



HOW TO SOOTHE YOURSELF IN STRESSFUL TIMES

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It has been an incredibly challenging time for all of us lately. We have been required to change almost everything about our lifestyles, schedules and plans. We are cooped up either completely alone, or with our families and we are tired of it! Many of us are worried about being able to care for our families and pay our bills; we all wonder what our futures will be. And we all have to learn to live with uncertainty.

One of the deepest lessons we are learning at this time is that we often cannot count on our external environment to bring us comfort and peace. So how do you find peace, calm and ease during such a challenging time?

Here are some suggestions to help you navigate this time with as much grace as you can!

- **Always do your best, but let go of perfection.**
Juan-Miguel Ruiz in his wonderful book, "The Four Agreements", encourages us to let go of getting things exactly right! Whether you are a front-line worker or a parent with young children, this is a time to be kind to yourself and realize that you can only do what you can right now. So remember, you can't fix or control everything. Just do your best each day. Because each day is different, and each day we may feel different!
- **Take time for yourself, any way you can.** If you have kids and are working from home, this may seem impossible. But teach your family that you need 5, 10 or even 30 minutes of time for you. If there is no other place, go to the bathroom and lock the door! Take a few minutes to just breathe, do a guided meditation, put on your headphones, or take a cleansing shower. Everyone needs some down time to function at their best. Plus you are teaching your kids that even moms and dads need downtime...
- **Talk about how you are feeling with others who can listen and share.** When we don't try to handle everything ourselves, we at least feel less alone and realize that everyone else is in a similar boat. This is truly a

difficult and unprecedented time for all of us. We need each other more now than ever!

- Do something mindful for yourself at least once a day (if not more). Count backwards from 20 as you exhale or listen to a guided meditation on youtube. Take an online yoga class or just sit quietly and repeat everything for which you feel grateful. If you can stop every hour or so and even just stretch or take one deep breath, that would be great. The more you do these small gestures, the more they become healthy habits, and the more they will help you manage the anxiety you may be feeling with all the unknowns.
- Find some ritual that helps you create a separation between work and home time. These days our workspace is our home. So teach your brain that work time is done for the day by mindfully putting your work in a folder, writing notes for tomorrow so you don't worry about it all night, tidying up, and even putting things on a shelf or closing a drawer. This helps the mind understand that your focus will shift elsewhere for now. If you can, walk outside and physically make a break between your workday and family time. Sounds small, but it helps train the brain to focus where we want it to.
- Do something unrelated to work that captures your attention in a one-pointed way. For instance, Sudoku or a crossword puzzle; watching a great movie; playing a card game, doing a craft project. It is really hard to be stressed if your mind is focused intently. Multitasking is overrated! In order to calm the mind, we can't be doing 3 things at once.
- Finally, remind yourself regularly that self-care is not a luxury, it is a necessity! If you don't take care of your needs, you will become more anxious, depressed, angry and less able to adapt to change. We all handle our stress differently, and we can't expect others to know what we need. So tune in to your own body and once you know what you need, let your family and friends know how they can be supportive. You are also modeling for your kids and others when you take care of yourself!

As you try any or all of these suggestions, be kind to yourself! It is harder to change and learn when our systems are under stress. So remember: all you can do is your best today. And tomorrow's best will be different...

If I could pick out just one emotional skill I wish everyone could have, it would be to self-soothe. I find in general that people have not learned to do this for themselves, whether because they were over-protected as children, or had to survive trauma and just figure out the best they could for themselves. Mostly, when we become triggered, we revert to either numbing

in some way, escaping, ignoring or self-harming. All if these survival strategies have their value at some point; but are they really getting you through the crisis/ problem or just pushing it to the side (or on to someone else!).

After working with a lot of clients over time, I have noticed that people will call me in a crisis, I talk them off the ledge, and then the next time there is a crisis, they call me again. I usually repeat the very same thing I have said before, and often, even they can recognize this pattern. How nice would it feel to be able to do that for yourself, instead of depending on another for your wellbeing?

With that in mind, I have put together a few tools on <http://www.jfcsphilly.org/supportforhealthcareprofessionals> you can use to identify and help you remember what you need to gracefully move through challenging times.

For support during this time, please call our Care Navigation Line at 1-866-JFCS-NOW or go to www.jfcsphilly.org/supportforhealthcareprofessionals

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline phone number is 1-800-273-8255