

Community Trauma: Navigating a Pandemic

Article #2: Moving toward Resilience

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I have been sheltered in place going on 3 weeks now. I self-isolated a week before our Governor gave the order for all Michiganders to stay home. I will admit that my first week I was fairly lost. One of the results of trauma is disassociation (feeling disconnected from the world around you). I was not sure how I would be effective working from home and had a hard time gathering my thoughts. It was a difficult time for many reasons. Before our lives were upended by Covid-19, I was feeling like my life was really coming together in exciting ways and I was looking at retirement not too far in the distant future. I really liked my job. I was working to stay healthy by starting a walking routine, watching what I ate, and trying to beat the prognosis of pre-diabetes, and working to stay off medication.

I had been following the rise of the pandemic since early February and was staying abreast of the fast-moving pace at which this virus was claiming victims and leaving no one spared of its devastation. By Monday of the second week, when the order was given to shelter in place and after a steady diet of doom and gloom, I was losing my optimism. That night I felt a little hopelessness, but it was also a turning point. I realized I was going down the rabbit hole. Through good people in my life, I was reminded why I do what I do and found new purpose. Yes, I cannot meet with people to train on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) or my other workshops and it felt like "what's the purpose then?" When my head cleared I realized there is still a purpose. The fact is, after shaking my self-awake, I gained new purpose and decided there are still a lot of things I can and need to do. I would just need to adjust to a new *virtual reality* and embrace this as our new truth. I hope we make it out of this intact, but until we are on the other side, we still have to find a way to *live, to learn, to love and to leave a legacy* (Steven Covey).

I share this because I want people to know that even the so called "professionals" can find themselves in dark places and that my way out of that place is to continue to work my routines that are effective for me. I needed to keep my walking routine and getting outside. I had to decide that I still have something to give in this new reality and that I can still make a difference. I needed to sleep and eat well and find things to laugh at even if it was gallows humor. I needed to listen to music and play my bongos (one of my mindfulness techniques). Finally, I needed something to be excited about in the near future as that gives me hope and energy.

It is tempting when faced with such extreme situations like a pandemic, a war, a natural disaster, to begin to doubt and fret and tell ourselves that none of this nonsense is worth it. This is where having a *personal resilience strategy* is critical!

If you do not have a personal resilience strategy, I encourage you to create one. What are the things you need to help bring you a more peaceful mindfulness and hopeful outlook? There is a phone app called *iChill*. It is from the [Trauma Resource Institute](#). It is simple to navigate and helps individuals to take stock of where they are presently at regarding stress, anxiety, anger, etc. The core principle is a *set of wellness skills* called *The Community Resilience Model (CRM)*. The goal is to maintain a middle ground with a scaling system to help individuals check themselves and take the temperature of their present mental status.

The app suggests wellness skills to help increase resiliency and bring some homeostasis to our lives and then has a scale for where we are after our exercises. If we are in the “high zone”, some of what we may be experiencing would be: edgy, irritable, mania, anxiety, anger, and pain. If in the “low zone” you may be experiencing depression, sadness, feeling isolated, exhaustion/fatigue, or just feeling numb.

Let me quickly share some of the skills within the app that may help. You do not need the app to practice these skills but it is good to have as reminders of how to do the skill until we are proficient at the:

- Skill #1: Tracking: Reading your nervous system; becoming aware of what is happening in your body. The goal is to learn the difference between distressing sensations and sensations of wellbeing.
- Skill #2: Resourcing: Naming things in your life that are uplifting, peaceful, joyous, or calming to help bring us back to our Resilience Zone. The more we practice resourcing, the more we are able to calm our nervous system and return to our desired zone.
- Skill #3: Grounding: Direct contact of the body or a part of the body with the ground or a surface that provides support for the body. You can ground by sitting, standing, walking and noticing how your body is making contact with a surface. Grounding helps us stay in the *present moment* and pull back from ruminating in the past or future. It is what is happening in your body **right now**.
- Skill #4: Gesturing: Bring attention to gestures that are self-calming and normally things we do just under our conscience awareness like, thumb rubbing, tapping, rubbing your head or temples. These are gestures that should bring calm.
- Skill #5: Shift and Stay: This skill can be used when you have been bumped from your Resilience Zone. By shifting our attention from something unpleasant or distressing (thoughts, feelings, sensations) to a place in the body that is neutral or pleasant and staying with those sensations until we move back to our zone.

I hope you find some of these skills helpful and that they may also lead you to develop some of your skills or versions of these that work for you. We still have a way to go to make it through this pandemic. Please stay safe, healthy and as grounded as possible. **Humans are Resilient.**