

MANAGING PARENTAL STRESS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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**IN AN
EPIDEMIC
FEARS ARE
NORMAL**



INCLUDING:

- falling ill and dying
- approaching health facilities
- losing job and income
- being socially excluded, i.e. experiencing racism, being associated with virus
- powerless to protect loved ones/fear of losing loved ones
- being separated from loved ones
- helplessness, boredom, loneliness and depression due to being isolated
- reliving a similar experience

(Inter-Agency Standing Committee in the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Reference Group, Feb 2020)

AND SPECIFIC TO COVID-19

- Risk of being infected and infecting others, uncertainties about transmission
- Common symptoms of a cold or another virus can be mistaken for COVID-19 causing fear of infection
- Caregivers may feel increasingly worried for their children being at home without appropriate support
- Deterioration of vulnerable individuals, i.e. older adults and people with disabilities, if caregivers are placed in quarantine

(Inter-Agency Standing Committee in the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Reference Group, Feb 2020)

PREVENTING PARENTAL BURNOUT



PARENTAL BURNOUT

WHEN THE STRESS BECOMES CHRONIC, EXHAUSTION BUILDS UP, FEELINGS OF DETACHMENT FROM CHILD & INEFFICACY

- Acknowledge that you **will** feel overwhelmed and out of control. Note the feeling and remind yourself that anxiety, feeling out of control and overwhelm at this time is normal
- Reduce expectations for self, kids, and co-parent. Be realistic about what is possible during this time. Give yourself permission to cut corners:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/14/parenting/just-give-them-the-screens-for-now.html>
- Take breaks BEFORE you need them
 - Pause, breathe, count to 10, diaphragmatic breathing
- Prioritise activities that bolster your sense of meaning, i.e. attune to your values, help others, watch family movies that align with your values etc.
 - https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/twelve_films_that_highlight_the_best_in_humanity

RELATIONSHIPS IN QUARANTINE

- In close quarters, there are more opportunities for both negative and positive relationship dynamics to amplify
- Take care of your relationship:
 - support your partner, listen to their stress, talk to them about how you're feeling **calmly**
 - Sign up for "Marriage Minute" newsletter at <https://www.gottman.com/marriage-minute/>
 - tips on appreciation, State of the Union, show interest, find areas of agreement, express affection (during a conflict too)



SELF CARE: YOUR WELL- BEING IS CONTAGIOUS



SELF CARE

- Is essential in stress and burnout management
- You and others around you are facing uncertain and scary times. You are confronted with thoughts of your mortality, mortality of parents, feeling very responsible for your children, fearful about facing it all
- Be aware these thoughts make us feel vulnerable which can increase irritability and self-protective behaviour (see what happens in the grocery stores). Be kind and gentle to yourself and your family.

WHAT DOES SELF CARE LOOK LIKE?

- Healthy routine with some variety
- Sleep hygiene
- Go light on the alcohol
- Exercise
- Regular social connections
- Limit time on social media (studies show increased perception of risk) and ANY media:
 - Silver in *Healthy Psychology* found after the Boston Marathon bombings in 2013 strong association between exposure to media coverage of the attack and symptoms of acute stress. People with the **highest exposure to media coverage of the bombings had even more acute stress than people who were directly exposed** to the bombings (PNAS, Vol. 111, No. 1, 2014).
 - we judge risk based on our feelings instead of reputable data

What would it look like to be kinder to yourself?

And to your family?

MINDFULNESS

IT IS A WAY OF BEING, NOT JUST A MEDITATION PRACTICE

Mindfulness is about allowing the world and yourself to be exactly as it is: not trying to get anywhere else or achieve something else

- you can be mindful by simply paying attention to sensations as you're doing dishes, your body posture as you do daily chores, your breath etc.

