

Fostering Hope and Optimism During Challenging Times

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“Helping you find your inherent strength, courage and wisdom”

THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF DURHAM HEADQUARTERS

Welcome!! 😊 😊

Please use the polling and chat features:

Poll: Are you struggling to hold onto hope and optimism in our current circumstances?

Question: What helps you hold onto hope?



What is being faced?

- An actual threat to our health and well-being (anxiety keeps us alive and can be helpful, to a degree)
- A change in our regular routine
- Increasing fear and anxiety
- Changing circumstances and uncertainty
- Loss and grief
- Increased conflict
- Coinciding and exacerbating inequities
- Balancing working from home with other commitments
- Supporting elderly family members, who are at higher risk
- Changes in external environment and interactions
- Distrust/on alert
- Decision fatigue
- Less privacy



How charged are our batteries?

- We can only operate at full charge (resiliency) for so long
- The current circumstances drain the battery automatically
- Every other challenge faced can drain it further (e.g. school decisions, multiple responsibilities, losses, increased work pressures and adapting to virtual ways of working)
- Identifying ways to recharge and/or being okay with it not functioning at full charge



What impacts or lowers our hopefulness and optimism?

- Uncertainty
- Feeling a loss of control
- Challenging emotions, which feel difficult to tolerate
- Negative experiences

- What else?





“If we want to cultivate hopefulness, we have to be willing to be flexible and demonstrate perseverance. Not every goal will look and feel the same. Tolerance for disappointment, determination, and a belief in self are the heart of hope.”

— Brené Brown



Psychological Flexibility

- Involves connecting to the present moment in a purposeful way, where we can notice emotions and choose behaviours that move us toward what's important to us
- We have opportunities to expand our flexibility when doing well, but also when facing difficulties
- Involves adapting to situational demands
- It includes noticing the way we interact with our emotions and deciding what we would like it to look like
- It provides a positive sense of self



What can get us stuck?

- “Hooks!”: Difficult emotions and/or experiences which impact our behaviours or responses often in unhelpful ways
- What kind of “hooks” do we face with the pandemic?
 - **Hearing a news report which increases anxiety**
 - **Hearing from other people what they are doing (e.g. with school, social life or work and it doesn’t fit for you)**
 - **Noticing a cough or symptom**
 - **Thinking about the year ahead**
 - Any others you would add?

Poll: What is the hook that is pulling you in the most?



Reactions to painful emotions and experiences

- Avoidance
- Conflict
- Rumination (stuck in the past or future) (“what if’s”, “this is unfair”, “I can’t handle this”)
- Seeing yourself as your experience
- Disconnection to others or withdrawing
- Feeling disempowered
- Can involve less helpful ways of coping (increased substance use, excessive news and television, conflict)
- What are some of the difficulties we face when we attempt to get rid of pain or suffering?



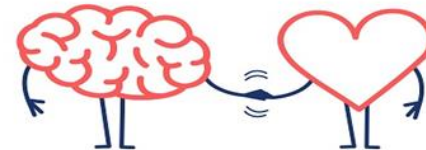
Notice the what ifs? But try not to get hooked in!

- Notice worry, if it shows up. It is normal under the current circumstances!
 - See if you can notice it, without immediately reacting!
 - What do you know about worry, when it feels helpful and when it can mislead you?
 - What physical responses and negative thoughts does worry bring up? This is what worry does!
 - What would happen if you don't immediately respond?
 - What could you tell yourself instead?
- * This same response can be applied to other emotional hooks, like **hopelessness!**



Get to know your emotions. See them as guests in your house!
Notice when they provide insight that feels helpful or when they
take over and feel unhelpful.

Poll: What emotion have you seen increase the most in the past 7 months?



Accepting emotions

1. STOP technique (Goldstein, 2012):
 - S** - Stop and take a pause
 - T** - Take a breath
 - O** - Observe what you notice
 - P** - Proceed with the rest of your day



Acknowledge and validate

- These are difficult times!
- We are not alone
- We will have challenges times, and **it's okay to not be okay** sometimes!
- What expectations can you let go of?
- No decision is perfect, especially during a pandemic. Try to let go of 'perfectionism'. Try to let go of previous expectations of self within our current circumstances
- We can find joy in our present moment. Connect with your body. **Let's focus on our breath.**



Reflection questions to foster hope and optimism

- What are some of the behaviours causing me difficulty, that I want to lessen in my life?
- What behaviours do I want to increase, which help me move toward more hope?
- What painful experiences, dilemmas or decisions can I make or let go of right now?
- Who or what in my life can I connect to, which may be helpful? (“rolling breakdowns”...use the support (power) grid!



