


Fostering Resiliency: How to Pivot During a Pandemic


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A bit about me

- Licensed pain and health psychologist at TRIA
- Doctorate from the University of Nebraska – Lincoln
- Internship and Post Doc at the University of Nebraska Medical Center
- SMART-R Certified Benson Henry Institute



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Objectives for today's talk

<p>1</p> <p>Identify the deleterious effects of stress on mental and physical health.</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Understand five strategies that ameliorate the impacts of stress to live a more robust life.</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Describe how to mentally pivot during the pandemic to increase psychological flexibility.</p>
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Stress/anxiety/fear are social contagions.

- These feelings and beliefs can pass on to others, much like a common cold (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016)
- They spread fiercely in the era of instant news and social media
- The average *high school kid* today has the same *level of anxiety* as the average *psychiatric patient* in the early 1950's

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HOW STRESS AFFECTS THE WHOLE BODY

Central Nervous System

- Perception - Narrowed
- Memory - Coarse, Imprecise
- Learning - Blocked
- Conditioning - Defense
- Tendency - Regress or Perseverate
- Expectancies - Negative
- Tone - Flee or Destroy

Muscular System

- Tension
- Ready for Action
- Jaws Clench
- Body Braces for Action

Autonomic Nervous System

- Heart rate ↑
- Blood pressure ↑
- Oxygen need ↑
- Breathing rate ↑
- Palms, face sweat
- Blood sugar ↑
- Adrenalin flows
- Digestive tract →shunts blood to muscles
- Blood vessels constrict in hands and face

Image from Sapalsky, 2005

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Why does this happen?

- Sometimes we work *really* hard to control what is out of our control
- Sometimes we struggle to make the present moment different
- Sometimes we judge ourselves for failing to reach our goals

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“When I look back on all these worries, I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed that he had had a lot of troubles in his life, most of which had never happened.”

Winston Churchill

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Intrinsic Mental noise

“Monkey Mind” according to the Buddhists
Often takes the form of reliving negative past experiences, and anticipating future problems

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Mental “noise”: impact of the environment

• According to a 2012 New York Times article, we now “consume”

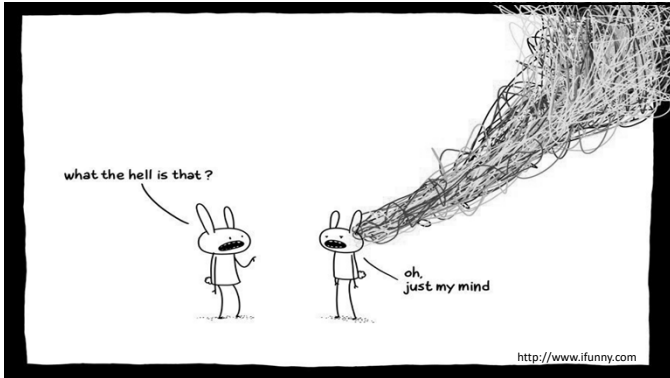
• **100,000 words each day**

• **34 Gigabytes of data each day**

• In bytes, this is a 350% increase from 1980

• **This can fuel a chronic restlessness and distraction**

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Paradoxical Responsibility

How I SHOULD BE DOING IT.

WHAT THE DOCTOR ADVISED AGAINST.

CURRENT SITUATION.

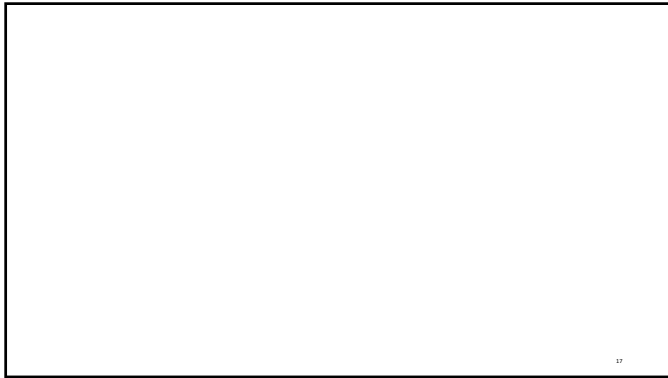
1. Focus on being a good clinician to sick patients while keeping your family safe.
2. Practice social distancing while working in cramped clinics.
3. Remain well informed and sane at the same time.

