

DELAWARE INSTITUTE FOR
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Early Childhood

Beyond Stress Management
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Unprecedented, enormously challenging, unparalleled, extraordinary —words we typically use sparingly are commonplace these days. These times are all of those and more—frightening, threatening, surreal—and the list goes on.

Stress management seems like such a benign term compared to the exhausting effort of keeping our heads above water during this tsunami of illness and death. What do we do? What helps when all seems so hopeless, overwhelming, and out of our control?

We need to think outside of ourselves, beyond management; we need to find a purpose that is bigger than all the darkness. We need to be those helpers that Mister Rogers urged children to watch for, to look for when things look horrendous.

These times are challenging in ways never before experienced. September 11th, the Sandy Hook shootings, the Boston Marathon bombing were all horrific experiences. In response, populations I cared deeply about reacted to, came together for, and brought out the best in each other. But these events were delineated; people could stop, cry, breathe, hug, make plans, and move forward.

Today, it truly is a tsunami, and it has not stopped; it has only prevented us from coming together for those hugs, sharing those tears. I urge you to stop, cry, breathe, call the people you want to hug, make plans, move forward, and above all else, reach out. Call an old childhood friend, send a funny YouTube video—beat this monster at what is hurting us most—not having human contact when it is needed the most.

One of my favorite people in the world was my Uncle Red. He died when I was 16, and I am most grateful that I not only had his unconditional love for those 16 years, but I also was able to have some of those soul-searching adolescent conversations before he passed. My uncle had a degenerative spinal disease; by the time of his death, he had no muscle function, only uncontrollable spasms. I never heard

him complain or curse; it was always “Okay, that’s over. What’s next?” I asked him once how he could do it—how he could not be angry or bitter. He answered that the challenge was not his deteriorating body, but it was maintaining and strengthening his soul, and that was a challenge he could answer.

While none of us chose this pandemic (another word we likely never considered becoming a daily term), we can decide how to respond, with grace, humor, and love for our fellow human beings.

Sending strong, loving thoughts your way,

Lucinda Ross