Resiliency Plan

Much is now understood about the psychological impact response to unexpected events, such as illness and natural disasters. There is clear consensus, both expert and in the literature, that one’s level of social connectedness will likely be the single most important determining factor in how an overwhelming or unexpected event affects both the individual and the community. What is unusual about a quarantine as it relates to other natural and man-made disaster events is the need for social distancing and quarantine and isolation to contain the illness.

Although some isolation is necessary and cannot be avoided, there is much individuals and communities can do to plan for the next few weeks of decreased connection.

We lean here on expert consensus (Hobfoll, et all) for primary elements that support emotional health and even post traumatic growth in the face of uncertainty and decreased contact and a rapidly changing situation. These elements include Safety, Calm, Connection, Efficacy and Hope. Consider developing a resiliency plan for yourself, your family, and even your smaller communities here. Pandemics are unusual in that they hit each person, family and community in different ways and at different times. Planning resiliency actually counters the feeling of helplessness and allows us to remind each other, that there are many things we can do to support ourselves and each other, thereby reducing the feeling of helpless so often at the core of development of trauma.

Consider building a plan for the next two weeks that involve elements known to support and mitigate traumatic stress in real time. Schedule them, talk about them together, innovate. You can plan that things will change, but having a plan will give a framework and structure to the days ahead. You can always change it. This is particularly helpful for kids, but it helps all of us in times of uncertainty.

Get creative. You could think about making a star chart or playing bingo with younger kids to see if you might be adding each element every day. Create friendly competition (that’s connection!!) with your neighbor, families or co-workers to see who is fueling their social and emotional immune systems the most.

Safety:

Protect from misinformation and fearful stories:

Plan your interaction with the media and world around you. Choose one reliable news source and stick to it. Create a small circle of friends or family you trust to be level headed and check in once daily about what you need to know. Create times twice daily to check e-mail and allow for ‘protected spaces’ or “Corona Free Zones’ where you are not responding to media and texts when you have a chance to engage in something important, connect, or do something for yourself.

Plan moments to be present. Perhaps share them with someone else. Plan moments to check in on life around you at set times, perhaps when you brush your teeth in the morning and night. Are you healthy.
right now? Have moments where you are reminded that you personally are not at imminent risk can help your nervous system relax and gives your immune system a boost.

Stay in your own lane. Many folks are worried about family members, loved ones and even other cultures impacted by this moment. Others can’t help but worry about the future and what it all means. Give yourself permission to take care of only yourself or your own family for one window in the day. Acknowledge when the uncertainly is more that you can handle, spend time doing something that feels good to you.

Calm:

Again, plan for an activity, at least once a day, that helps your body relax. This might be a shower, going outside your apartment, calling a friend, watching a funny show, walking in nature. Consider a goal of getting out of your house every day, even if it’s snowing, even if it’s just a walk around the block. Look for evidence of life while you’re out there. Make it a scavenger hunt. Look for the green bud or early crocus coming up. You don’t usually need to be in contact with others to go out of your doors.

Exercise. Yep. Even if it’s not your thing. We lean hear on the evidence that tells us that exercise decreases arousal and lower our cortisol secretion – that means it’s great for our immune systems. It also helps us to secrete calming chemicals that help keep our levels of arousal lower. Just walk. You don’t have to run a marathon.

Sleep- Might seem like you don’t need sleep if you’re not leaving your home or not attending to work or school life. Not true! We now know that sleep is restorative, boosts our immune system and we process much of our stress while we sleep. Sleep helps to support production of the neurotransmitters that keep your brain health and responding to stress. Give extra points for winding down slowly with a book and avoiding media in the hour before bed. More bonus points for an 8-hour sleep opportunity.

Breathe. Yep. Again, you might think, don’t I already do that? You do, and you have since you were born, but now, let’s do it with intention. Set your timer. Plan at time to look out the window and pay attention to your breathing, event for 2 minutes, twice a day. When you exhale long, slow breathes, you actually tell your brain to send out the chemicals that calm your body down (parasympathetic nervous system).”

Efficacy –

First, what is efficacy? It’s empowerment, engagement, and a way to tell your brain you’re not helpless here. Your actually practicing efficacy by putting a plan together. Let’s go beyond efficacy service- if you have enough for others- this tells your brain that not only can you get yourself out of this, but you have enough for the people around you. This is a powerful and not-so-subtle message to yourself, your family and your community that you’ve got this moment. It is the antidote for the feeling of scarcity and fear.

Start close to home. Again, making a plan and creating efficacy. It’s what you can do.

The possibilities are endless. Making a plan for a meaningful project you can do at home. Checking in with an elderly neighbor to see if you might shop for them or run an errand. Making menus for the next two weeks. Making a donation to a local group that is serving the homeless or hardest hit by this situation in your community. Making a plan to reach out and connect or send a letter to someone you
know is sick or in quarantine. Playing a game or giving your full attention to a family member who is needs distraction. Organize your closet. Go through that pile of papers. Planning a dance party or a new routine that you want to do (different song of course) every day that you’re home. Make a menu based on the food you have in the house right now; you might be surprised what you find at the back of a pantry.

**Connection-**

We already said it. This is where the money is for supporting yourself, your community and the people you care about weather and emerge from this moment as healthy as possible. We need each other. We are wired to lean on each other for support, calm and even give and receive hope from strangers. We’ll have to do this one with intention. Get creative in ways to **plan for** connection on a daily basis.

If you working from home, consider scheduling meetings with your team to check in on each other.

If you are missing church, consider attending online or creating a text group with a few people you most enjoy seeing

Plan to get old school. A letter in the mail, or art from a kid, to someone who you are thinking about or worried about, is good for both the giver and the receiver.

Create a small team of folks that you know care about you and ask for them to check in on you every day, or make a calendar to check in once a week with a different person

Send out an e-mail to your classmates, school mates, or friends or family far away to connect.

Plan to reconnect with someone you have been meaning to reach out to. This can be especially important for aunts and uncles and folks in the community you are thinking or worrying about.

**Hope.**

Ah, this one can be elusive but is clearly elusive. How do you plan for hope? In times of uncertainly, it can start to feel like there’s no moment but this one.

Planning for the future can be an act of defiance when everyone around you is panicked. Planning for the future and finding your creativity, and offering hope to others also tells your brain there is life after this moment. Even creating structure and planning is a way of create hope.

Plant a few seeds in a garden or out front of your house. The summer is coming those seeds will come up.

Having children write in journals to gather and write about their experience in a pandemic to put in a time capsule for their own children.

Share encouraging stories with each other- stories of hope, things you hear that neighbors are doing for neighbors, the stories that inspire you to rise up to this moment and do what you can.

Make a movie list of the movies and books hat remind you of what others have already overcome.
Deliver art projects to neighbors and leave them on their doorsteps. Do yardwork for someone who can’t get outside.

Plan a gratitude practice. This might be a journal, chalk board, slips of paper or a practice before meals or bed. Practicing gratitude changes the wiring in our brain to focus on and look for the things that are working are good in this moment.

You got this.