@dicksonhass

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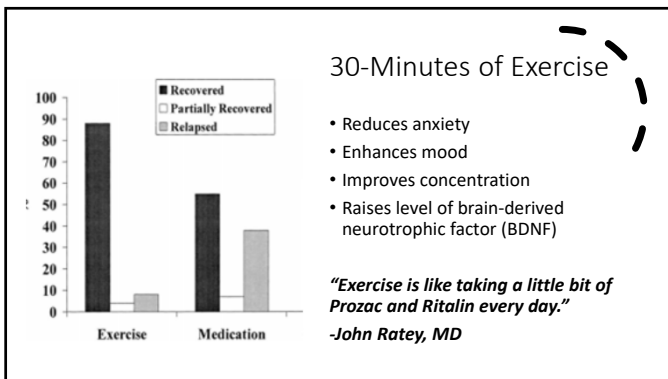


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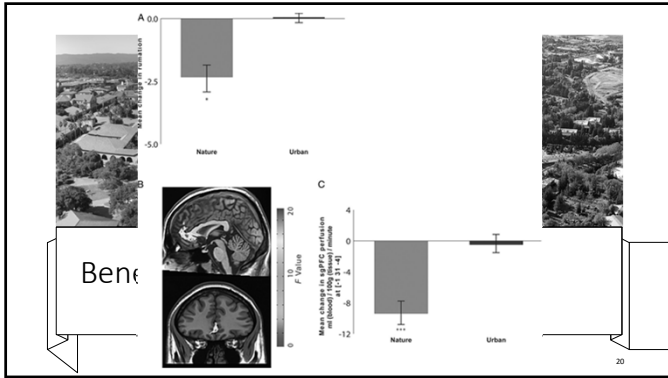
What can you do about it?

- ⌚ Take one hour a day...
- ❤️ 30 – minutes of exercise
- 🧘 15 – minutes of being present
- 🧠 10 – minutes of meditation/prayer/reflection
- 😊 5 – minutes of gratitude

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15-Minutes of being present

- Your presence is your present to those around you
- 2+ Hours of social medial usage is correlated with a 60% increase in clinical depression
- Unplug to get connected with those around you.

Do you mind if I strap your phone to my forehead so I can pretend you're looking at me when I talk?

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Ideas

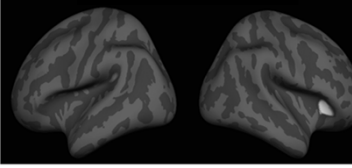
"The great science to live happily is to live in the present."
Pythagoras

Ideas to practice being present:

- When you wash the dishes, wash the dishes
- Take a squeegee breath
- Go for a mindful walk
- Tech-free meals
- Child directed interaction
 - Puzzles
 - Books
 - PodCasts
- Be like Mr. Rogers

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Cortical Thickness




Lazar, 2005

10 – minutes of meditation/prayer/reflection

- These methods can help calm the fight or flight response in the body
- Improves:
 - Emotional regulation
 - Focus
 - Executive Functioning
 - Mood

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Effects on immunity

- 8-week MBSR training for 25 healthcare employees
- Followed by influenza vaccine
- Increased left anterior brain activation
- This was associated with increased antibody titers to influenza vaccine
- MBSR group developed twice as many titers to influenza vaccine

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Single word focus

- Pick a **focus word**, short phrase, or prayer that is firmly rooted in your belief system
 - Today we will use the word "ONE"
- Sit quietly in a comfortable position.
- Close your eyes.
- Breathe slowly and naturally, and as you do, **say your focus word**, sound, phrase, or prayer silently to yourself as you exhale.
- Best if done 10 to 20 minutes a day
 - Start with a few minutes and build

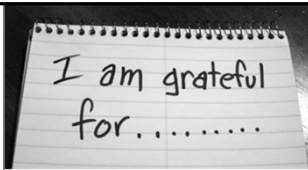
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Elicit the Relaxation Response (RR)

Assume a passive attitude. Don't worry about how well you're doing. When other thoughts come to mind, simply say to yourself, "Oh well," and gently return to your repetition.

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5 – minutes of gratitude



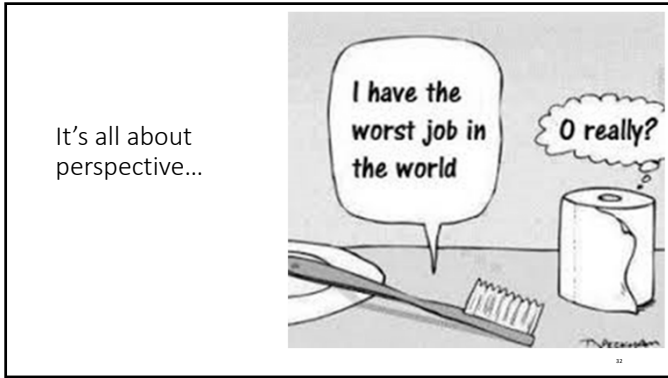
- Write out two to five things that you are grateful for at the end of each day.
 - Diversify time, people, experiences
- Try to recognize others in your gratitudes
- Look for ways to include how painful experiences strengthened you or provided new opportunities

