

Managing Stress In Scary Times

In times of great uncertainty, it is not unusual for one to feel overwhelmed, helpless, angry or scared, as well as a myriad of other emotions...and that's okay. It's what you do with your thoughts and feelings that matter.

Much is beyond our control when it comes to Covid-19, the Coronavirus, here are some simple reminders of what is within your control and tips to try to maintain your sanity and maybe help someone else along the way:

- **Act on the things you can control.** We had no control over how the virus started, but we all have a role in mitigating its spread. Cough into your elbow, practice "social distancing" and follow the recommendations of public health officials. Your behavior affects others and their behavior affects you; let's be responsible neighbors and citizens of the world.
- **Limit your exposure to the news.** While it's important to be informed, continuously watching, listening to or reading about the virus can be very distressing. Stop bombarding your system with stressful news. Give yourself a limit, for example watch coverage in the morning and then again after dinner. Turn off all news at least one hour before going to bed. Imagine what your dreams would be like if you watch a comedy, read a book or meditate instead of tuning into the news.
- **Don't isolate.** As more of our daily lives are carried on remotely for now, and we are advised against in-person social gatherings, find other ways to connect with people. Call or text someone. Organize regular phone calls, online chat rooms or email threads to touch base with friends, family and colleagues. Hang a sign in your mailroom inviting your neighbors to join a virtual chat or book club. Write to a soldier abroad, or to a senior in an assisted living facility or nursing home on lock-down, or to someone in Italy or Spain who has been quarantined for weeks. This pandemic is a world-wide event; you are not alone in your fear and you are not alone in your community if you reach out.
- **Exercise.** Gyms are closed but you can still move your body. Go out for walks, bike rides, etc.. If the time comes that we have to stay home for a couple of weeks- walk up and down the hallways of your building or clean out your closets. If you live in a house, it might be time to clean out your garage or attic or do some yard work.

- **Practice Mindfulness.** You don't have to meditate or sit still to be mindful, it simply means giving your full attention to what's in front of you (not the news). For example, if you're washing dishes, focus your attention on the water- the temperature, the sound, the way it hits the plate and clears away the scraps of food...

If you still feel unsettled or agitated, try the 5,4,3,2,1 coping technique: Look around and name 5 things that you can see, 4 things that you can touch, 3 things that you can hear, 2 things that you can smell and 1 thing that you can taste. This will help ground you to the here and now.

You can also go online and find many helpful guided meditation videos and relaxation tools.

- **Reach out for support.** If you, or a loved one, have a fever or are physically ill, contact your doctor for guidance. Similarly, if you or a loved one are feeling overwhelmed and hyper-focused on "what ifs" around the fear of getting the disease or the very real financial consequences associated with the temporary closure of businesses, reach out to a mental health professional for support.

Jill Schreibman, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker at Westchester Jewish Community Services (WJCS). Contact Jill at jschreibman@wjcs.com if you would like to talk.