



Notes from Bessel Van Der Kolk, M.D.
How We Can Deal with Current Pandemic-Related Stress
Compiled by Hope Harbor Counseling Department

Preconditions for Trauma

- Lack of predictability in life/schedule.
 - To overcome: plan your days, plan your weeks.
 - Create schedules; create a calendar of social connections and activities
 - Consider what you look forward to in non-pandemic circumstances
- Immobility.
 - To overcome: Activate your body
 - Use energy from stress hormones that trigger us to move, protect, and take care of ourselves to do things with your body
 - Cook meals together, gather food, build things, do work around the house, yoga, exercise, etc.
 - Yoga calms body down
 - Meditation practice and mindfulness are beneficial in regulating self/emotions
 - Learn to self-regulate: controlling emotions, behavior and thoughts
- Loss of connection
 - We don't exist as individuals, we are collective creatures, causing social distancing to be very difficult over time
 - Interact with others
 - Sounds, facial movements, and the rhythms between faces/voices keep us alive
 - Games, storytelling, music making, virtual connection, family meals
- Numbing and spacing out and losing sense of agency
 - This is natural response when overwhelmed
 - To overcome numbing out, do things to make body feel alive
 - Learn to notice yourself, pay attention to what is going on inside of your body
 - Without body awareness, body functions on autopilot responding to things automatically with anger, fear, and irritation
 - Once you become aware of what is going on in body, you are able to make choices

- Try having someone else who can help you notice and name things going on with you
- Loss of sense of time and sequences
 - Tendency to feel like situation will go on for forever when you are traumatized
 - Sense of not having a future, timelessness
 - Begin noticing how things around you become different with each moment that passes, remind yourself that you are a living organism with a sense of time
 - Notice sensations, feelings, that pass and shift as time goes on while you tune in to your breath
- Loss of safety
 - Identify what makes you feel safe
 - Listening to certain kinds of music
 - Most important element in feeling safe is physical touch
 - Cuddle, hug, engage in physical affection with those we feel safe with within your quarantined home
 - Establish internal sense of safety
 - Best way to do this is through yoga or tai chi
 - Privacy is important, everyone needs a place where they can withdraw and rest. Create a safe space within your home to recharge
 - If you are in a situation at home where you do not or cannot feel safe for whatever reason, please call 1-800-799-7233 to get help through the National Domestic Violence Hotline. You can also visit www.thehotline.org/help to chat online. Don't wait!

For additional resources go to www.besselvanderkolk.com

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