STOP

- **S** - Stop what you're doing, put everything down
- **T** - Take a few deep breaths
- **O** - Observe your experience exactly how it is:
 - what are your thoughts? thoughts are just thoughts, not facts, and impermanent
 - notice emotions and how they are showing up physically. Naming emotions tones down your fear circuit in the brain and calms
 - notice your body, posture, tension pain
- **P** - Proceed with something that will support you in that moment: call a friend, make a tea, stretch

Soften, Soothe, Allow (MBSR training) : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5PpLPhZ8H4A>

COACHING EXERCISE

"THERE IS A HIDDEN OPPORTUNITY IN EVERY SITUATION"

- Think creatively: what opportunity can you open up for yourself with your increased presence at home with your family?



ADDITIONAL TIPS

- Parental resource for COVID-19 Pandemic: https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/factsheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf
- Daily LIVE community meditations: https://www.tenpercent.com/live?utm_source=cv_response&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=reminder_tphlive_323
- Daily gratitude journal (3 Good Things App)

Meditation: It's Not What You Think

© 2005 Jon Kabat-Zinn

Excerpted from *Coming to Our Senses*, Hyperion Press, NY, NY

It might be good to clarify a few common misunderstandings about meditation right off the bat. First, meditation is best thought of as a way of being, rather than a technique or a collection of techniques.

I'll say it again.

Meditation is a way of being, not a technique.

This doesn't mean that there aren't methods and techniques associated with meditation practice.

There are. In fact, there are hundreds of them, and we will be making good use of some of them. But without understanding that all techniques are orienting vehicles pointing at ways of being, ways of being in relationship to the present moment and to one's own mind and one's own experience, we can easily get lost in techniques and in our misguided but entirely understandable attempts to use them to get somewhere else and experience some special result or state that we think is the goal of it all...

Second, meditation is not relaxation spelled differently. Perhaps I should say that again as well: Meditation is not relaxation spelled differently.

That doesn't mean that meditation is not frequently accompanied by profound states of relaxation and by deep feelings of wellbeing. Of course it is, or can be, sometimes. But mindfulness meditation is the embrace of any and all mind states in awareness, without preferring one to another. From the point of view of mindfulness practice, pain or anguish, or for that matter boredom or impatience or frustration or anxiety or tension in the body are all equally valid objects of our attention if we find them arising in the present moment, each a rich opportunity for insight and learning, and potentially, for liberation, rather than signs that our meditation practice is not "succeeding" because we are not feeling relaxed or experiencing bliss in some moment.

We might say that meditation is really a way of being appropriate to the circumstances one finds oneself in, in any and every moment. If we are caught up in the preoccupations of our own mind, in that moment we cannot be present in an appropriate way or perhaps at all. We will bring an agenda of some kind to whatever we say or do or think, even if we don't know it...

For meditation, and especially mindfulness meditation, is not the throwing of a switch and catapulting yourself anywhere, nor is it entertaining certain thoughts and getting rid of others. Nor is it making your mind blank or willing yourself to be peaceful or relaxed. It is really an inward gesture that inclines the heart and mind (seen as one seamless whole) toward a full-spectrum awareness of the present moment just as it is, accepting whatever is happening simply because it is already happening...

Meditation is not about trying to get anywhere else. It is about allowing yourself to be exactly where you are and as you are, and for the world to be exactly as it is in this moment as well. This is not so easy, since there is always something that we can rightly find fault with if we stay inside our thinking. And so there tends to be great resistance on the part of the mind and body to settle into things just as they are, even for a moment. That resistance to what is may be even more compounded if we are meditating because we hope that by doing so, we can effect change, make things different, improve our own lives, and contribute to improving the lot of the world...

So, from the point of view of awareness, any state of mind is a meditative state. Anger or sadness is just as interesting and useful and valid to look into as enthusiasm or delight, and far more valuable than a blank mind, a mind that is insensate, out of touch. Anger, fear, terror, sadness, resentment, impatience, enthusiasm, delight, confusion, disgust, contempt, envy, rage, lust, even dullness, doubt, and torpor, in fact all mind states and body states are occasions to know ourselves better if we can stop, look, and listen, in other words, if we can come to our senses and be intimate with what presents itself in awareness in any and every moment. The astonishing thing, so counterintuitive, is that nothing else needs to happen. We can give up trying to make something special occur. In letting go of wanting something special to occur, maybe we can realize that something very special is already occurring, and is always occurring, namely life emerging in each moment as awareness itself.