

Staying Centered in the Midst of Crisis

An offering to my beloved community from: Jeanne Marie Merkel

The Covid-19 (Coronavirus) Crisis has turned our world upside down.

Many people are experiencing a high level of fear and anxiety due to uncertainty about the future, grief, isolation, illness, and loss of employment. This is understandable. Our hearts go out to all who are directly impacted by the virus, and to those who are impacted by the necessary measures to contain it.

This is a time that calls for us to strengthen our inner resources, reach out to connect with and support others, and carefully discern our path forward.

It is important to remember that stress and anxiety will not only destabilize our immune system, but they will keep us from taking appropriate action.

Here are some tips on calming down that stress response, and staying centered in the midst of crisis, that I have found helpful:

1. Learn how to calm your body at will. The simplest tool is your breath. For a moment, just PAUSE: Take a deep breath in to the count of 4, hold it for 7 counts, then slowly release it through your mouth to the count of 8. As you release, let yourself sigh. Repeat this 3-4 times, as needed. If you do this regularly, you will train your body to be relaxed and calm as a default setting. Biofeedback has proven that this is an effective strategy.
2. Remember the strengths and resources you have within yourself. Get in touch with feelings of determination, resilience, survival skills, feistiness, courage, and resourcefulness. Shift your focus to things that make you feel strong and connect you to joy and meaning.
3. Take a good look at your anxiety level, and ask yourself: Is this anxiety helping me stay safe? Is it excessive anxiety that is not helpful or is making matters worse? Am I pushing away anxiety and in denial about what is happening? Look at the difference between perceived threat and actual threat. What can you control and what is beyond your control? Be real honest with yourself, and then shift your attention to what is actually happening NOW, and what you need to DO to respond to it effectively.

4. Limit your exposure to social media and be very careful about choosing reliable sources of news. What we chose to take in can be toxic and make us feel overwhelmed and fearful; or it can nourish us and empower us to take effective action. You are the gatekeeper of your own mind. Find that centered place within where you can access your own intuitive wisdom and clear thinking. Take a long walk in nature and connect with the larger wisdom and renewing energy that is always available to you.
5. Be proactive: Make a plan and take action. Nothing helps dissipate anxiety like taking some effective action, however small. When you feel a lack of control, it is often tempting to go overboard with actions that make you feel secure in the short term, but in the long run are counter-productive. Find ways of being resourceful, sharing knowledge and skills. Think outside the box to find new perspectives and solutions to the challenges you face.
6. Connect with Community. It has been such a reassuring thing to see how people are reaching out to one another through the internet, ferrying nourishment out into the world, developing creative ways to support one another and finding deeper meaning in this crisis that unites our global family. Giving and receiving both help to calm the nervous system. If you are feeling isolated, don't be afraid to reach out. There are people who want to be there for you. Don't forget to connect by phone or Facetime with the elders in your family and community. Many of them have lived through difficult times, they may have some wisdom to share. Including them in the discussion will ease their sense of isolation, and yours.
7. Keep your heart open to those outside your immediate family and circle. Try to avoid engaging in any exchanges that focus on blaming, shaming or polarizing. If ever there was a time that we needed to all be pulling together, NOW is that time. It feels like this virus has pressed the PAUSE button on our crazy human social patterns and structures and asked us to all look at what is most important in life and how interconnected we are. This is an opportunity for us to change course for the positive. Let's do it!
8. Make a commitment to stay engaged with what is happening; not to "tune out" with mindless activities or numbing addictions, but to use this

opportunity to really deepen your relationships with others, and to engage in creative problem-solving that will help the collective. Find out where the need is in your community and get involved. We all have something to give.

9. Take this time of necessary “social distancing” as an opportunity to turn away from the noise of constant distraction, and get to know yourself on a deeper level. Silence is a doorway through which we can become aware of our intrinsic connection to something larger than ourselves and our human drama, to the sacred web of life that holds all of us. This experience is like a wellspring that will replenish your spirit, anytime you drink of its waters. Return here often. It will transform you and transform every interaction you have with others and with your world.

10. Stay in a place of gratitude for simple things: the sunrise, the light coming in your room, the bird outside your window, a message from a friend, the poignancy of loss that reminds us that we have loved deeply, the act of comforting an ill friend, the ability to laugh, the power of music to inspire and unite us and get us on our feet, and most importantly – the hope of being able to finally embrace loved ones when this storm has passed.

I am sending this out with gratitude to all of the friends and family members, coaches, teachers, authors, thinkers, dreamers, musicians, poets, and leaders who have inspired and supported me, especially through my difficult times.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can be of support to you. As a Life and Transition Coach I am offering free phone or Zoom sessions to people who are feeling isolated or anxious and who could benefit from a conversation to help them process what they are going through. Send me a message and we'll arrange a time. Blessings and Stay Safe, Jeanne Marie www.wellspringcss.net

These insights are gleaned from my own life, and from reading and listening to experts in the fields of psychology, transition coaching and mindfulness. I have synthesized several authors' insights to meet the current situation. Here are a few resources that I have drawn from and found helpful. Dr. Rick and Forrest Hanson: “[Fear in the Time of Coronavirus](https://beingwell.simplecast.com/episodes/fear-in-the-time-of-coronavirus)” podcast aired March 16, 2020. <https://beingwell.simplecast.com/episodes/fear-in-the-time-of-coronavirus>. Also their book: [Resilient: How to Grow an Unshakable Core of Calm, Strength, and Happiness](#) Dr. Joan Borysenko: [It's Not the End of the World: Developing Resilience in Times of Change](#). Thomas Huebl: <https://thomashuebl.com/coronavirus-news/>