

Managing Stress & Anxiety in Quarantine

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Stress & Anxiety

- ▶ “Stress is what arises when something we care about is at stake”
 - ▶ Manifests in our body as a racing heartbeat, sweating or clammy hands, stomachache
- ▶ Anxiety will manifest in our brains and our bodies
 - ▶ Worried thoughts or catastrophic thinking, panicky or uneasy feeling, elevated heartrate
- ▶ How is your anxiety showing up?
 - ▶ Worst-case scenarios? Zoning out? Irritable? Feeling unproductive?
 - ▶ Somatic symptoms? Tense or achy? Uncomfortable?

Fight-flight-freeze

- ▶ When we encounter something threatening, our nervous system activates
 - ▶ Speeds up our hearts and sends a message to our brain to mobilize
- ▶ System can't distinguish between external threat and internal threat
 - ▶ Fight: self-criticism and blame, flight: numbing or isolating, freeze: ruminating or worrying
- ▶ What's your brain's go-to strategy?
- ▶ Engage your “rest and digest” system through deep belly breathing
 - ▶ One hand on chest and other hand on stomach (or put book on stomach)
 - ▶ Inhale by inflating your stomach, hold, exhale longer than inhale

Making choices

- ▶ Feeling out of control, we look for what we can control
- ▶ Try instead asking “what can I choose in this situation?”
 - ▶ We don’t have control over our thoughts and feelings, just our behaviors
- ▶ We always have a choice (even if we don’t like it)
 - ▶ “I’m really worrying right now/stressed out, what choice can I make in this moment?”
 - ▶ What kind of person do I want to be?
 - ▶ What personal qualities do I want to bring?
 - ▶ What choice is in line with my values?
 - ▶ What choice helps me feel safe?

Grounding yourself

- ▶ Anxiety takes us to a different time and place
 - ▶ Past mistakes or future worries
 - ▶ Doesn't leave room for what's happening in front of us
- ▶ Practice grounding yourself in the present:
 - ▶ “Do I feel safe in this moment?”
 - ▶ If yes, sit with it
 - ▶ If no, “what choice can I make right now to feel safer?”
- ▶ Feel your feet on the floor, name the things around you, engage your 5 senses

Healthy distraction vs avoidance

- ▶ How you keep busy is incredibly important: difference between avoidance and distracting
- ▶ Avoidance: mindless scrolling on your phone or overconsumption of something (news, media, substances)
 - ▶ On autopilot and we don't feel great, underlying uneasiness
- ▶ Healthy distractions: things that you do intentionally when you're not feeling well, to help you cope
 - ▶ Recognizing something's wrong, not in the right headspace to handle it in that moment
- ▶ Stuck in an avoidance strategy?
 - ▶ Take a deep breath, ground yourself, pick an immersive activity
- ▶ Self-care is doing things intentionally, that energize and recharge you
 - ▶ Meaningful things, sense of purpose
 - ▶ Create a list of activities and hang it up somewhere

Building structure: 2-hour rule

- ▶ Struggling with building a routine or boredom? Try the 2-hour rule
- ▶ Don't do anything for more than 2 hours in a row (with exceptions)
 - ▶ At home with free time, set timer if needed
- ▶ Diversify what you're doing by switching between consumption and creation
 - ▶ Polarized: binge-watching and feel lazy/avoidant vs. guilty-feeling need to be productive all the time
- ▶ Find a healthy balance:
 - ▶ Don't over-rely on anything: "I've just consumed something, what can I create? Or vice versa?"
- ▶ What does imbalance look like for you?
 - ▶ Where could you make some choices to find balance?
 - ▶ Does my family lean one way or another?

Gratitude

- ▶ Gratitude is not an attitude, it's a practice
- ▶ Doesn't negate the struggle, it's about seeing the whole picture
 - ▶ Our brain is like “Velcro for the bad and Teflon for the good”
 - ▶ Work against our innate instinct to actively cultivate the good
- ▶ Family activity: Highs and lows of the day
 - ▶ Modeling for them to hold space for both good and bad
- ▶ How has this impacted you positively and negatively?
 - ▶ What silver linings can you bring into your life when things are back to “normal”?

Radical acceptance

- ▶ We don't have to like something to accept it
 - ▶ Pain + resistance = suffering
 - ▶ “I accept this is happening *and* I don't like it”
- ▶ When we accept reality we can make choices
 - ▶ Notice resistance, ask yourself “what choice would be helpful right now?”
 - ▶ If you don't know what you need, ask for support
 - ▶ Don't have to rely only on ourselves

Thank you!

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