level-with-exercise.aspx) releases endorphins (hormones that make you feel good), helps sharpen focus, and aids sleep. Healthy movement is also linked to a lower risk of mood disorders, higher energy levels, and improved mood.

**Try Yoga:** [Yoga offers many health benefits](https://www.everydayhealth.com/fitness-pictures/10-surprising-health-perks-of-yoga.aspx), like busting stress, stretching out inactive muscles, building strength, and getting a burst of [physical activity](https://www.everydayhealth.com/yoga/does-yoga-count-as-exercise/). Yoga links movement with breath and both these factors can affect our body’s stress-coping reactions.

**Eat Well:** Avoid mindless snacking. If you’re hungry eat [high-protein snacks](https://www.everydayhealth.com/diet-and-nutrition-pictures/high-protein-power-snacks.aspx) (hard-boiled [eggs](https://www.everydayhealth.com/diet-nutrition/diet/eggs-health-benefits-nutrition-calories-more/), [nuts](https://www.everydayhealth.com/diet-and-nutrition/0406/why-you-should-go-nuts-for-nuts.aspx), Greek yogurt, nut butters, and veggies). [Protein](https://www.everydayhealth.com/diet-nutrition/protein-how-much-you-need-benefits-sources-more/) helps you feel full longer and avoid the crash you might feel after the energy high of a carb-heavy snack. Certain [foods help lower stress](https://www.everydayhealth.com/diet-nutrition-pictures/how-to-reduce-stress-with-diet.aspx). Try warm, soothing foods (like soup or tea) and fatty fish (the [omega-3s](https://www.everydayhealth.com/diet-nutrition/omega-3s/) may improve mood). [Avocados](https://www.everydayhealth.com/diet-nutrition/diet/avocados-health-benefits-nutrition-facts-weight-loss-info-more/) are packed with vitamins [C](https://www.everydayhealth.com/diet-nutrition/vitamin-c/) and B-6, which are known to help [reduce stress](https://www.everydayhealth.com/stress/guide/relief/). [Dark chocolate](https://www.everydayhealth.com/diet-nutrition/diet/chocolate-dark-chocolate-nutrition-facts-health-benefits-caffeine-recipes/) is antioxidant-rich and is great for countering stress (but eat it in moderation, because it’s dense in calories). Other helpful foods include whole-grain carbohydrates, [bananas](https://www.everydayhealth.com/diet-nutrition/diet/bananas-nutrition-facts-health-benefits-recipes-risks/), oranges, water, and [leafy greens](https://www.everydayhealth.com/diet-nutrition-pictures/best-salad-greens-for-your-health.aspx). You may want to indulge yourself with treats or a favorite cocktail, but these can increase your stress. These foods include caffeine, alcohol, and refined sugars. You don’t have to eliminate them but enjoy them in moderation.

**Practice Kindness & Gratitude: Helping someone or r**eaching out to those more vulnerable pays mental health dividends, Acts of kindness boost our own mood and make us feel better. People who regularly practice [gratitude](https://www.everydayhealth.com/wellness/united-states-of-stress/kept-gratitude-journal-month-it-changed-my-life/) journaling (writing down what you’re grateful for) report better well-being, physical health, and increased optimism about the future. Practicing kindness is sometimes hard (particularly when we’re in tight quarters and tensions are high), but remember everyone is going through a tough time right now.

**Practice Relaxation Techniques:** Another way to increase relaxation and improve overall well-being is through relaxation techniques. Mindfulness is the practice of focusing on the present moment. It helps you shift your wandering stressful thoughts back to the here and now, where you can address your emotions, how you feel physically, and accept them without judgment. Deep breathing exercises are very effective in quickly reducing stress and lowering blood pressure. [Meditation](https://www.everydayhealth.com/meditation/) is focusing your mind for a set period of time. You don’t need any special equipment or space - you can do it anytime, anywhere. It can help ease symptoms of depression and anxiety and regulate negative thinking. As with deep breathing, there are many apps (such as “Calm”) available to help you.

**Use Social Media Mindfully:** Social distancing doesn’t mean emotional distancing. Social media and other virtual tools allow you to connect with friends and family when you’re apart. They can also have unintended consequences if their use becomes excessive or consuming. The more personal your [social media interactions](https://www.everydayhealth.com/wellness/united-states-of-stress/social-media-busting-boosting-your-stress/), the better (think direct-messaging rather than mindless scrolling). Be selective about whom you follow and what apps you’re using. Take time to disconnect. If you’re feeling isolated, make a point to call a friend or family member, rather than shooting out another text or Facebook comment.

**Get the Facts, But Don’t Overdo It:** It’s important to stay informed and alert to critical updates in your area, especially those that affect your health. But you don’t need to be listening to the same alerts and headlines repeatedly. Try [limiting news consumption](https://www.everydayhealth.com/infectious-diseases/tips-on-how-to-handle-anxiety-in-the-time-of-covid-19/) to two or three sources a day, and checking in at set times (not continuously) throughout the day for updates. Rely on information from reliable sources like the WHO or CDC websites and local health authorities platforms, in order to help you distinguish facts from rumors. Facts can help to minimize fears. If you can, avoid checking the headlines just before bed.

**Get Creative: Make something. Try** cooking or baking, or some other [creative or artistic endeavor](https://www.everydayhealth.com/columns/voices-of-experience/art-therapy-adult-coloring-books-self-awareness/), like drawing, painting, or knitting. It’s a chance to tune out distractions and focus on one thing at a time. It’s also an outlet to express your emotions. When we create, it gives us a sense of hope that we’re renewing and that’s very powerful when we’re feeling so out of control.

**Show Your Animals Some TLC:** [Playing with your pets](https://www.everydayhealth.com/stress/play-with-therapy-dog-feel-less-stressed/) or just spending some extra time taking care of them shows them you care and may help ease your own anxieties.

**Have Hope:** Our country has weathered many storms in its history. Somehow, we always demonstrate an impressive level of resilience amid chaos. We’re certainly facing some major challenges, but we need to trust our own abilities to navigate these trials as we move through these very interesting times.