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**ASSISTANCE
LEAGUE OF
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**5 STEPS TO
PHYSICAL &
MENTAL HEALTH**

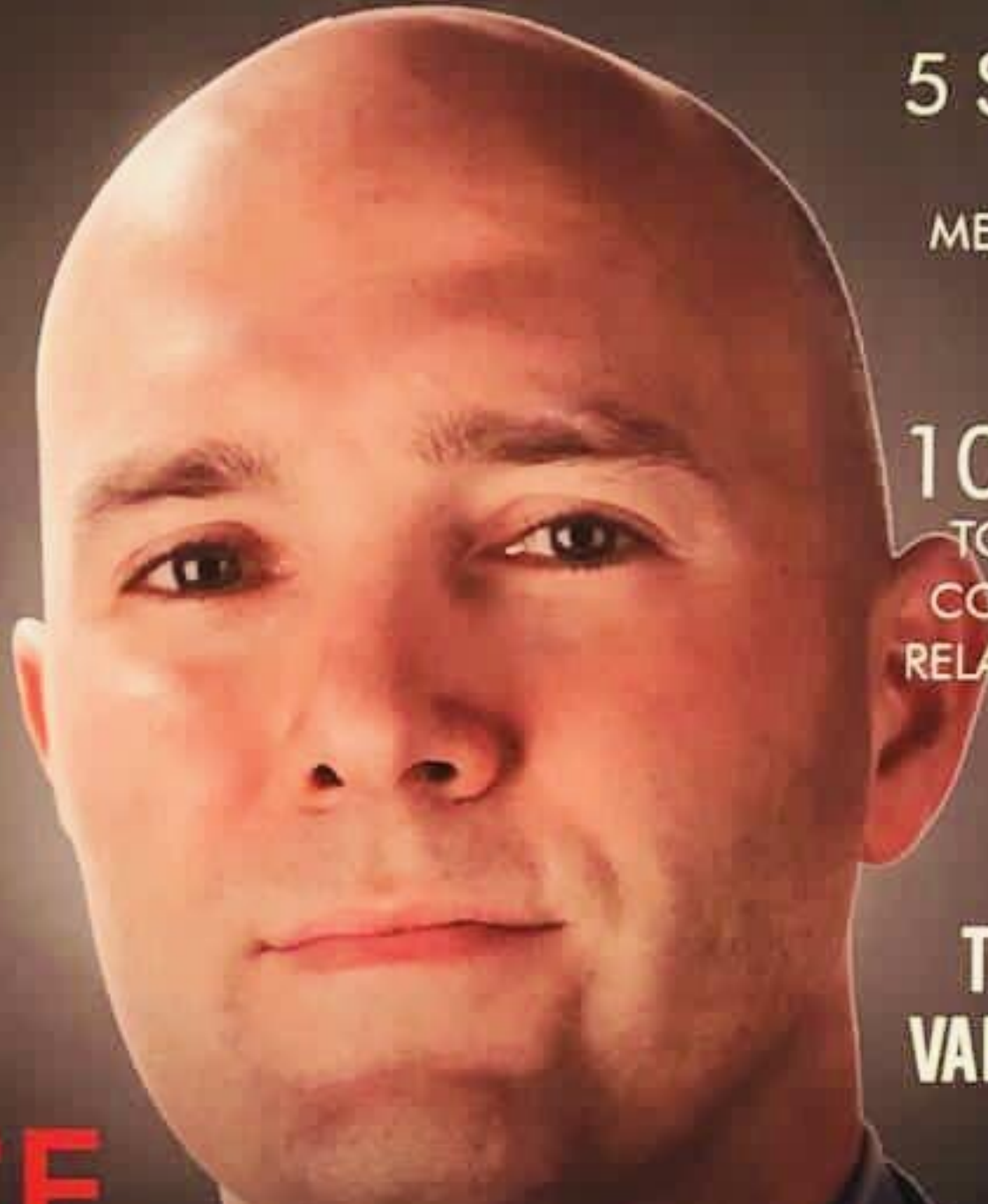
**10 WAYS
TO COPE WITH
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10 WAYS TO COPE WITH CORONAVIRUS-RELATED ANXIETY

Dr. Lillian Nejad

LEARN WAYS TO COPE AND CONTRIBUTE DURING TIMES OF CRISIS

The coronavirus is a threat that we have never faced. This pandemic has had a significant impact on our lives; it has affected our work, our lifestyles, our ability to socialize and our sense of safety and security. So, of course, we're feeling anxious! A higher level of anxiety is a normal and expected outcome of these strange and uncertain times.