Holding onto hope

- Think of a time you held onto hope in the past or coped with something difficult
- How did you do it? What worked? Can you use it now?
- Celebrate the small victories or changes
- Connect to your future self and struggles you may face? What kind words of support would you share.
- Remember our capacity can grow.



Practice compassion (with self and others)

- Reduces stress hormones
- Silence the inner critic and replace with the inner ally
- Speak to yourself like you would to a good friend
- Validate
- Acknowledge the unique struggles faced
- Empathy – try to walk in each other's shoes



Establishing an inner resource

- Focus on a person, place, pet, which brings you a sense of peace, calm and compassion.
- This can be an anchor when you notice self-criticism or hopelessness
- Guided imagery (identifying a person)



Acceptance practice

- Not resignation!
- Involves being open to the range of experiences we can have including emotions, thoughts, interactions, etc.
- View ourselves as observers- try to be open, aware and engaged
- Pay attention to judgement of any kind, and see if we can shift our focus to the present moment, and/or decide if this judgement is moving you toward what is important to you?



What can we gain from present moment awareness?

Moving the woodpile of overwhelm!

- Take a mindful walk outside and observe the environment around you
- Connect purposefully with others
- Check in with your self, what do you need in this moment?
- Focus on the here and now



Relaxation

- Helps reduce stress
- Activates our parasympathetic nervous system and tells us we are safe
- Practice when not in distress and then more effective when you are!
- 5-10 diaphragmatic breaths (in through the nose, out through the mouth)
- Box breathing (in for 4, hold for 4, out for 4, hold for 4, repeat)
- Progressive muscle relaxation



The power of gratitude

- [Gratitude journal](#)
- 1-3 times a week, identify something you are grateful for?
- Spend some time considering why you are grateful and what positive impact this person, event, circumstances has had for you?
- Are there any “silver linings” in our current circumstances?



Look for and/or contribute to good news stories/take action

“When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, “Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.” -Mr. Rogers

- Pay attention and/or be part of positive stories
- Take action to create change
- Let’s share some! What are some of the positive actions you have heard of in your communities or have been part of?



Connection and support

- Connection stimulates the parasympathetic branch of our nervous system.
- It tells us we are safe.
- Share experiences and emotions with supportive friends and family
- Connect to counselling, online groups, community supports, action or organizing



Take a pause and consider: What is important to you?

- Take a moment and consider who and what is important to you right now?
 - Values
 - People
 - Pets
 - Future hopes for self
 - Experiences



Now consider...

1. What thoughts, feeling and sensations get in the way of moving you toward what's important?
2. What responses, including avoidance, show up to get you away from these difficult experiences?
Are these helpful?
3. **What is helpful to move you toward what is important to you? And what are you doing already?**

And

4. What can I do right now that will be helpful to me, my family and/or community?
5. What are the values that are important to me as I navigate this pandemic, that may guide my actions?
6. What are small changes I am making or could make that keep me focused on what's important to me?



Values

- Humour
- Honesty
- Compassion
- Effectiveness
- Care
- Pride in your work/Quality
- Kindness
- Perseverance
- Patience

Are there any values you want to upgrade or downgrade in terms of their helpfulness?



Focus on what's in your control?

- When thinking about what's important to you, what are the pieces you can control, and what might be more helpful to let go (even just for the short term)?



Poll: Which strategy do you think will be most helpful for you in increasing hope and optimism moving forward?

1. Acknowledging and validating emotions
2. Practicing gratitude
3. Practicing acceptance
4. Identifying what's important to you and how to move toward it
5. Increasing compassion
6. Relaxation practices
7. Present moment awareness
8. Contributing to change/focus on good news stories
9. Connection, supports and/or using an inner resource
10. Other



Let's imagine....



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References and resources

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- Kristin Neff: Self-compassion exercises. Found at: <https://self-compassion.org/category/exercises/#exercises>
- Berkeley Greater Good Science Centre. Found at: <https://ggia.berkeley.edu/>
- Inner Health Studio. Guided Visualizations. Found at: <https://www.innerhealthstudio.com/visualization-scripts.html>





Questions?
Comments?

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