

MINDFULLY DEALING WITH ANXIETY AND FEAR

During the current Coronavirus scare, we're all aware of the levels of panic and fear around and you may be feeling this yourself. Below are some useful points to be aware of:

- If you're feeling panicky and anxious about the consequences of the virus, your survival mechanism (the fight/flight/freeze response) is getting triggered in the brain. Fight might express itself as panic buying or not thinking about others and being very focused on your own and your loved ones' survival. Flight might be isolating more than necessary. Of course, it's important to follow Government guidelines and be sensible but there may be a level of self-isolation that is simply feeding your fears and reinforcing worst-case-scenario thoughts. Freeze may manifest as confusion, not knowing what to do.
- Allowing high levels of fear and anxiety to remain unchecked in your system will create stress and potentially exacerbate health problems and it will reinforce negative thinking about the virus and its potential impact.
- The first thing that goes out the window when we're stressed is self-care. Because the negativity bias within the brain is telling you to put all your energies into survival.
- If you *don't* allow the fear to overwhelm you and inform your actions and decisions, you have a chance of developing greater emotional resilience and growing stronger through this crisis but this requires employing self-care strategies. It's important to take care of yourself first even if you are responsible for more vulnerable children or elderly people as you will be better able to help them. Think of the advice given on planes if there's an emergency. They recommend you get your oxygen mask before you sort out others'.

HERE'S WHAT TO DO IF YOU'RE REALLY ANXIOUS AND AFRAID:

1. Before you do anything else, calm your physical system. Anxiety can create huge agitation physically and will stop you thinking clearly and could potentially lead to decisions that you later regret. The importance of calming the physical system first is that it will calm your brain down and it's the racing, out of perspective thoughts that set up the cycle of anxiety.

Here are a few ideas of things you could do:

- First, recognize that you are anxious and afraid. You may find it helpful to say a phrase like: this is a moment of suffering; I'm really worried; I'm struggling.**
- Go for a walk or just get out into the garden for 5/10 minutes – nature is grounding and healing.**
- Have a calming bath with candles or a shower.**
- Consciously soften your body. Scan your body from head to toe and identify where the tension is. Breathe into and out from it. Let it go.**
- Put a hand over your heart chakra.**
- Rock side to side or back and forth as if you are calming a crying baby.**
- Ask yourself: What am I needing right now? And try to feel into the answer to this intuitively.**

2. Recognise that you are not alone. There are millions of people going through this and who are also frightened. See your experience as part of the larger human experience. So you don't isolate yourself in your mind and heart by seeing your suffering as abnormal. Talking to friends or family who are able to keep this crisis in perspective may help you to get perspective and feel less isolated with your fears.

3. Be mindful of your suffering but don't over-identify with your fears. Mindfulness encourages us to acknowledge difficult emotions like fear and anxiety. Suppressing these experiences also doesn't help. Mindful awareness of our emotions allows us to *be* with painful feelings just as they are. Mindfulness theory says *thoughts are not facts*. Some of your fears will be warranted but some may not be. Think about limiting how much news you listen to/watch.

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