

Finding stillness in a crisis

These current and uncertain times may affect us in many ways, physically, emotionally, socially and psychologically.

When we are facing a crisis of any sort, fear and anxiety are inevitable. They are normal, natural responses to challenging situations.

We know that it can be easy for us to get lost in worrying and ruminating about all sorts of things which are out of our control. Sometimes this may make us feel worse and can be unhelpful.

It is important for us to take care of our emotional wellbeing in such uncertain times.

Dr Russ Harris, author of *The Happiness Trap*, encourages us to **FACE** our feelings and to find places of stillness within a crisis.

F:ocus on what's in your control

A:cknowledge your thoughts and feelings

C:ome back into your body

E:ngage in what you are doing

F:ocus on what's in your control

- Remember that you cannot control what happens in the future.
- You cannot control the Coronavirus itself, the world economy, or how your government responds.
- You cannot control your feelings either, eliminating your fear and anxiety is not realistic or a natural position for you to adopt. What you can control is what you do here and now, and that can make a huge difference to yourself and anyone living with you, as well as the community around you.
- We have far more control of our behaviour than over our thoughts and feelings. This involves our inner world (difficult thoughts and feelings) as well as our outer world – all the real problems that we're facing.

But how do we do this?

- When a big storm blows up, the boats in the harbour drop anchor, because if they don't, they'll get swept out to sea.
- Dropping the anchor doesn't make the storm go away as anchors can't control the weather. But it can hold a boat steady in the harbour until the storm passes in its own time.
- Similarly, in an ongoing crisis we are all going to experience our own internal storms. They could be unhelpful thoughts spinning in our heads or painful feelings whirling around our body. If we are swept away by the storm, there is nothing effective we can do.
- The first practical step we can take is to 'drop the anchor' or, find the stillness within the crisis in whichever way feels natural to us, using the ACE formula.

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A:cknowledge your thoughts and feelings



Thoughts

It's often difficult to notice what 'thoughts' we might be having. Sometimes we are thinking without even noticing, but the first step is to try and acknowledge what you're thinking, what is going through your mind?

- Can you take a step back from these thoughts and observe them from a distance?
- Notice the effect these thoughts might be having on your feelings, and also the effect these thoughts might be having on your body.

Feelings

It is important to allow yourself to feel the emotions that you naturally feel. These feelings are normal, particularly during uncertain times as these.

Normal emotions may feel like fear, worry or helplessness. It's ok that you feel these emotions, silently and kindly acknowledge whatever is 'showing up' inside you.

You might also start to experience memories and sensations, these are all ok as well – allow yourself the time and space to sit with these and to accept that they are a part of your story at this moment in time.

C:ome back into your body

When you feel as though you might need to 'drop the anchor', come back from your thoughts and feelings and connect with your physical body.

Remember though, you are not trying to turn away from, or avoid what is happening in your inner world. The aim is to remain aware of your thoughts and feelings. A:cknowledge your thoughts and feelings and then connect with your body and actively move it.

You are **F:ocusing** on what is in your control, you can gain as much control as possible over your physical actions, even though you may not be able to control your feelings.

Your body is your stability, you can try the following activities or come up with your own.

- Engaging in activities like yoga
- Short mindfulness exercises
- Slowly pushing your feet hard into the floor
- Slowly straightening your back and spine
- Sitting upright and forward in your chair
- Slowly pressing your fingertips together
- Slowly stretching your arms or neck, shrugging your shoulders
- Breathing slowly



E:ngage in what you are doing

If you find yourself distracted by your worries or thinking about things you cannot control, gently remind yourself to get a sense of where you are and refocus your attention on the activity you are doing.

Some ways to do this are:

- Notice three or four things that you can hear
- Notice what you are doing
- Look around the room and notice five things you can see
- Remind yourself that it is normal to feel unsettled during a crisis like this
- Ask yourself what you can control in this moment
- Gently remind yourself to engage with the task in front of you



Ideally you can run through the ACE cycle three or four times and it could become a two to three minute exercise whenever you need it.

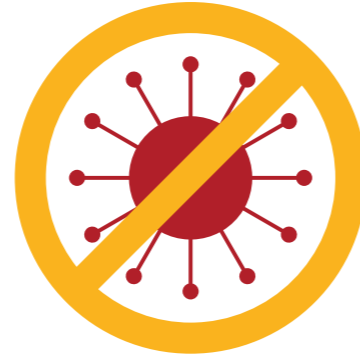
There are also some free audio exercises available: www.actmindfully.com/au/free-stuff/free-audio

If you find things are feeling 'too much', you could spend two to three minutes in a quiet space in the hospital to listen to them.

