

Looking After Yourself in Times of Uncertainty

YOU CAN'T POUR FROM AN EMPTY CUP

HOW WE REACT TO STRESS

When we are faced with a threat we become stressed and our body experiences a surge of adrenaline! Which is great as it gives us the much needed energy to react to increase our chances of survival. Our responses can usually be categorised into the following:
(Examples of how we may react are given if we use the example of a hungry tiger stood in front of us)

FIGHT- *punch the tiger or use a weapon to keep the tiger away*

FLIGHT- *run, very fast away from the tiger!*

FREEZE- *stand still or hide and hope the tiger cannot see you*



These reactions require our brains to focus on sending important messages to our heart and muscles, and will place extra effort on alerting our emotion centre (called the amygdala) of our brain to continuously inform us that there is a danger. This means that our ability to do things like use our memory, think logically, think rationally, plan ahead, consider how other people may be feeling or what they are thinking are all compromised! You probably notice that when you are stressed you don't act in ways you normally do!

Therefore if you are stressed it can make it really difficult to care for someone who is also stressed. In such cases it would be useful to try and calm yourself or try to remove your perception of a threat so you can calm others; *i.e. Look after yourself first, and then you have the resources to support others better!*

It can be really difficult to calm yourself when you are unsure about whether something is a threat or not, or when the threat can't be removed or we have no control over it! During these times of uncertainty our perception of a potential threat can be heightened, and can be unhelpful when trying to manage our usual lives and others. So what can we do so calm our brains down a bit?!

PREPARE TO SELF-CARE!

Self-care is key to calming ourselves so we have the resources (brain power!) to care and support others. We would recommend trying to implement structure, routine, and consistency to your life as well as those you care for! For self-care to be effective it needs to be sustainable and practical for your lifestyle! Suggestions to self-care:

MINDFULNESS

The three main principles of mindfulness are:

1. Being in the present moment i.e. focus on the right here, right now and not the future or past!

2. Noticing and increasing our awareness of what is going on
3. Placing no judgment on our experience, i.e. no labelling of things we notice as good nor bad, right or wrong, they just are!

There are lots of Mindfulness apps that you can access; we have enclosed a leaflet. Mindfulness practice does not have to take long, you can do it anywhere at any time for however long (even 30 seconds!)

BREATHE

We hear it all the time! But it's true, slowing down your breathing can really help ground you and slow things down. Try imagining blowing up a balloon in your stomach and slowly releasing it.

BE YOUR OWN BEST FRIEND

If your best friend came to you upset and struggling what would you say to them? Write this down... pin it in a place you regularly look. This is how you will speak to yourself when you are struggling. Give yourself a break, be kind, you're doing your best in a difficult time. Go you!

DOING SOMETHING MEANINGFUL TO YOU!

Think of an activity you enjoy. It can be ANYTHING! What is it about the activity that you value? For example, if you enjoy going out for a coffee with your friends, you may value connection with others. Although you may not be able to go for a coffee with a friend could you be creative about how you could still live your life by this value in a different way. For example, Skype your friend and sit and drink coffee together in a designated area of the house.

Try to identify what you **value** about the activities you enjoy doing in your life and think about how you can still live your life by these!

World Health Organization Coping with stress during the 2019-nCov outbreak

-  It is normal to feel sad, stressed, confused, scared or angry during a crisis. Talking to people you trust can help. Contact your friends and family.
-  If you must stay at home, maintain a healthy lifestyle - including proper diet, sleep, exercise and social contacts with loved ones at home and by email and phone with other family and friends.
-  Don't use smoking, alcohol or other drugs to deal with your emotions. If you feel overwhelmed, talk to a health worker or counsellor. Have a plan, where to go to and how to seek help for physical and mental health needs if required.
-  Get the facts. Gather information that will help you accurately determine your risk so that you can take reasonable precautions. Find a credible source you can trust such as WHO website or, a local or state public health agency.
-  Limit worry and agitation by lessening the time you and your family spend watching or listening to media coverage that you perceive as upsetting.
-  Draw on skills you have used in the past that have helped you to manage previous life's adversities and use those skills to help you manage your emotions during the challenging time of this outbreak.