

Coping with COVID-19 and Beyond

Since the coronavirus pandemic began in Canada in March of 2020, most of us have had to reimagine how we live and work. During all of this uncertainty, we have had to adapt to significant changes, including a multitude of health concerns, financial worries, and disruptions to our daily lives and those of our families and friends. Furthermore, the pain has been compounded by recent incidents of mass shootings and racial violence. There is no doubt that anxiety and trauma abounds right now, and that is why it is essential that we focus on coping. Since none of us know when all of the uncertainty will end, it might be most useful to put our energies toward accepting it right now.

One of the effects of COVID-19 seems to have been that life has slowed down. Perhaps, there is a gift in this change of pace. When we slow down, we can be more present to *all* of the possibilities that each moment brings. We can be moved by the simple pleasures of life, such as the flowers in bloom in our neighbourhood, the laughter of a child, or relaxing in the sunshine as we feel the soft summer breeze. We might have more time to chat with our neighbours, friends or family members (remotely or with safe physical distancing), and learn more about them. There is value in fully stepping into the opportunities that life is offering us now. Although vacations may look different this summer, we can always choose to adopt a "vacation" state of mind. Instead of fixating on when COVID-19 will be over, find ways to live more fully *now* by opening yourself to whatever is going on in the present moment. After all, it is the only place where change is truly possible.

More than ever, this is a time for compassion, gentleness, understanding and kindness. Maintaining realistic expectations of oneself, and acknowledging that your personal best needs to look different at this particular moment in time seems essential right now. As work duties have changed drastically, and childcare responsibilities have increased, home looks very different now for most people. By prioritizing and protecting the relationships in your life, you can ensure that no matter what happens you will move through it as a team. This includes self-care. Being gentle with yourself, exercising regularly, pacing yourself with daily tasks, and practicing relaxation strategies will also help you to be able to have the strength to support others.

Finally, this is the time to consider who depends on you. Instead of asking what life can do for you, this is the time to ask what you can do for life. Are there people in need that you are able to help? Reaching out, and offering to lend a hand to those who might need you, could help you to feel more positive too. Random acts of kindness can be small, such as waving hello to your neighbour, but they can be powerful. We can never know how big a difference one small caring gesture will make to someone else.

It is my belief that something positive can come from even devastating experiences such as COVID-19. It could help us all to wake up, identify what is most important, and take action to

follow through on making it happen in our lives. Slowing down, taking the time to be kind to yourself, and reaching out to those in need can help us to move through this time in a mindful way. In quiet moments, try listening to the voice of your deepest self. It will show you the most sustainable way of living in the present, and help you to move forward into a satisfying future.