Anxiety shows up whenever there is a threat – it serves to protect us by helping us take effective action that keeps us safe from harm. However, when we experience anxiety overload, our “fight or flight” instincts can lead to some of the unhelpful behaviors that we have seen on the news, like hoarding supplies, panic, denial and aggressive behavior. But let's not forget that circumstances like these can also bring out the best in us and in our communities, and it is important to focus on the ways we are all rising to the occasion and on how we can grow and learn from this experience.

While the current social distancing measures are in place to keep us physically healthy, staying mentally healthy is also paramount. We all have our role to play to contribute to the efforts to keep ourselves and others safe.

Here are 10 ways to cope and contribute during this time of crisis:

1. Accept your anxiety but don't let it be in charge of your behavior.

It is perfectly reasonable to feel anxious right now. Uncertainty is what many of us are finding the most problematic. We just don't know how long we will need to take precautions and how long it will take to get back to our regular lives. All we can do is accept the reality of our current circumstances and try to adapt as best we can. Accepting anxiety actually reduces its impact and helps you take positive and helpful action.

Here are five steps you can take toward acceptance and effective action:

- **Step 1:** Validate your anxiety. It is perfectly reasonable for you to feel anxious and stressed under the current circumstances.
- **Step 2:** Remember the things that are most important to you. Ask yourself, “What do I value most?”
- **Step 3:** Make a commitment that you will not let anxiety be in charge of your decisions. Act according to your values instead.

- **Step 4:** Engage that part of your brain that makes rational, reasonable decisions (the prefrontal cortex). Practice relaxation exercises to reduce your level of anxiety and mindfulness exercises to accept and stay in the present moment. Insight Timer, a free mindfulness app, is a great online resource to practice relaxation and mindfulness.
- **Step 5:** Take helpful actions that both protect and support you and your family as well as your community.

2. Stay connected.

We need to find ways to stay connected even if we are physically isolated. The effect of isolation on people will vary widely depending on a range of factors: their age, their health, who they live with, whether they are in financial duress, whether they feel supported and their personal characteristics and attitudes.

If we think about the impact of isolation just based on different age groups, school-age children may feel most frustrated or upset about not getting to spend time with their friends, but they may fare better overall because they are used to staying connected via



technology. Working adults who are now having to work from home may have widely different responses – some may actually like the flexibility of working from home whereas others may find the isolation very distressing. The people that are likely to be the most negatively impacted are older adults and the elderly, particularly if they do not have access to technology – they are likely to feel more insecure, unsafe and lonely as a result of these social distancing measures.

We need to focus on what we can do and not on what we can't. We can be grateful that this pandemic is happening at a time when we have the technology available to keep us informed and help us stay connected. Use the channels of communication and connection that are available to us – and make sure they are available to the most vulnerable.

3. Be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

A crisis can be a time of panic and paralysis or a time of creativity and innovative solutions. Remember that panic just leads to more panic. Think about how many people went panic-shopping and left nothing on the shelves – this just served to spread panic to the rest of the community. It's not enough that we have to worry about catching and/or spreading a

virus, but now we have concerns about our basic needs being met. Remember it's okay to feel anxiety, but that doesn't mean it's okay to let anxiety make all of your decisions.

Instead, focus on solving problems and implementing creative approaches to assist people who are significantly impacted by the coronavirus. Humans have an incredible capacity to innovate and discover and adapt in times of crisis. Turn your mind to generating sensible and inventive solutions in your communities that will help alleviate panic and improve people's sense of safety and security.

The coronavirus pandemic is not just affecting our physical and emotional health, it is causing significant financial distress. Many businesses are being hit hard, like hospitality, travel and entertainment. For some creative solutions to help businesses that are suffering, read "Conscious Corona-Consumerism" by The Hustle.

4. Be informed but not overwhelmed.

We all need to be aware of the current safety precautions and guidelines that are being put in place. Some people may feel relieved with more information while others may become more anxious. Do what works for

you but also try to have a balanced approach (and remember how your information intake will impact those around you, especially children).

Given these guidelines are changing everyday, it makes sense to stay informed on a daily basis. However, this does not mean spending all day on social media or all your time watching the news. It can be difficult to wade through all the information popping up in your messages and social media sites, and unfortunately there are a lot of misinformation and hoaxes being circulated, so ensure that your main sources of information are trustworthy and reliable.

