

# Resilience During Difficult Times

MARCH 24, 2020

Taking good care of ourselves and each other is more important than ever during this uncertain time. *Here are some stress-reduction methods to help get you through the upcoming days, weeks, and months.* Try picking one or two that resonate with you, and see what happens. Once you see the benefits, it will be easier to make them standing practices. Whatever you choose, remember the most important thing: be kind to yourself.

## #1 Leverage Help If You Need It

Times like these can bring up some serious emotions as well as re-trigger previous traumas. How we process difficult emotions can be a very personal thing. Sometimes, depending on the magnitude, it can be helpful, even advisable, to discuss those emotions with a mental health professional who can be an important guide to navigating difficult emotional times to restore your own resourcefulness. Asking for help can be hard for many people but at times like this, it is more important than ever. Many employers have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which can be an amazing and confidential resource that provides access to such professionals. Given social distancing and other containment or quarantine protocols we find ourselves currently implementing, many therapists are offering tele-therapy as an alternative to in-person visits. BetterHelp ([www.betterhelp.com](http://www.betterhelp.com)) and TalkSpace ([www.talkspace.com](http://www.talkspace.com)) are two examples of tele-therapy offerings that get solid reviews.

## # 2 Focus on What You Can Do

When bad things happen that are beyond our control, we can feel a pervasive sense of hopelessness and helplessness. Particularly when it is geographically difficult for us to help, it can feel like there is very little we can do to alleviate the suffering of others. A potentially more empowering way to look at or reframe things could be to ask “in what ways, even if they are small, can I help?” This reframe at least shifts the internal conversation to action as opposed to feeling like you have no control.

Donations are an easy way to offer help. Given fears around the economy, people may be reluctant to give sizable monetary donations, but even small amounts can help. Donations of time (even offered remotely) and food are also helpful. There are many pro bono-related opportunities to get involved and make a difference as well.

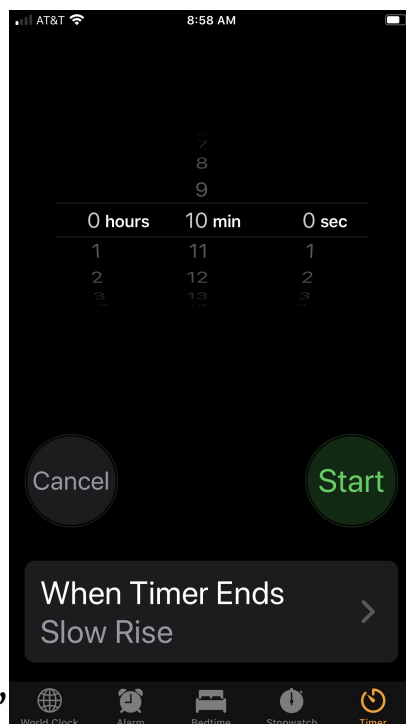
In addition to the more concrete ways you can help, consider all of the small but impactful ways you can take action in your own communities. For example, if you are feeling unsafe during these times, how can you help create feelings of safety for someone around you? It may be as simple as checking in on an elderly neighbor to make sure they have food or a means of safely getting supplies. Or if you're worried about those who don't have food in affected areas, you can drop off non-perishable canned goods at a local food bank (while following safe social distancing protocols). Do you feel angered that some groups of people are being targeted based on their race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or other factor? How can you help those around you feel a greater sense of inclusion and belonging even if it is by scheduling a friend chat on Zoom, Skype, or FaceTime? Is there someone in your own life who is grieving that could use your support? Even the smallest act of kindness can help you feel like you're doing something to make a difference, and that can create a sense of productiveness to counterbalance helplessness.

### #3 Don't Compare Yourself to Others

Whatever you do decide to do, try not to compare yourself to what others are doing. This can be easier said than done in the age of social media activism. Between navigating working from home, homeschooling children, trying to keep tabs on parents and other family members who may be at risk, personal commitments, and trying to keep to some semblance of a self-care routine, our time is even more limited. Living a comparative life can make you feel as though you are not doing enough, which can lead to guilt, shame, and disempowerment. Commit to what you can do, even if it as small as lighting a candle or offering a positive intention, and feel good about it.

### #4 Constructive Conversation

Talking about how you're feeling is a great way to move through an experience and feel better. Keep in mind, though, that moods are infectious. Instead of using the group dynamic to dwell on fears, commit to also engaging with your family, friends, and colleagues in ways that can also focus on the potential good that might come from this situation such as new and improved laws, strengthened and reinforced communities, or the outpouring of support. Such conversations can support moving forward by focusing on more uplifting emotional states like compassion, empathy, generosity, and resilience.



