



WHY DO WE WORRY?

When we are constantly worried and on edge, our nervous system is on high alert. Mental tension translates into physical tension, which can make us feel like we really should worry because we're feeling so physically agitated.

Some QUICK THOUGHTS:

Nonstop news about a deadly virus spreading across the country, impending weeks of mass disruption and social distancing has us all on edge. In fact, it is really hard to absorb pertinent information when we are stressed or anxious.

Stress causes our rational thinking brain (prefrontal cortex) to go offline, because we go directly into **survival mode**. Only when our brains reconnect with the feeling of safety does our rational part of the thinking brain come back online.

When our prefrontal cortex is working normally, we can make our grocery list and head to the store. However, when we see everybody running around panicked, we join in. This is called "**social contagion**," which is basically the spread of emotion from one person to the next. It is powerful and seems very real.

Knowledge is power! So next time "social contagion" urges are present and you want to purchase extra toilet paper, think about what you are doing, breathe and ground yourself. Ask yourself if this is a need or compulsion and repeat. Remember to practice the behavior you want to grow.

HEALTHY CHOICES

In Times of Crisis & Challenge

By Kristine Gustafson, MS, LPC

KEEPING THE RIGHT MINDSET

1. **A Mindful Mantra 'This Too'**. Because the tendency to resist is strong when there is a lot of unpleasantness. In difficult times "**This too**" is my abbreviation for saying "I accept unconditionally the unfolding of this present moment in whatever form it takes – **this too** is allowed and accepted." 'This too' reminds me to soften my resistance. It helps to stay grounded in presence (as best I can), say it mentally or out loud.
2. **Creativity to Connect!** Literally tap into your creative self and color, paint, doodle, write, sew, and do anything to engage the creative brain. This will disengage stressful thoughts during a crisis/challenge and help change your thoughts to something more pleasant and positive.
3. **You think there for you CAN**. Or to those self-sabotaging thoughts you CAN'T... This is why it is important to remember to re-frame negative thoughts that are unhelpful in life. Re-frame those thoughts to something that is more positive and is more realistic even in a crisis.
4. **Soothe your EMOTIONS and PROBLEMS without food!** Start by remembering that food may comfort you instantly but ultimately you will get upset at yourself for your decision to get off your healthy eating routine. Change your focus, practice relaxation techniques, and use a personal mantra. "Food is for substance not boredom!"
5. **MAKE A PLAN and stick too it!** In times of a large scale crisis when we are in survival mode, make a plan or list and stick to it! This will reduce panic purchases and help focus on needs.

FINDING YOUR BALANCE

1. **One Conscious Breath**. Just close your eyes and take one long slow breath, or maybe ten, if you have a minute free. One conscious breath brings you back to yourself – reminding us that the world is still turning and the sun is still shining. It also floods our body with needed oxygen!
2. **MAKE time to RELAX!** If all you are doing is worrying and stressing over what you think is going to happen life becomes unbearable so STOP, take a breath and do something fun.
3. **Practice mindfulness moments**. Practice grounding yourself, taking deep breaths, staying in the present. All helps build a good "mental immunity" to stress, anxiety and panic. Practice what you want to grow.
4. **Just Say NO!** You can do two things that involve saying "NO." First, see if there are any 'have to' items you can cross off of your list. Second, be sure that all of your 'want to' items really bring you joy and feed you emotionally. If they're just 'sort of' worth the time then say "NO."
5. **Ask for HELP!** Sometimes other people in our lives see we need help before we do. LISTEN TO THEM! If your thoughts become hopeless or too much for you to handle, seek professional guidance from a therapist.