

Controlling What We Can Control



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WELCOME

Due to COVID-19 we are collectively going through unsettling times that are undoubtedly causing mental distress. While securing shelter, food, and taking care of our physical health is our number one priority right now, I wanted to create something with simple exercises that focus on relieving some of those anxious thoughts and feelings that add even more darkness to these already dark times.

These exercises are just suggestions and are not meant to substitute individualized professional help nor completely alleviate any mental health concern; they are just ways to help control and release the stress that comes from excessive worrying and overthinking that often overwhelm us. That said, I am aware that this will not resonate with everybody, but I do hope this is able to help someone!



Warmly,

Laura Alvarez, MSW, LSW

RELAX

The following three exercises are particularly helpful for moments when anxious thoughts and feelings arise and you need help regaining focus on the present moment.

Deep Breathing

This exercise can be done anywhere at any time. It helps to close your eyes while doing this exercise.

- * Inhale through your nose for four seconds, imagining the color white (representing positivity) spreading all through your body
- * Hold for seven seconds (or less if seven seconds is too long)
- * Exhale through your mouth for eight seconds, imagining the color black (representing any negativity) being released into the air and traveling far away from you
- * Repeat at least three times or as many times as you want

5 Senses

This exercise can also be done anywhere at any time.

Start by focusing on your breathing and once you start to feel relaxed, look around the room and identify:

- * 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



Meditation

For this exercise, it helps to be alone in a quiet place where there is zero to little distraction. You can meditate for as long as you want, though I suggest just doing it for only 2-5 minutes a day or at a given time if you are new to this practice. There are several ways to meditate, this is just one example. Don't get discouraged if you find it difficult at first!

- ✿ Sit up straight or in whichever position feels comfortable, though try to avoid laying down as it is easier to fall asleep this way
- ✿ Close your eyes and begin to focus on your breathing as you inhale and exhale through your nose
- ✿ Once you begin to feel relaxed, picture a bright, white light in the center of your chest or where your heart is
- ✿ Picture the light spread throughout your body or maintain it in place, and focus on the feeling of tranquility that comes from envisioning the light
- ✿ If you find yourself being distracted by your thoughts or unable to visualize the light, bring your attention back to your breathing



RELEASE

Often times we may find it difficult to share our worries with others, which is why these two following exercises offer an alternative way to freely express any and all thoughts and feelings that we may be keeping inside, while still keeping everything private.

Journaling

Many people think journaling is the same as having a diary- where you write about your days and that's it. Not necessarily. Journaling helps serve various purposes, two of them being:

- 1) A healthy way to release and process anything you are keeping bottled inside
- 2) Finding a pattern in your negative thinking or behaviors (which in turn makes it easier to identify what you might need to work on)

For this exercise, you can just write whatever comes to mind, such as worries, fears, good news, and hopes, not paying attention to whether it is in complete sentences, proper grammar or spelling. You don't always need to write about something negative, you can also (and should) write about what brings you joy and positivity, such as what you're grateful for.

If you find it difficult or uncomfortable to think about what to write, another way to journal is through prompts. Prompts are just proposed questions or topics to help make it easier for you to do this exercise. Some examples are:

- * When someone looks at me I want them to see a person who...
- * What's stopping me from being kinder to myself?
- * I am in the best mood when...

Drawing

Drawing is a great way to visually release any tension you are feeling, especially when you're unable to put your thoughts and emotions into words.

Some examples of what to draw are:

- * Draw your body! Pay attention to where feels the heaviest...is it your back, shoulders, etc.? This can help you realize where you should shift your attention to to release the tension physically as well.
- * Draw what is making you feel upset or draw how it's making you feel...what colors do you see/feel?



CREATE

The following two exercises are great for when you're having a hard time either believing in yourself and/or the future. They can help regain a positive outlook and attitude towards yourself and life in general.

Vision Board

This activity can be both fun and powerful, especially while in quarantine. You can use magazines, draw, print images, or just create it entirely on the computer.

- * Find and collect images, quotes, or any of the like that speak to what you want to become, accomplish, feel, visit, etc., and put it all together on a blank paper or board
- * Don't worry about how clean or nice it looks!
- * When you're done, put it somewhere you'll constantly see it, such as on the wall in your room or on your door

Your completed vision board can serve as a great reminder and motivator of all that you're looking forward to and/or working towards!



Affirmations

What we say to ourselves and the manner in which we speak to ourselves holds a lot more power than we think. Simply put, affirmations are statements that you constantly remind and repeat to yourself. The key is to repeat these often, and eventually you'll find that you'll begin to believe in these sayings, and your attitude and perspective will change in a more confident and optimistic way as well! Just like with the vision board, it may also help to write these down and place them somewhere you will always see.

When making your affirmation statements, it is important to use language such as "I am" and "I have" rather than "I will" or "I want".

Some examples are:

- * I am in charge of how I feel and today I am choosing happiness
- * There is so much to look forward to in my future
- * I am a money magnet
- * I do not look for external validation to determine my worth



VIRTUAL RESOURCES

If you find yourself needing further assistance, the following are *some* sites that are providing free to low-cost virtual mental health services during COVID-19:

New Jersey

2nd Floor Youth Helpline

- ✿ 1-888-222-2228
- ✿ <https://www.2ndfloor.org/>
- ✿ For individuals ages 10 to 24
- ✿ English and Spanish

Franciscan Community Development Center

(Affiliated with Felician University)

- ✿ 201-381-1674
- ✿ franciscan.felician@gmail.com
- ✿ English and Spanish

Good Grief

- ✿ <https://good-grief.org/our-programs/>
- ✿ taylor@good-grief.org
- ✿ Free grief groups and virtual support for families
- ✿ Peer support groups in English (bilingual families in group help with Spanish translation)
- ✿ Additional COVID-19 Resources: <https://good-grief.org/covid-19/>

Partnership for Maternal & Child Health of Northern NJ

- * <http://partnershipmch.org/programs/support-group/>
- * Virtual support group for pregnant and new moms in Northern NJ with babies up to one year old
- * Groups Mon-Thurs (In Spanish on Wednesdays)

NJ Mental Health Cares

- * 1-886-202-HELP (4357)
- * help@njmentalhealthcares.org
- * <https://www.njmentalhealthcares.org/>
- * 7 days a week from 8am to 8pm
- * Spanish Interpreter option

Rutgers Graduate School of Professional Psychology

- * <https://gsapp.rutgers.edu/gsapp-guidelines-for-covid-19/mental-health-support>
- * Complete a request form
- * For NJ Community Members: https://rutgers.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_d5WHSccxMZUO8Nn
- * Separate request forms available for Rutgers students, Rutgers faculty and staff, and healthcare providers

Nationwide

Crisis Text Line

- * 24/7 availability
- * Text "START" "HELLO" or "HOME" to 741741
- * English only

Boris Lawrence Henson Foundation

- * Up to 5 free virtual therapy sessions (individual or family)
- * Need to submit an application; first come, first serve basis
- * Seems to be English only
- * <https://borislhensonfoundation.org/covid-19-free-virtual-therapy-application/>

Disaster Distress Helpline

(via SAMHSA- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)

- * 24/7, 365 days a year
- * 1-888-985-5990 (press '2' for Spanish)
- * Text TalkWithUs to 66746 (or Hablenos for Spanish)

National Domestic Violence Hotline

- * 24/7, 365 days a year; English and Spanish
- * 1-800-799-7233 or text "LOVEIS" to 22522

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

- * 24/7, 365 days a year
- * For English: 1-800-273-8255
- * For Spanish: 1-800-628-9454



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