

Here are 10 things you can do to help cope with a crisis. Crises are particularly hard for mental health because they can be prolonged times of dealing with unresolved issues and unknown futures. Remember, there is nothing we can do to feel completely better, but that doesn't mean we can do *something*. Every little bit helps when it comes to sustaining mental health.

- 1. Get outside.** Every day. Multiple times per day. If you can't get outside, watch nature shows, virtual tours of botanical gardens on youtube, open windows, say hello to passerbys. Go for a drive, explore a part of the city you've never seen, get outside the city for a minute.
- 2. Meditate on creation.** Look at how its functioning these days. Flowers and birds remind us that we can rest in this current moment. They do not plan, nor do they fret over their next meal or how they'll survive tomorrow's weather. They deal with the current moment and reside in the present. Flowers burst forth and display beauty in spite of a global crisis. They are living on and unto how they were created...the birds keep doing bird things and the flowers keep doing flower things. We need to keep doing people things and let tomorrow worry about itself.
- 3. Grow something or make something.** Watching seedlings sprout and sourdough starter grow gives us hope that life comes from death, creation keeps on marching and in spite of all our fear, growth is happening. You don't have to deal with seeds or bread, but do something to tend to your need to see growth and progress.
- 4. SLOW BILATERAL STIMULATION to CALM PANIC.** As a trauma therapist, this is one of my personal favorites. Place your hands flat on your thighs and pat back and forth (left-right-left-right, etc.) slowly (almost as slow as one beat per second). This calms your brain and lets your body know, "There's no need to prepare for a fight or fleeing. I'm okay." For many people, this works better than deep breathing, mindfulness, or other forms of regulation in moments of panic or fear. Play with how you do this. Cross your hands over your chest and pat your shoulders, have a metal slinky go back-and-forth, back-and-forth from one hand to the other, squeeze play-doh in one hand then the other. The goal is to s-l-o-w-l-y stimulate your brain from side-to-side using your body.
- 5. Ask a friend or loved one for prayer.** There is no sense in going at this alone. Tell someone you're struggling. Tell someone you're having the first good day in 16 days. Tell someone you don't feel like talking about it, but you need prayer or a reminder of Truth.
- 6. Feel your feelings.** There are so many things to grieve right now. We are made to eat together, work together, express affection, to celebrate, worship and struggle together. We are made to love places of familiarity and order. When all that is turned upside down, we can feel sad, scared, frustrated, insecure, vulnerable, angry and threatened. If you've experienced trauma, all of that gets stirred up in times of turmoil. Take a moment to ask

yourself, “What am I feeling?” and “What am I thinking about what’s going on?” Give yourself a moment to actually just feel those difficult feelings. A good cry is helpful and appropriate.

It’s also okay if you’re enjoying this. Take a moment to be grateful if you’re feeling rested, respite from difficult environments, or enjoying a slower pace of life.

- 7. Make a list of past victories.** What are other times when you have seen something work out in a way you never could have imagined? What have you dreaded but grew to appreciate? Preach to yourself that victories happen and happen when/ where we least expect them. (My personal touchstones: God parting the Red Sea for the Israelites, labor and delivery)
- 8. If you’re a believer, preach to yourself.** Use songs, Scripture memory, podcasts, audio sermons, and reading the Bible to reorient yourself. God’s Truth is our only unwavering guide, anchor, compass and ballast in the storm of life (this was just as true 6 months ago as it is now, but we certainly feel it more than we did then.) Tell yourself it is normal to feel overcome with fear and unbelief. It is our job to seek the face of Jesus and ask Him to help our unbelief.
- 9. Disconnect from the news, social media or any other sources of information.** This does not mean to stay completely uninformed, but be smart. Ration the amount of information you allow yourself. Don’t be a passive consumer of difficult information to self-medicate fear and offer a false sense of control. Pay attention to how it affects you and be purposeful about how you’re using media. You are in charge of it. Don’t let it be in charge of you and your mood.
- 10. Know that a rollercoaster is normal.** Whether you’re stuck at home alone, homeschooling what feels like far too many children, trying to find a quiet space in a house that feels far too small, or not sure where next week’s groceries will come from, know that we are all going to have really bad days, okay days and some good days. Note your 9 out of 10 (on a scale of 1-10) days so that when you have a 1 out of 10, you can remind yourself that these really hard days do give way to better days. Really hard days do not last forever.
- 11. THESE DAYS WILL NOT LAST FOREVER.** Remind yourself of that. Remind yourself that we live in a reality where pain does not win in the end. Remind yourself that we might struggle for a little while, but disease does not have the final say. Remind yourself of this Truth over and over again.