FACE COVID: some more top tips

How can we harness these techniques?

Once you have dropped your anchor, you will have a lot more control over your actions, and this makes it easier to do the things that truly matter.



C:ommitted action

At the RHN we have all been wonderful in our commitment to following precautions such as social distancing, frequent hand washing, protective clothing and staying within our zones.

- Ask yourself what else you could do, in line with your values – ‘what can I do right now, no matter how small, might it improve life for myself or others?’
- For our staff, we know that looking after others comes very naturally, but please do not forget about you in these circumstances. It is often hard to shift the focus on yourself, but you also need to recharge.
- When we make time for us, we are happier, more productive, more able to help and ultimately are better able to do our jobs.
- Be flexible and creative. Make time to look after you while you’re looking after others.

O:pening up

Opening up means making room for difficult feelings and being kind to yourself. Remember it is completely natural to feel difficult feelings such as fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, loneliness, helplessness, frustration and maybe guilt at times.

We can’t stop these feelings from happening as they are normal reactions. But what we can do, is open up, make room for them and allow them to be there (even though they hurt) and treat ourselves kindly.

Some ideas...

Sometimes sitting with these difficult feelings can be overwhelming. The ACE exercise can help you to acknowledge the feelings, focus on what you can control and re-engage in what you are feeling.

Sometimes though you may need to create some more space for these to exist.

Think about ways that you can express some of these feelings – get creative! You could try:

- writing down how you feel
- drawing
- painting
- finding some music to listen to or create some of your own
- some quiet time for yourself – inside or outside.

Mindfulness exercises and breathing exercises can also help create some space for you, your thoughts and your feelings. Find some stillness amidst the crisis.

V:alues

What sort of person do you want to be as you go through this? Your values might include:

- love
- respect
- humour
- patience
- courage
- honesty
- caring
- openness
- kindness

How can you sprinkle these into your day, and don’t forget to show these values to yourself?

- What courageous/kind words can you say to yourself today?
- What ways could you act that shows kindness and/or courage during a time like this?

Sometimes it feels strange to be kind to yourself and it is hard to know how. Ask yourself ‘if someone I loved was going through this experience, feeling what I’m feeling, if I wanted to be kind and caring towards them, how would I treat them? Or – ‘if someone was showing courage through a time like this, how might they act?’ Look for people around you who may be a role model. It could be a leader, a manager, a colleague, a friend, anyone!

Some ideas...

- Allow extra time every day for stress relief
- Have a bath or an extra-long hot shower
- Make a soothing hot chocolate or a comforting casserole
- Go for a long walk (remember to stay two metres away from others who might have the same idea)
- Make sure you maintain a daily routine
- Try to get enough sleep
- Eat a healthy diet
- Do some exercise
- Take a mindful moment, list three things you are grateful for in the moment

I: identify resources

Identify resources for help, assistance, support and advice. These can include family, friends, neighbours, professionals and emergency services.



Depending on your schedule, dedicate some time to watching your favourite film or TV series.

Missing your friends or family? Voice or video call your loved ones or have a virtual house party. Download the 'House Party' app, hold a virtual meet up, stay connected and stay safe.

Free daily yoga sessions	www.wecommune.com
Tour a museum from your own sofa	www.goodnewsnetwork.org/tour-2500-world-famous-museums-from-comfort-your-own-sofa
Free counselling for frontline staff	www.frontline19.com
Audible have given free access to some of their stories	https://stories.audible.com/start-listen
Free workouts every day	www.instagram.com/1rebel
Join the quarantine art club	www.instagram.com/carsonellis

Be careful what and how much you read/watch! Nothing on the news but the blues? Limit your time listening to the news and checking social media, give yourself a break from your TV/phone.

Try to make sure that you get your information from legitimate news sources such as;

- the UK government website www.gov.uk/coronavirus
- the World Health Organisation (WHO) website www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019

remember to take control here – be informed by the news but do not be absorbed by it!

D: isinfect and distance physically

At the RHN we have been extremely prepared and proactive with our distancing and disinfecting procedures.

Although this has created a lot of changes to your everyday working lives, everyone has adapted to changes in order to protect our patient's lives – well done team!

We are all in this together, keep up the good work.