ADDRESS YOUR STRESS: Coping during the COVID-19 Crisis

In this time of constant change and uncertainty about what the future holds, emotions are running high. For many, the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to stress-induced anxiety. Anxiety is experienced as anticipatory thoughts about negative situations that may occur in the future. We often experience anxiety when we believe we lack control in our lives. In times like these, we can find our emotional anchor by focusing on things that are within our control. I encourage you to implement the following strategies to regain your sense of internal control.

**Take care of your body**
1. Obtain consistent quality rest:
   - Maintaining a regular sleep schedule helps to keep you regulated and rested. It does not have to be the same bedtime and wake time of your previous routine. **Avoid napping.**
   - Reduce your screen time at least 1 hour before bedtime (e.g., phones, tablets, television, e-readers).
   - Your bed should only be used for sleep. Engaging in work and entertainment while in bed makes it difficult for your mind to associate your bed with a space for sleep.
   - Create a routine of sleep promoting activities to transition from daytime activities to bedtime.

2. Be active—Research has proven that 30 minutes of aerobic activity is healthy for the body and promotes emotional wellbeing.

3. Eat well—Avoid comfort eating and boredom munching. Eat on a schedule, and between meals choose the healthier snacking options that are available in your home.

**Take care of your mind**
1. Plan your day—Establish a daily schedule that is practical for you to follow. Then break up the monotony by creating a slight variation in your routine for each weekday.

2. Stay Connected—How will you connect with others outside of working from home, and family interactions each day? This is a good time to nurture your relationships with others. Maintain healthy boundaries around conversation topics so that connection does not become an added source of anxiety.

3. Engage in activities that you enjoy or pick up a new hobby—This is an excellent time to reconnect with activities that spark joy, and to find new activities that are slightly challenging and rewarding.

**Take care of your spirit**
1. Be mindful and present—Many of us have an opportunity to recalibrate the pace of life and realign ourselves with the things we value most.

2. Give yourself grace for imperfection and decreased productivity—You can reject the external pressure to maximize productivity at this time. It is also ok to feel overwhelmed at times.

3. Soothing with your senses—When you are feeling overwhelmed, take a step back and use the moment as an opportunity to awaken your senses. Create a list of calming resources in your environment that you can touch, see, smell, hear or taste.

4. Breathe—Deep cleansing breaths from your diaphragm are helpful in calming the body and centering the mind. Pace your breathing in a rhythmic manner. A popular approach to rhythmic breathing is to inhale for a count of 4, hold your breath for a count of 4, and exhale slowly for a count of 6.

Believe in your power to influence your experience during the COVID-19 health crisis. Please do your best to be intentional about focusing on the areas of your life where you maintain control. We will get through this together.

D’Andria A. Jackson, Psy.D
Licensed Clinical Psychologist