

“Top Ten” Stress Resilience Tools and Techniques for Surviving the COVID-19 Crisis

Mark Gorkin*

“The Stress Doc”, Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW), USA

Corresponding Author: Mark Gorkin, “The Stress Doc”, Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW), USA.

Received: : April 08, 2020; **Published:** May 20, 2020

This “invisible enemy,” COVID-19 has certainly thrown the United States and the entire globe, into a frightening, uncertain, and turbulent orbit. More than ever, we need a stress and wellness tool kit for managing the current crisis, being sequestered, sometimes feeling isolated, wondering when this will end, and if we will still have a job, answering children’s difficult questions, the challenge of interacting when everyone is feeling tense, etc. And, of course, this is on top of the everyday challenges of grappling with the “American Dream” and, especially for newcomers, often feeling like “a stranger in a strange land”.

Clearly, in times of crisis, as a community we need to affirm that reaching out for mental and emotional health services (the mind-heart) is as natural and normal as seeking help for physical illness (the body). We must especially help our under-served community come out of the shadows of shame, stigma, and silence and discover a new horizon of hope!

Here is Be Well Initiative and the Stress Doc’s™ “Top Ten” Stress Resilience Tools and Techniques for Surviving the COVID Crises and Everyday Stress:

1. **Find a “stress buddy”:** Find a friend, family member, or community leader whom you trust and can open up to, that is, to talk openly and honestly about your emotions.
2. **Speak to a professional:** If you are feeling intense levels of stress, anger, and/or depression, with disrupted patterns of eating and sleeping, misusing alcohol and drugs or simply wanting to withdraw from life, snapping at loved ones, it is time to speak with a person trained in providing mental health counseling. There are Crisis Hot Lines for you to call. If I can be of assistance, email stressdoc@aol.com. Mark Gorkin, the Stress Doc, Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW) - telephone # 301-875-2567.
3. **Join a support group:** Consider starting an online support group. BWI will be glad to assist. There are also online church groups, and 12-Step groups (and you don’t have to have a drinking or drug problem). There is opportunity to share with others, without a sense of shame or weakness, experiencing similar stressors and pressures.
4. **Understand change, loss, and the need to grieve:** The Harvard Business Review recently had an article on how our emotional reactions to the Corona Crisis can be like a grief process, as if something has died in our belief system about the rational world. Here are “The Five Stages of Grief”:

- 1) **Shock and/or denial:** “This can’t be real”; “Virus won’t affect us”; “We’ll weather this storm unscathed”.
- 2) **Anger (also cover for fear and/or helplessness):** “You’re making me stay at home and taking my activities away”; role loss/identity.
- 3) **Bargaining:** “Okay, if I social distance for two weeks everything will be better, right?”
- 4) **Sadness/hopelessness (also cover for anxiety):** “Will this ever end?; “Will I have a job?; “I once had a career path...”
- 5) **Relief/acceptance:** “This is happening... I have to figure out how to proceed”: acceptance brings forth a sense of control and positive problem-solving.

Grief is a natural part of separation, loss, and human existence. If you are still emotionally weighed down after a month or two, your grief may be turning into depression. Seek the help above!

5. **Make sleeping/rejuvenating, healthy eating, and exercise top priorities:** It is vital to boost your immune system in these viral times. Try getting at least 6, even better 7 - 8, hours a night of sleep. Develop a sleep routine, turn off the electronic gadgets, read or listen to soothing music or sounds of nature.

Now is a good time to reconsider those eating patterns; especially if we are at home, we can eat bags of potato chips or we can really thoughtfully plan our meals, maybe with the help of a nutrition buddy. Time to listen to your grandmother!

Finally, if you feel comfortable, and can create safe social distancing, a 15-30-minute walk is an excellent way to keep your mind-body vital, break up the day, and lift your spirits. Also, there are many online yoga and meditation classes.

6. **Learn to set limits:** During my workshops, more people have said to me, “Mark until I learned how to say ‘No’...I was living on the edge of stress!” Saying “No” doesn’t make you a bad person. Ultimately, if you are to truly help others you must maintain your own good health yourself. Remember, Burnout is less a sign of failure and more that you gave yourself away! Take an assertiveness training class or call one of the BWI staff for guidance.
7. **Identify and defuse stress triggers:** To improve your capacity for emotional self-regulation, before reacting: a) take some deep breaths, b) pay attention to those “3 B” - Brain-Body-Behavior - stress smoke signals, c) learn to use assertive “I” messages instead of blaming “You” messages, for example, “I don’t agree” as opposed to “You’re wrong!”

Actually, two of my favorite stress defusers also help set limits: A firm “no” a day keeps the ulcers away and the hostilities, too. Do know your limits and don’t limit your “No”s.

8. **Get organized:** Chronic clutter in a room or office (or even a car) creates a messy mind. This is a great time to attack those projects you have been putting off. And your spouse will thank you!
9. **Discover a hobby or engage in an art project:** Again, now is a time to practice that instrument, or try your hand at pottery or poetry, or write in a journal about your emotions (a proven stress reliever).
10. **Just laugh:** Whether it’s watching a favorite sitcom or finding fun videos on the web, sharing a laugh with others is truly wonderful stress medicine. Laughter eases the fear! Amen and women, to that!

In closing, if you begin to apply these “Top Ten” tips and techniques you will become commander of your own stress ship, being able to navigate stormy seas and eventually reach your own island or homeland of mind-body-spirit resiliency and serenity. Just remember... Practice Safe Stress!

Volume 9 Issue 6 June 2020

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