



Mental Health Self-Care

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Common Stressors

- Unknown circumstances and outcomes
 - We are not familiar with dealing with something unseen and unknown
- Increased anxiety
 - News, social media, downtime
- Family dynamics at home
 - Close proximity, more needs
- Parenting
- Fears about jobs/finances
- THOUGHTS IN YOUR HEAD

Family dynamics

- Proximity magnifies both small issues and big ones.
- Even the best relationships can be strained to by too much togetherness when you are not already used to it.
- Tips:
 - If you feel guilt or think badly of yourself for being aggravated by family, take a moment to mentally step back and reframe: what am I needing right now in this situation?
 - Be kind to yourself as well as your family: everyone has a limit; you just need to learn better about how to give yourself a break before you reach yours.
 - Where is your limit? How do you know you are getting close to it (thoughts, emotions, physical signs)?
 - Start paying attention to where you are relative to your limit: use scale of 1-10. Take a break from others and get some refresher time before you get to the limit

Good Family Check-In Practice

- With your spouse/significant other, even with your kids
- WHAT WE ARE DOING WELL:
 - What I think I am doing well right now
 - What I think you are doing well right now
 - What I need more of
- WHAT I HAVE TO GIVE:
 - Each share how much you have to give of yourself/energy/patience on a scale of 0-100
 - A good way to get a quick snapshot of where the other person is emotionally
 - If you are at a 75 and your partner is at a 30, then you are responsible for taking on the share of duties/supporting the family/support your spouse that day.
 - If your totals don't add up to 100, then have an immediate emergency plan to handle the rest of the day in a way that doesn't drain either of you too much

Parenting tips

- Questions from your kids: you don't have to have all the answers for your kids about what is happening or about what will happen next.
- Structure: a must for helping kids adapt.
- Your alone time: to be present and attentive you need a little time for yourself away from others regularly. If you are feeling depleted, you will have a very difficult time helping your kids.

How Anxiety Works

- Evolutionary survival needs have preconditioned us to look for the problems/threats around us.
- Our minds are hard-wired to use neural pathways that help us find problems.
- We feed anxiety unconsciously by attending to it and through our current source of threats: news, social media, our imaginations.
- What we visualize is real to our brains– same physiological and biochemical reactions as a real-life event.
- The more we think about it/feed it, the more it grows
- False Expectations Appearing Real

Harmful thoughts

- Examples:
 - I should not feel this way, other people have it way worse.
 - This is never going to end.
 - This has been going on forever.
 - I/we are not going to be ok if _____ (your version of something bad) happens.
- REMEMBER: ANTICIPATION IS ALWAYS WORSE THAN OUR EXPERIENCE OF THE REALITY
- Reframe thoughts like these: make them more realistic.....
 - I am tired of this, but one day we will be back to normal
 - If (something I am worried about) happens, I will figure out what to do next. I have made it this far, and we will get through this too.

Ways to cope with anxiety

- We all have anxiety, anxiety is not the problem, the problem is how we respond to it. Do we react and interact with it, or do we redirect our minds and focus on the present moment?
- Anxiety is worry about future or the past, anxiety does not exist in the present moment if you put your focus there.
- Mindfulness: put your mind/thought system in the exact moment your body is in.
- Train your mind and your brain to use mindfulness– like building a muscle. Builds stronger neural pathways for positive and mindfulness than for anxiety.
- Use breath/chores/walking to make yourself present: use all 5 senses to BE in the moment.
- 4-7-8 breathing
- Apps like headspace or insight timer– guided meditations and mindfulness exercises, some on CV

Other coping skills

- Create a time for yourself every day: can be 5–10 min.
- Make sure you are on a schedule. Structure helps with anxiety, lets you know what to expect, keeps you in a rhythm.
- Get natural light: go outside. Very important for brain neurochemicals associated with mood.
- Positive visualization.
- One positive thing practice: (twice a day at least)
 - Find something positive in any moment (something pretty, funny, happy memory, yummy food taste) and use all 5 senses to experience it. Notice how/where it feels good inside your body, and with each breath in, imagine that sensation growing inside you, taking more space and growing. This teaches mindfulness and supports your brain with positive input.
- Night journal exercise:
 - Make a bullet list of a few positive (anything NOT negative) things from the day. Put it next to your bed, immediately when you wake up and before getting up or looking at your phone read the list once. That night add to the list, the next morning read whole list all the way through. Repeat for several days. You don't have to "buy-in" when you read it, just read it and move on. This reprograms your neural pathways to find the positive.

Mindfulness resources

<https://www.anxiety.org/can-mindfulness-help-reduce-anxiety>

<https://www.mindful.org/using-mindfulness-to-treat-depression/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Ybvz1YDIOI>

<https://positivepsychology.com/mindfulness-exercises-techniques-activities/>

<https://psychcentral.com/lib/how-mindfulness-can-mitigate-the-cognitive-symptoms-of-depression/>

Jack Kornfield

Tara Brach

Exercise and diet

- Overwhelming research about the importance of exercise in buffering our brains against the negative effects of anxiety.
 - Cortisol and neurochemicals eat away at critical brain structures responsible for helping us not be stressed, for memory and recall.
- Endorphin release helps us feel better.
- Walk briskly for 30 min is enough, more cardiovascularly challenged the better
- Brain-gut connection very important. Food we eat can have a negative impact on our gut microbiome, which affects brain functioning, moods, and mental health.
- Food that cause inflammation in the gut can lead to depression and Alzheimer's disease.
- Mood can be impacted by food additives or inflammatory foods such as dairy, gluten, corn, food dyes.
- Other culprits: sugary foods, refined food, foods high in saturated fats.

Teletherapy

- HIPPA compliant video-assisted therapy.
- Phone sessions.
- Research shows we can treat most issues just as effectively as in-person sessions.
- Can also handle medications for mental health issues.
- Offered through Northshore Counseling and Wellness, as well as most therapy offices.
- Insurance is fully supporting this method.