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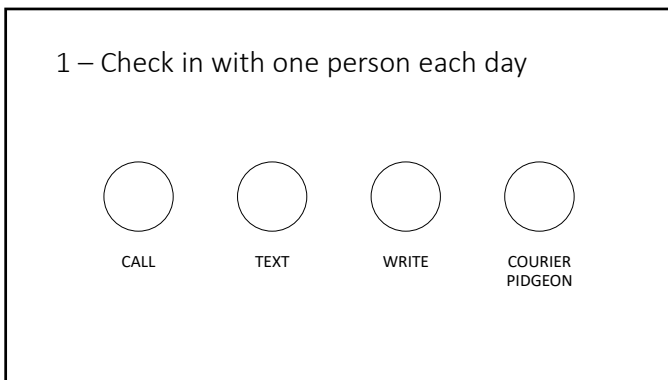
Easier said then done



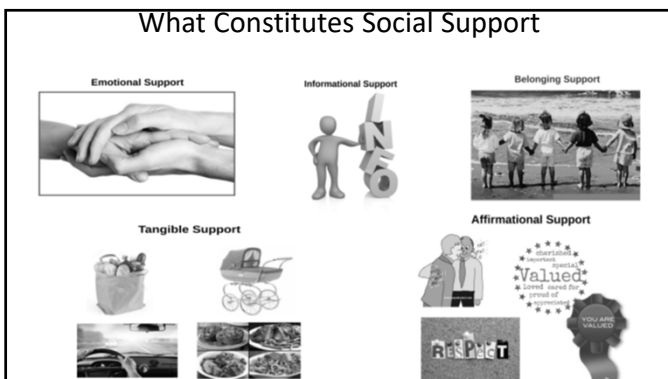
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How to Pivot During the Pandemic

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FACE COVID

(Harris, 2020)

F = Focus on what's in your control

A = Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings

C = Come back into your body

E = Engage in what you are doing


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Focus on what is in your control

1. Focus on today's choice
 - For the next 24 hours, I will do _____
2. Focus on what matters to you.
3. Focus on your behaviors
 - We often have more control over our behaviors than thoughts and feelings

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Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings



1. Name it to tame it
 - Am I falling victim to the bully brain?
 - What is the story I am telling myself?
2. Make room for difficult emotions
 - Remember if you don't want it, you got it.
3. Acknowledge and notice
 - I am noticing anxiety
 - Here is grief

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Come back into your body




1. Come back into and connect with your physical body. Find your own way of doing this.
2. Try some or all the following, or find your own methods:
 - Slowly pushing your feet hard into the floor.
 - Slowly straightening up your back and spine; if sitting, sitting upright and forward in your chair.
 - Slowly pressing your fingertips together
 - Slowly stretching your arms or neck, shrugging your shoulders.
 - Slowly breathing

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Engage in what you are doing

1. Get a sense of where you are and refocus your attention on the activity you are doing.
 - Look around the room and notice 5 things you can see
 - Notice 3 to 4 things you can hear
 - Notice what you can smell or taste or sense in your nose and mouth
 - Notice what you are doing
 - End the exercise by giving your full attention to the task or activity at hand



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How to drop anchor



- Acknowledge that there is something painful/stressful happening
- Press your feet firmly into the floor – feel the ground beneath you
- Sit forward in your chair and straighten your back
- Slowly press fingertips together and slowly move elbows and shoulders
- Feel your arms moving all the way from your shoulder to fingertips
- Acknowledge that there is something painful/stressful happening
 - Name the thought or fear
- Release the tension in your fingers and arms while exhaling

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Useful Resources

YouTube Videos

- Sara Lazar Tedx Meditation Reshapes the Brain
- Shawn Achor The Happiness Secret
- Andy Puddicombe 10-Minute Mindfulness
- Pico Iyer The Art of Stillness

Books

- The Relaxation Response by Herbert Benson
- The Liberated Mind by Steven C. Hayes
- The Upward Spiral by Alex Korb

Apps

- CBT-i Coach
- BreatheEasy Free
- Virtual Hope Box

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Free apps to help weather the storm
National Center for Telehealth & Technology

iPad & iPhone See All

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When to seek additional supports

- Prolonged feelings of depression and hopelessness (more than two weeks)
- Feeling like your life is out of control
- Inability to concentrate or make decisions
- Difficulty getting along with friends and family
- Intense fears
- Persistent difficulty sleeping
- Avoiding work or school activities
- Inability to abstain from destructive behaviors (e.g., drinking, bingeing, etc.)

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Strategies on how to pivot

1. Name it to tame it
 - Am I falling victim to the bully brain?
 - What is the story I am telling myself?
2. Acknowledge today's choice
 - For the next 24 hours, I will do _____
3. Practice self compassion
 - To thine own self be kind
4. Let go of expectations

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Take aways

- 🕒 Take one hour a day...
- 💓 30 – minutes of exercise
- 🧘 15 – minutes of being present
- 🧠 10 – minutes of meditation/prayer/reflection
- 😊 5 – minutes of gratitude
- 🧑‍🚒 FACE Covid – Do what matters

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Discussion

- ❓ Questions
- 💬 Comments
- ✓ Needs for Clarification

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