### #5 A Media “Fast”

The internet and news channels can feel like a bottomless pit of dark content that update by the moment. Immersing yourself in it for too long can have the same “dwelling” effect as a negative conversation. While it is important to stay informed and follow safety directives, try to take several hours a day, or even longer, and detach yourself from the media saturation. Instead of checking social media or the news multiple times, switch it up by looking at joy-inspiring pictures of family, friends, pets, your favorite places, or with some of the other suggestions here. You’ll be surprised how cleansing and liberating an experience it can be. If you feel the need to check the news more often than normal, try setting a timer for 10 or 20 minutes and then move on to another activity, or use a stress-reduction tool like taking some deep, calming breaths.

## #6 Meditation and Mindfulness

Pause.

*(Take a breath.)*

Observe what’s going on.

*(Take another breath.)*

Understand that while you might not be able to control some of the external things happening in this moment, you do have control over how you respond to them. Although it may not always seem like it, you’re at a moment of choice. You can choose to sit with, explore, and process what’s coming up for you so that you can let it go, or you can choose not to attach to it in the first place. Both are helpful when trying to elevate mental and emotional states. What is not helpful is to attach and give power to negative thoughts and emotions. This will only exacerbate your stress, preventing you from moving on and taking constructive action. A mindfulness practice can help you exert control by interceding prior to a negative emotional response and creating the space for you to make a conscious choice not to live beyond the present moment. Be in your life *today*. You’ll deal with tomorrow... tomorrow. It’s like the wise old saying suggests, “Worrying won’t stop the bad stuff from happening, it just stops you from enjoying the good.”

Check out [www.calm.com](http://www.calm.com) for some guided meditations if you do not already have a meditation practice.

## #7 Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT)/Tapping

A tapping practice can help you face toxic feelings head on: to honor them, feel them, and then, ultimately, free them. If you’re not familiar with this practice, it derives from acupuncture and energy psychology, and involves tapping on meridian points of the body in order to release energy blockages caused by negative emotions. By stimulating the meridian points, tapping helps lower cortisol and pull your body out of a stress response and into a state of relaxation. In doing so, it enables you to experience a challenging situation while coming from a more empowered place of calm.

For more guidance on how to tap, you can find a range of “how-to” videos on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com). Here are two on stress and anxiety by EFT practitioners [Julie Schiffman](#) and [Brad Yates](#). You can also check out [The Tapping Solution](#) for more general information on the practice.

## #8 A Gratitude Practice

The world can feel big, its forces scary, and the future out of your control. But if you can ground yourself in the aspects of your life that are positive – your health, your family, your sense of community – and find a moment to be grateful for them, you’ll be surprised at how quickly the rest of the world evaporates. Even if there’s nothing about the current situation to be grateful for (although generally if you look hard and deep enough, there might be), you can focus on other areas of your life where you can count some blessings. Your gratitude can range from the largest big-picture things like your relationships or your level of education, to the most minute of small things like

the smile on your child's face when they see you walk in the room. Some people prefer making a list of what they're grateful for each morning or night, while others like to do it throughout the day as they transition from one segment to the next. Either way, a gratitude practice is a great way to reframe how you're feeling or thinking about what's going on.

## #9 Feel Good in Healthy Ways

Expose yourself to all your “feel goods”—the things that bring you joy. Perhaps it's cooking, a hobby, or spending time with your loved ones (even if that means via technology). Get lost in your favorite uplifting or calming song or a captivating book. Walking among breathtaking landscapes (even if on a virtual tour) can be a great reminder of the wonder, beauty, and hope in the world. Getting out of your head and into your body by exercising and producing some endorphins is another healthy and constructive way to feel good.

*An important note:* It can be tempting to turn to food and alcohol in stressful times. While a favorite comfort food, cherished dessert, or even a cocktail can temporarily lift mental or emotional states, they can also prompt feelings of guilt if you overindulged and compound anxiety. Consuming them in moderation, balanced by other healthy choices, and making sure they are not coping mechanisms, are key.

Here are some guidelines: (1) check in on your intention for having it (e.g., Am I using this to cope or to feel better, or is it for pure enjoyment?); (2) enjoy it mindfully and slowly, savoring every bit or sip; (3) check in periodically and gauge whether it's truly elevating your mood and bringing you pleasure; and (4) don't make yourself feel guilty for having it—that will only make you feel worse and bring the opposite result. Even better, pair it with constructive conversation and add it to your gratitude list.

## #10 Productive Distraction

Find times throughout the day to take breaks or distract yourself from whatever may be causing you stress. One caveat: keep it productive. Often, when feeling stressed, engaging in active behavior – like moving a project forward or crossing an item off your to-do list – can help you feel better and more empowered.

One productive distraction is to cross something off your “resistance list”—the items on your to-do list that you've been putting off. It can be something simple like buying the water filter that you need for your refrigerator or unsubscribing from emails you are no longer interested in. Another productive distraction is to de-clutter something like a drawer that needs organizing or old drafts of documents that are no longer needed and can be recycled.

8 Min Read

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Diane Costigan