

Self Help - Easing Your Mind During a Time of Uncertainty

Fears and concerns are spiking because of the threat and uncertainty of the Corona virus. It is understandable and normal that you would feel fear, anger, frustration, helplessness and all the other emotions that arise when facing about a situation that causes so much illness, death, and financial repercussions on every level around the world and that threatens to touch your life or the lives of your loved ones.

It is especially threatening when you feel a lack of control to prevent it from happening. The impact of this virus on people's health and livelihoods are far reaching. It is even amplifying other fears that have nothing to do with the virus.

Finding self-help to deal with many of the emotional, psychological and spiritual challenges that this virus presents as well as the very real physical changes of schedule, work situations, home schooling, the need for childcare and balancing working and home. **People's self-care routines are interrupted** and a new normal is continually being revised.

To Get Started Again: Bring into your conscious awareness, your observing or witnessing self, to track your responses and reactions inside to what is happening outside of you that contributes to your greater fear, distress and physical symptoms. We all need to do our part to **calm down our anxious brains**. It is important for your health, sanity and immunity. That doesn't mean you don't feel the feelings you have. It means you learn to work with them. The ability of your brain to **reorganize** its patterns of responding is called Neuroplasticity. It means you "rescue yourself" from allowing fear, distress, and catastrophic thinking to rule your life.

Science: When you are threatened, you often respond from a part of the autonomic nervous system called the Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS) that brings up an activation often referred to as flight or fight (and in some cases of trauma or threat a freeze response which is activated by the parasympathetic nervous system). During the flight or fight response your adrenals produce adrenaline to help you meet either a real or perceived threat or challenge. Once the threat passes your brain gives the adrenals the message to stop producing so much adrenaline and your bodily functions return to normal and you can feel "safe" again. The part of the brain that is the fire alarm is called the amygdala. It is not logical and can turn certain situations / objects into triggers for anxiety by pairing it to other disturbing life experiences, associating it with the worst that can happen to you, or highlighting your fears of the unknown. Scientists and neuroscientists have proven that you can learn to train the amygdala to stop responding to the triggers. Below are few things to do to lessen the impact that the current situation has on you and some of the things you do have control over at this time when things *feel* out of your control. The good news is you have choices!

1) Limit your exposure to the news or social media that is preoccupied with worst case scenarios, the horrors, statistics of death and illness, the repetitive reporting of the crisis. The facts are the facts. Just get the facts that help you know what to do (John Hopkins. CDC or some other source)

– DON'T continue to share statistics that are scary to you or others. If you feel yourself getting upset, get off the web or information source. COMMIT TO THIS! It is enough that uncertainty and the unknown trigger your threat response. You don't need to keep adding to it. I realize for some individuals staying glued to all the news feels like you are "doing something" or that you will be able to be better prepared.

This may be an old pattern of coping, set up in earlier situations of uncertainty or trauma. Be aware of what is getting triggered and get help if you are losing sleep or compulsively attentive to the news.

2) Even if your thoughts are racing and feeding your upset, attempt to slow down enough to notice it - practice present moment awareness (mindfulness).

- Meditation helps (lots of online instructions). If you can observe something about how you are feeling, you can acknowledge and label it. To name your experience is one step in letting it go. Talk to close friends, a spouse, or a therapist about how you are feeling. Difficult or distressing emotions especially fear can often be that automatic brain response that you can work with by redirecting your focus elsewhere and working to calm your body down. Walk outdoors (the earth can nurture you), play in the yard or indoor games, play with your children, read, do crafts, do yard chores, household chores, de-clutter, be creative, cook, work on a project you have wanted to for a long time but put off, hang out with your animals, listen to or make music, watch movies that make you feel good, make love, sleep in (silver lining), etc.

3) We all need resiliency more than ever. Embrace and practice all that you have ever learned to do to create your healthiest self. Replace **lost** self-care with **new** self-care. Watch the Spring colors unfold. Be grateful for life and all you experience that is good.

4) Hug your family members. Touch soothes your sympathetic nervous system. Hug and pet your animals - same results. Connect through the phone or social media to friends and family often. See their faces on Facetime, Zoom, etc. Share concerns and then move on to some delight in what this unprecedented time period of being at home has offered you and your loved ones. Name the silver lining that you are experiencing.

5) Parents and family members calm yourselves first. Emotions are contagious. Thoughts permeate and multiply. Normalize fears and vulnerability and allow your children to learn how to be with uncertainty without having to be afraid all the time. Teach them how to be afraid and then help them practice moving through their feelings by shifting their focus and creating positive ways of thinking and being with what is not known yet. Help them acknowledge and grieve their immediate losses of school, seeing friends, graduations, etc. and plan for future enjoyment or celebrations.

6) Breathe. Breathe. Breathe. You experiment. In 3 or 4 / out 6 or 8. In 5 / hold 5 out 5. Belly breaths, etc. When in doubt, Breathe. In and out through nose and/ or mouth. You decide what makes a difference to the tension you can release.

7) Quiet your environment when overwhelmed. Lie down. Hide in the bathroom. Walk out your door and circle your house or block - alone. Tell everyone you need a time out. Find something to do that calms you down.

8) Focus on Love (or any other spiritual practice) - Whom you love, How you Love, What you Love, How you feel Loved, Communicate how you want to be Loved, Practice Loving kindness especially in these times of family closeness, rising impatience, or irritations. Love, Love, Love – encourage the vibration. Expand on any other spiritual practice you can that lift your spirits, nourish you and transforms fear.

We are all in this together and have the opportunity to transform fear and create closeness and love.