

Community Trauma: Navigating a Pandemic

Article #6: Mentally Distancing

J. Thomas Munley, LPC, CTP-C
Trauma Coordinator, ACE's Master Trainer
Mid-Michigan Trauma Collaborative



We have learned a lot of new words during the last month and a half or so. One of them is *social distancing*, which is in place to *flatten the curve*. I know more about this virus - what it can do and how it can spread - than I would ever have guessed I would want or need. The truth is, a lot of what I know I wish I didn't have to know, but in order to be safe we need good information from reliable sources.

With all that said, I decided I needed a break all my news feeds. I don't watch regular or cable T.V. so all of my information comes by way of 'flipbook' and other social media sites like LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. I have decided to *mentally distance* myself the rest of the week for my own sanity. I am sure if something earth shattering comes up someone will tell me. But until then, I have to pull away to protect myself from the onslaught of horrible and disturbing news. I turned off all my device notifications so that every five seconds a new story of something awful isn't bonging on my phone or iPad. Watching Corona Virus press briefing is mentally exhausting and gives me whiplash from one day to the next. Seeing people protest in the streets against the lock down angers me to no end. I can't watch any more right now.

I give myself one or two times a day to look at the news just to stay abreast of developments but *mentally distancing* has proven to be helpful in trying to stay hopeful and sane. I have a friend who talks about the endless process of "what ifs" that his brain keeps repeating, dragging him down the rabbit hole of the worst possible outcomes for this pandemic. This is where mindfulness can play a key role in pulling us back to the "now" and grounding us in the present versus the dread of an unknown future.

Mindfulness is one of the ways in which we can actually move to calm the untamed mind. So, what does mindfulness look like practically speaking for the average person? The truth is you do not need to be a Jedi Mind Warrior to practice mindfulness. In its simplest form, mindfulness is paying attention *to the now* and focusing on what we are actually doing versus letting the mind take us where we don't really want to go.

Here is a great definition of mindfulness from [Psychology Today](#):

*"**Mindfulness** is a state of active, open attention to the present. This state encompasses observing one's thoughts and feelings without judging them as good or bad. To live **mindfully** is to live in the moment and reawaken oneself to the present, rather than dwelling on the past or anticipating the future".* If this seems so simple, why does it feel so elusive? First, this is an

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active stance and not just getting lost in thought. We are present to our lives, our feelings, our bodies and minds. There are a hundred and one ways to practice mindfulness.

Let me offer a few suggestions for mindfulness activities:

- Cooking: when we are cooking we have to pay attention to what we are doing or something is going to get burnt or ruined. This is a wonderful way to focus our attention on the now.
- Mindful showering: Pay attention to the way the water feels on your skin, hair, face. Relax into the warmth and beating of the water.
- Do a body scan: Consciously move around your body paying attention to how things feel. Do you have soreness in your neck? Are you sitting upright yet comfortably? Are your muscles tight or relaxed? Stretch! Intentionally move from your head to your toes slowly and openly.
- Journal: This is a wonderful way to get into the present by describing your thoughts, actions, plans and hopes. It focuses us on our inner life.
- Draw: Coloring a Mandala is a peaceful, fun and beautiful way to focus ourselves. There is an app called *Recolor* that allows you to color pictures you pick by touching the screen and changing different colors. It also stays inside the lines for you 😊.

Remember: Humans are Resilient!