

## Adjusting to a new routine in a changed world

- [By Michael Cousineau New Hampshire Union Leader](#)
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Anna and Tom Jablonski of New Ipswich take a walk with their children, Timothy, 5, and Ariana, 2, on the Londonderry Rail Trail on Wednesday.

- DAVID LANE/UNION LEADER



Brittany Severini, left, and Holly Nasser, both of Londonderry, take a walk on the Londonderry Rail Trail on Wednesday.

Anna Jablonski has a lot on her mind.

“It’s difficult to think about supporting your family, losing jobs, paying the bills,” the New Ipswich mother said Wednesday. “All those things are on my mind constantly.”

She and her two children met her husband, Tom, and took a walk on the Londonderry Rail Trail on a sun-splashed afternoon — something the family couldn’t do in normal times on a weekday.

COVID-19 is upending everyone’s daily routine — delivering repeated doses of anxiety — as home becomes the place where children learn and adults work.

“I think generally humans are creatures of habit, and we all have our routines, whatever they may be,” said Ken Norton, executive director of National Alliance on Mental Illness in New Hampshire.

“When those routines are disrupted, it’s kind of just incredibly unsettling for all of us in many different ways,” he said.

Norton suggests people create new routines.

“How can you establish a new routine for yourself to give you some kind of focus?” he said. “That might include going outside, getting more exercise and doing things, whether that’s meditation or yoga or playing a game or listening to music or reading a book or knitting.”



“We all need to be budgeting in some of that time for ourselves every day,” Norton said. ■



Manchester parents collect homework assignments from a school bus on Spruce Street near Massabesic Street Thursday morning.

Timothy Kelly/Union Leader

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Brittany Severini and her childhood friend Holly Nasser walked the trail, something they couldn't do on a typical workday. They both live in separate condos 500 feet apart and now spend time at each other's homes for variety.

“We're almost running out of things to talk about,” joked Severini.

It's been “mentally hard just staying in the same confines every day,” said Severini, who works at Southern New Hampshire University on Elm Street in Manchester, adding that “it's nerve-wracking” to watch the news.

Her friend, though, came to a realization since the virus struck. “I didn't realize how much I liked my coworkers,” said Nasser, who recruits nurses.

Rik Cornell, vice president for community relations at the Mental Health Center of Greater Manchester, said most people are feeling anxiety.

“Everyone gets barraged with emails, rumors and all of that,” Cornell said. “You couple that with the market and everything going on there, the lack of toilet paper, it really sends people into what I call a normal sense of anxiety.”

That includes a lack of sleeping and relaxing.

“We’re spending a lot of time telling people they should learn to take a moment to breathe,” he said. “A lot of people will keep their feelings inside, and they don’t talk about it. We feel people should be doing that.”

People also should get outside.

“One thing we certainly know for everybody is sunlight is really helpful for people’s mental health,” Norton said. “Being out there in the sun makes people feel better. They can do that and (still) practice social distancing.”

Unlike an ice storm or power outage where the effects might last a few days, no one knows how long the pandemic disruptions will continue, he said.

“And right now, the answer seems to be weeks, and kind of hanging out there, maybe it’s months,” Norton said. “It’s a lot easier to deal with things than thinking longer term what some of the implications are because that’s when it gets very scary.”

Cornell advised people to keep in touch with friends and family — even by phone or social media.

“People who are (stuck) at home have a lot of time to do that,” he said.

“I think one of the common things I’ve always said to families: They need to spend time eating dinner together,” Cornell said. “Now, guess what? You can spend time eating dinner together. No excuses.”