

How to Stay Calm During a Pandemic

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As we face these strange times of a global pandemic, it is more important than ever to cultivate calm. Those who become sick or lose loved ones need our support even if it is just holding a calm and caring energy in your heart.

As social beings we thrive with social contact. It is basic to our emotional-physiological regulation. Research has shown over years that being in community is a biological imperative. Thus, with social isolation and a loss of routine, it is especially important to be intentional about daily strategies for regulation and calm. Three broad areas are critical to remember and keep in mind everyday; emotional-physiological regulation, self-empathy for fear and anxiety, and meaningful engagement.

Emotional-Physiological Regulation

Start everyday with a routine. Get dressed even if you're not going anywhere. Engage in some form of movement or exercise, a simple fifteen minute walk through the neighborhood, dancing, a half hour of stretching, play wrestle with your kids, work in the garden, etc. Exercise is one of the most effective ways to help your system stay regulated. Limit screen time. Go outside. Watch the birds. Look up at the sky. What shapes, colors, and play of light can you notice in your environment that you haven't stopped to see before.

You can find a long list of regulation strategies on our website here. Print them out. Read through them everyday and decide which ones you will engage for the day.

Self-Empathy for Fear and Anxiety

Fear and anxiety are natural responses to a legitimate threat to well-being. As you meet these feelings in yourself, the purpose is not to try to get rid of them, but rather to meet them with compassion and to keep yourself from feeding them with escalating thoughts, stories, and media.

Of course, to respond to fear and anxiety, you need to be able to notice it first. Set your intention every day to notice these feelings when they arise. Take time to write down or share with someone all the signs and symptoms that fear and anxiety are present. Here are some common things you might notice when fear and anxiety are present:

In your body you might notice:

- Overall tension
- Contraction around the heart
- Upset stomach
- Elevated heart rate
- Sweaty palms
- Tension in your face and jaw

Psychologically and emotionally you might notice:

- A sense of paralysis or freezing
- A lack of interest in what you usually enjoy
- Feelings of dread, anxiety, fear
- Confusion and disorientation
- A sense of urgency
- Obsessing or perseverating over a particular thought or decision

Behaviorally you might notice:

- Lashing out with unkind words towards others
- Using a harsh tone, yelling, or snapping at those around you
- Criticizing others
- Rushing from place to place
- Making quick decisions
- Taking in media even though it is not providing relevant information and you feel worse after doing it
- Binge screen time

Thoughts

- Judgments of others
- Thoughts of what you think others should or shouldn't do
- Making up stories about the future that trigger more fear
- Mentally rehearsing stories of possible negative futures
- Focusing on thoughts of scarcity or lack

Do you recognize any of these in yourself? Set your intention to meet them with a gentle and kind embrace, something like, "Oh that's fear, that's okay. This is a normal response and I don't want to feed it with my thoughts and behavior. What would I like to do to contribute to regulation and grounding for myself right now?"

Once you notice and respond gently to fear and anxiety you can engage in an intervention. Here are a few interventions:

Turn towards your anchor. Every time you engage your anchor you strengthen that process. Take your time and go slow. Spend at least a few minutes at a time engaging your anchor and then turn back towards the activity at hand.

Bringing your attention more fully to the activity of the moment can be very grounding if you can hold it there. A simple way to start is noticing sensations in your hands. For example, if you are typing, you can notice the sensation of your keyboard. If you are doing housework, you can notice the texture or temperature of what you touch, etc.

Orienting to your surroundings is a simple way to get grounded and calm. It is so simple, it's hard to imagine how powerful it can be, but it is. Begin with the five senses. One by one, slowly notice what you see, hear, smell, taste, and touch. You can also orient by naming what's true in the present moment such as; "I am safe right now. I have food. I have shelter. I have people who care about me."

Gratitude practice is helpful as a way of life and can also be especially grounding when managing fear and anxiety. If you don't already have one, incorporate a gratitude practice into your daily routine. You might think about what you're grateful for as you brush your teeth each morning or share gratitudes with family at dinner time or journal about your gratitudes at the

end of the day. Nothing is too small to celebrate and feel appreciation for.

Meaningful Engagement

There is much research to support the notion that meaningful engagement while facing a challenge helps with resilience and prevents trauma. Generosity is an antidote for fear regarding scarcity as well as a contribution to the community. As many of us face being laid off or otherwise losing income, it is essential to lean into sharing resources.

Actively look for ways you can safely engage in helping others. Can you bring meals to people in quarantine? Can you share a smile with someone who feels anxious? Can you find something to celebrate with another? Can you walk someone's dog? Can you do extra chores if someone in your house is a healthcare worker?

Set your intention to send a calm and kind attitude into the field of energy in which we are all connected. Entertain positive ideas...perhaps this acute global challenge will strengthen a sense of united global community.

Practice

What is one thing you can commit to right now to help yourself remain calm and grounded?