Cultivating Calm in Crisis: Strategies for Living in Uncertain Times

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IT'S OKAY
TO THINK
THIS IS HARD
COVID-19:
Novel Virus; Novel Crisis

- In a crisis, our *nervous system* springs into action giving us a surge of adrenaline, energy, and focus to get through the immediate problem at hand.
- We cannot sustain a state of “high alert”.
- We have to pace ourselves and find effective ways to calm, settle, and restore ourselves.
Definitions

- **Anxiety**: a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome.

- **Stress**: a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstance.
Anxiety is Contagious!

- Emotions communicate to ourselves and others.
- As social creatures, our survival depends on being able to read emotional cues in others so we can respond appropriately and secure our position in the group.
- Anxiety is often experienced in groups.
- Once triggered, it's highly contagious.
- You can do your part to manage the spread.
What's your anxiety response?

- **Over-functioner**: Overly focused on other people's problems to exclusion of self-care. May give advice, micro-manage, fix, rescue, control. Feels resentful, overwhelmed, and exhausted.

- **Under-functioner**: Invites others to take over. May rely on others for advice or decision making, shuts down, zones out, regresses. Feels helpless and incapable.
Practices for Cultivating Calm

- Recognize and acknowledge
- Get some fresh air
- Work up a sweat
- Talk to someone you trust
- Set clear boundaries
- Take a mental step back
- Slow down your breathing
- Take time to rest and recharge
- Plan for transitions
- Put pen to paper
More Calming Practices

- “Soft belly” breathing
- 4-7-8 Breathing (YouTube)
- *Three-Minute Breathing Space* (YouTube)
- Centering Prayer/Meditation
- Yoga (Yoga with Adrienne: YouTube)
- Mindful walking, eating, hand washing
- Listening to soothing music
- Gardening
Myth of Comparative Suffering

- **Comparative suffering**: ranks suffering in terms of who has it the worse AND suggests there is finite amount of empathy and compassion to go around.

**EXAMPLES:**

“It could be worse, I still have my job.”

“I shouldn't be sad/mad/scared because...”

“I have so much to be grateful for, I should be positive.”

- We compare to avoid our feelings of helplessness and vulnerability, which may give rise to shame.
Self-Compassion and Empathy

Self disclosure
IT'S OKAY TO THINK THIS IS HARD
“Whatever is mentionable is manageable.”

Fred Rogers
Homework

- What are your anxiety triggers?
- Do you tend to over or under-function when stressed?
- Name (3) calming practices that work for you? Bonus: Identify a new practice you're willing to try this week?
- What have you been avoiding feeling? Bonus: Is there someone you'd like to share this with?
Resources

- All things **Daring Greatly** author Brene Brown, including “Unlocking Us” podcast and her Ted talks on YouTube.
- **The Dance of Intimacy.** By Harriet Lerner
- “RAIN” meditation on Tarabrach.com
- “Self compassion break” on Selfcompassion.org
- Qi Gong: *Eight Pieces of Silk Brocade* on YouTube
- Insight Timer: meditation app
- The Dodo: cute animal videos on YouTube ;-)
“RAIN”

- **Recognize:** Notice what's happening in your body, where your emotions live.
- **Allow:** Let go of resistance and be with your experience.
- **Investigate:** “What needs my attention right now?” (NOT cognitive)
- **Nurture with Compassion:** Offer yourself kindness or care for whatever you are experiencing.

Tarabrach.com: Resources: Rain