

Self Care in a Time of Crisis

Adapted from a handout from Lynda Cheldelin Fell/International Grief Institute at the Safe Crossings Grief Conference, March 2020

Stress Defined

Stress is the body's reaction to any change that requires an adjustment or response. Stress is the body's natural defense against real or imagined danger.

To keep safe, stress flushes the body with hormones to prepare the systems to:

Flight, Fight, Freeze, Appease



Common Reactions to Stress

Though the nature and scope of stress differs, common reactions occur in 5 distinct categories: **cognitive, emotional, behavioral, physical and spiritual.**

Understanding what is a normal reaction to an abnormal event is necessary in order to understand how to provide support.



Normal Reactions to Stress

Cognitive: Forgetfulness, Poor Concentration, Low Productivity, Negative Attitude, Confusion, Regression

Behavioral: Isolation, Intolerance, Lashing Out, Resentment, Distrust

Emotional: Anxiety, Frustration or Irritability, Mood Swings, Temper Outbursts, Nightmares, Crying Spells

Physical: Change in Appetite, Fatigue, Headaches, Insomnia, Weight Change, Restlessness, Upset Stomach

Spiritual: Emptiness, Doubt, Loss of Meaning, Looking for Magic, Loss of Direction, Cynicism

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to recover from or adapt to difficulties.

Supporting resilience means building resilience through strategies that support the brain, body and emotions during a critical time.



6 Suggestions for Self Care During This Time of Crisis

Suggestion #1 - Forest Bathing

Suggestion # 2 - Senorial Therapy

Suggestion #3 - Laughter

Suggestions # 4 - Color Power/Chromotherapy

Suggestion #5 - Self Compassion

Suggestion #6 - Information “Diet”

Suggestion #1 - Forest Therapy

Forest therapy is rooted in the Japanese practice of ‘forest bathing’. Exposing your brain to the natural environment (**even seeing a natural scene through a window or on your computer**) helps lowers anxiety, heart rate and mental fatigue. Nature offers one of the most reliable boosts to mental and physical well being. *The effects of nearby water improves it even more.*



“There are moments when all anxiety and stated toil are becalmed in the infinite leisure and repose of nature.” - Henry David Thoreau

Suggestion #2 - Sensorial Therapy

Our five senses play a role in how we feel and can be influenced by what our senses take in.

Sometimes when you feel stressful or hopeless, treating your five senses to something that looks, feels, smells, tastes or sounds good stimulates our feel-good hormones (dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin, and endorphins).



Sensorial Therapy

Every day practice the Rule of 5 by enjoying the following:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste



Senorial Therapy: *Visual Suggestions* (5 a day):

Watch a sunrise or sunset

Look at a cherished photo or favorite memento

Use a plan or flowers to enliven your work space

Enjoy the beauty of a garden, the beach, a park, or your own backyard

Surround yourself with colors that lift your spirit



Senorial Therapy: *Tactile Suggestions* (4 a day):

Soak in a warm tub with epsom salt or bath oil

Wear a pair of extra soft socks

Pet a dog or cat or other loved animal

Wrap yourself in a soft scarf or blanket



Senorial Therapy: *Sound Suggestions* (3 a day):

Listen to relaxing or upbeat music

Listen to laughter on YouTube or comedy

Listen to the sound of the ocean, waterfall or fountain

Hang windchimes near a window

Seek silence

Listen to the birds or a soundtrack of nature



Senorial Therapy: *Smell Suggestions* (2 a day):

Shower or bathe with a scented soap

Light a fragrant candle or burn incense

Apply a scented lotion to your skin before bed

Buy a fragrant flower bouquet for the kitchen or your room/office

Experiment with different essential oils in a diffuser

Enjoy clean, fresh air in the great outdoors

Spritz your favorite perfume or cologne



Senorial Therapy: *Taste Suggestions* (1 a day):

Enjoy a mug of herbal tea, cocoa with whipped cream or a cold drink

Chew a flavored gum

Indulge in a piece of dark chocolate

Enjoy a ripe piece of fruit

Research shows that certain foods help reduce stress: avocado, raspberries, blueberries, oranges, pistachios, walnuts, chocolate



Suggestion #3 - Laughter

Those who need a good laugh are usually the ones who feel least like laughing, yet the heart can hold joy the same time as sorrow, so go ahead and laugh.

One laugh can scatter a hundred griefs, and help lift the spirits.

- 10 minutes of laughter is equivalent to 30 minutes of cardiovascular activity
- Laughing bypasses the mind and helps with a positive attitude
- Laughter releases endorphins which help us feel good
- Laughter doesn't change reality but does help us to cultivate a positive attitude



Laughter (continued):

Because the body can't tell the difference between a real or fake smile, hold a (sanitized) pencil between your teeth to 'fake it until you make it'. The brain will be tricked into releasing those feel good chemical anyway.

This YouTube is a good starting place:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NkQ58I53mjk>



Laughter Suggestions:

Watch a comedy movie or TV show or comedy special

Stream funny YouTube videos

Listen to children laughing

Watch blooper reels

Read a humorous book

Look at funny pictures

Read entertaining social media memes

Listen to funny jokes



Suggestion #4 - Color Power: Chromotherapy

Colors are all around us, and they aren't meaningless. They can change the way we feel and act.

What we know about chromotherapy:

- Calms the amygdala (guard dog)
- Certain colors can invigorate a depressed mind or soothe an agitated mind
- Lowers blood pressure
- The repetitive hand motions used in coloring a picture induces a meditative state

“There is not one blade of grass, there is no color in this world that is not intended to make us rejoice.” - John Calvin

Chromotherapy

Different methods of using color to feel less stressed:

- Paint a color by number picture
- Color your bath water
- Plug in a colored night light
- Hang a color glass prism
- Enjoy a color wash YouTube video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmBdlXvoS2I>
- Download a color therapy app (colorfy)



Suggestion #5 - Cultivate Self-Compassion

“The love in the world begins with the love within ourselves.” - Deepak Chopra

Studies show that loving yourself leads to less stress and more optimism, and can actually guide you through adversity.

We use kindness to show others how much we love them. When you give yourself that same kindness, you illuminate your life with positivity.



Self Compassion: Try this simple exercise...

Answer these questions for yourself:

I have a(i.e. Good heart, gentle soul, witty personality...)

I make a(i.e. Good lasagna, amazing spreadsheet, scrapbook...)

I'm a good...(i.e. Friend, listener, gardener, organizer, painter...)

People would say I'm....(kind, smart, creative, funny, clever, empathetic...)



