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Affect Management in a Pandemic World

The rapid spread of the virus and its consequences have put us all in a state of shock, and grief. One cannot turn on their phone, computer or television without escaping the images of human suffering. People without pre-existing mental disorders are now experiencing anxiety, depression and grief. We are all at risk for mental and compassion fatigue. These strategies can help manage the painful affect with which we must now cope.

-Feel Your Feelings

Sadness, anger, and fear are all normal reactions to the context in which we live. We are all grieving and it is important to remember we all grieve differently. It is crucial we feel our own unique feelings without judgement. The feelings will be experienced in waves not stages. As in the mourning process there will be periods of calm and storm. Information about grief and mourning can be found on Alan Wolfelt's web, (<https://www.centerforloss.com/about-the-center-for-loss/about-dr-alan-wolfelt/>).

-Breathe, Breathe, Breathe

Deep breathing is essential to our well-being right now. It will calm anxiety and combat depression. Dr. Andrew Weil has three deep breathing exercises on his web, (<https://www.drweil.com/health-wellness/body-mind-spirit/stress-anxiety/breathing-three-exercises/1/>).

-Process the Pain

We need to express our feelings. Praying the Psalms, calling a friend, writing, creating art, singing, and dancing, are a few methods of expelling these feelings.

-Work Out the Stress Hormones

The stress response is our body's way of coping under the circumstances. It is crucial to release the stress hormones from our physical self. Harvard Health Publishing has explanation and methods for this, (<https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/understanding-the-stress-response>).

-Find Your Personal Meaning

When going through challenging times it is important to take time to reflect on the meaning it has for us. It is a strategy that gives us strength even in the direst circumstances. History and our faith tradition have many examples of this. Viktor Frankl built a form of therapy centered on its importance, (<https://www.intellectualltakeout.org/viktor-frankl-saying-yes-to-life-in-difficult-times/>).

-Rest

A common complaint is people are exhausted from trying to accomplish a lot despite Social Distancing. Now is the time to make time to rest. What we are going through is exhausting to the brain and body. It is important to take Sabbath. The Rev. John Bell has a meditation on this that is powerful, (<https://youtu.be/scNUVXFVHP0>).

When is it time to seek professional help for anxiety or depression?

Right now, it may be hard to distinguish if the symptoms we are experiencing are serious enough to seek professional help. A good question to ask is, "are the anxiety or depressive symptoms getting in the way of everyday responsibilities, or relationships?" When in doubt a call to an internist might prove useful. Many counselors or therapists are doing phone sessions right now and can help you assess this in the first session. See the articles listed below:

-Anxiety, <https://www.verywellmind.com/dsm-5-criteria-for-generalized-anxiety-disorder-1393147>

-Depression, <https://www.verywellmind.com/dsm-5-and-diagnosis-of-depression-1066916>