For those of you who want to limit their intake of information while still staying informed, I recommend choosing two credible sources of information that you will touch base with, once in the morning and once in the evening, for no more than 20 minutes. This is enough time to find out what is going on and learn about any new protocols or policies.

5. Follow recommended guidelines.

Maintain effective hygiene standards, follow social distancing guidelines, wear a mask as directed and buy only what you need. If you are unwell and not sure if you are experiencing symptoms of coronavirus, get tested as soon as possible and stay home and away from others until you receive your results. If you have coronavirus, ensure that you stay at home for at least two weeks to keep your community safe.

6. Be empathic. Behave compassionately.

Be understanding of other people's emotional and behavioral responses, even if they are unhelpful. Be mindful that everyone is processing this



information differently. Some people may not have the skills or resources to effectively manage their anxiety in a situation like this one. To get through this, we need to have empathy for others, we need to be less judgmental and we need to be patient. If you are in a position to do so, show compassion for people who have been impacted the most (physically, emotionally and financially) by providing support or by helping them access appropriate support in their communities.

7. Keep up your healthy habits and routines.

Maintaining some structure in our days can help us feel more secure and in control. Make sure that your routine includes your basic self-care needs as they are the foundation of staying physically and mentally well.

This includes:

- **Nutrition:** Eat healthy, nutrient-rich foods, maintain usual meal times, drink water and avoid alcohol and any substances that can weaken your immune system.

- **Sleep:** Seven to nine hours per night is recommended. If you are struggling with sleep due to anxiety, try listening to a relaxation exercise or mindfulness exercise on an app like Insight Timer, Calm or Smiling Mind.
- **Physical Activity:** Try to maintain your fitness. There are many online programs and apps to help you stay on track even if you're stuck at home. Many gyms have found ways to continue to offer their customers virtual access to recorded and live workouts. Find out what your local gym is doing and support them by joining online.

8. Find pleasant and/or productive things to do.

So we can't go out to restaurants, our concerts and festivals have been canceled and we might not even be working, so it's up to us to find ways to have fun and be productive while we are stuck at home.

Here are six ideas to get you started:

- **Stay social.** Call your friends – a

video call is even better than a phone call – and try to do fun things together. Have coffee, do a YouTube dance number with the Fitness Marshall or play a video game with your family.

- **Laugh and play.** A sense of humor is very important right now. Make time for light-hearted fun: play board games, watch a comedy or dance.
- **Relax.** Relaxation is incompatible with anxiety, so listen to relaxing music, do mindfulness and relaxation exercises, get some fresh air or catch up on some light reading.
- **Create.** Delve into art and creativity through drawing, painting, writing, photography, sewing – anything that brings you joy in the present moment. If you're not sure where to start, think about what you used to love to do as a child and start with that.
- **Learn something new.** Challenge yourself everyday by learning something new, i.e., a new vocabulary word, a new skill or a new phrase in another language. This will exercise your brain and increase your sense of confidence and mastery.
- **Declutter.** Go all Marie Kondo and use this time to clear your home of excess. Find out the benefits of Living Leaner and Lighter written by Zoe Rastegar, from Life Simplified Pro (www.lifesimplifiedpro.com).

9. Seek support.

The impact of this crisis will vary widely among individuals. Some people are not only contending with anxiety regarding their physical health, but also dealing with financial distress and job insecurity, caring for unwell family members and managing additional physical and mental health issues. If you are



struggling and feeling unable to manage your stress levels, it is vital that you use the available resources in your community to access support. Most of these services are now accessible via telehealth services, like video or phone sessions. The American Psychological Association (www.APA.org) has excellent information and resources related to the current pandemic, and Psychology Today (www.psychologytoday.com) can help you find a therapist in your local area.

10. Learn and grow.

Any upheaval or crisis will come with anxiety, discomfort and pain, but it also has the potential to lead you to clarity regarding your values, spark

innovation and progress, promote greater compassion and kindness in our communities, build resilience and give us a greater appreciation for what we have. Take this time to reflect on how this crisis has the potential to positively affect how you live your life moving forward. Remember, we are all in this together. We all have our roles to play to contribute to the efforts to keep ourselves and others safe. Let's use this time as an opportunity to slow down, to practice resilience, to adapt to the current circumstances as best we can, to seek support when needed, to stay productive and to pay attention to what is really important to us.

This is a time that can bring out the best in us. So let it!

Dr. Lillian Nejad is a clinical psychologist and author who was raised in McLean, Virginia and is now based in Melbourne, Australia. For more articles and information about her and services, go to www.omnipsych.com.