

The Coronavirus is **Triggering** So Many Fears!

Questions and Answers to help us make it through this time!

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As I text my sister to see how she is doing, I begin to type the word: C.O.R. O.N. A. ...before I type all of the words, the autofill on my phone automatically completes the word...CORONAVIRUS! This our new “unnormal.” Four to six weeks ago, the words Coronavirus was not in our lexicon. The Covid-19 pandemic is creating great fear and anxiety. That anxiety is manifested in sleep disturbances, irritability, fearfulness, anxiety, and general grief and loss. We also have concerns about work, family, and financial stability. We are in uncharted waters without a playbook.

So, what can we do? One of the first activities we can do is face our fears, step into them, and prepare our own set of individualized activities to help us manage this stressful time.

Let’s talk about our fears and ways in which we can manage them. Here are some questions submitted to Dr. Sampson in a recent blog.

Six Questions and Six Answers:

(1) Every time I cough I feel that I am coming down with Covid-19?

We are living in unprecedented times. It is understandable that our fears are manifesting in multiple ways. It is possible that your body is simply reacting to the fears. Carefully monitor these feelings to create rational thinking. It can be quite hard to separate out the medical symptoms from the emotional symptoms. Please know that anxiety-based symptoms such as shortness of breath and difficulties breathing mirror some of the symptoms of Coronavirus. Make sure you know the documented symptoms of Coronavirus, which are a dry cough, shortness of breath, muscle weakness, and occasionally gastric challenges. Track your medial and emotional feelings for consistency. If you are able to calm yourself down after meditating and via self-talk, this most likely is not the typical shortness of breath that is common. However, In general, we should all act as if we have the Coronavirus, as the safeguards in place will keep us all safe.

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Sometimes are fears are greater than just facing them. In this case, we must reach out for professional support.

Here are some resources that can assist you:

- (1) 24/7 Suicide Hotline (1800-273-8255)**
- (2) The Coronavirus Anxiety 24/7 Hotline: Text HOME to 741741**
- (3) Real online support offers group & individual support: www.join-real.com**
- (4) Online Meditation: Headspace *this site usually has a fee, but is offering free 30-day trials at this time**

- (2) **My neighbor is not taking this pandemic seriously. She is socializing, going out for unnecessary items, and knocking on doors in the neighborhood.** This is when a direct approach is so important, as refusing social distancing can be a life/death issue. Perhaps your neighbor is in need of social support and her anxiety is getting the best of her. Perhaps she does not believe that this is a serious issue. A gentle approach is to maintain the relationship by stating that you and your family are taking the situation very seriously, and do not want to take any risks that can impact anyone. Suggest a daily or every other day phone call, FaceTime or ZOOM check in. Or, a more specific approach is to simply say my family and I will be honoring the social distancing request at this time and cannot allow any visitors.
- (3) **My granddaughter asked me, “Nana, are we all going to die?”** Sadly, many of our children are afraid and worried at this time. How we handle information around the pandemic is how our children will handle the current issues. The question posed by the child is simply a request for order, structure, and a request to restore a sense of safety. It is important to allow children to talk through the concerns about Covid-19 without giving them too much information that they cannot process developmentally or emotionally. A five year old can handle discussing the pandemic, staying safe by washing hands to their favorite song (for at least 20 seconds), or by hearing how they can keep their toys clean, and cover their mouth when sneezing into their elbow or a Kleenex. A 12 year old can talk about the virus and their fears about friends, school, and the loss of life. Keep the child’s age in mind and how they function developmentally. A 12 year old who is prone to anxiety may not be able to handle what a younger child can. Stay away from, “we will be okay.....or don’t worry,” without offering solutions to calm down, and ways to stay safe.
- (4) **When I think about this virus I think about dying, and the recent loss of my mother.** The Coronavirus triggers what mental health professions refer to as “traumaversaries.” Traumaversaries are current or old traumatic incidents that an individual has been subjected to. The anniversary date of the loss is also the date that the trauma occurred. The virus invokes a sense of loss similar to the grief loss cycle. The trauma associated with that cycle becomes re-activated due to similar emotional feelings that are unresolved or historical. We must recognize when we are in this cycle and journal about it, talk about the emotion that is coming up, and work through it in the same way that we did when the original trauma was prevalent. It is not uncommon for a traumatic event to trigger other trauma we have experienced. The Coronavirus can even trigger insecurities, fears of failure, relationship challenges, and issues with relatives. We may also be forced to face situations we have previously denied. Journal these issues, ask for online help, read an online book, and unearth the fears. Make sure to take time away from watching multiple news stations.
- (5) **My children are driving me crazy. I miss them when they are at school, now I cannot stand it now that they are home!** We are facing so much with this pandemic that no one was ready to manage. Don’t feel guilty about these feelings. Acknowledge what you are feeling and try to think through what these feelings mean. Do you need more time alone, do you need to structure the day for you and your children, or do you feel ill equipped to manage becoming an “instant teacher.” Whatever the case, please give yourself permission to experience all of the feelings associated with your new roles and the new “unnatural.” Our anxieties can actually help us in staying focused and careful. Holding our anxieties in can cause sleep disturbances,

over/undereating, gastronomical challenges, and emotional instability. Step back from multiple roles all at one time. Choose something significant you can master before adding other roles. Your children won't be harmed by you not knowing how to teach. Unless you are an educator, please know that this is a specific role, culture, and skillset that most of us do not have. But, teaching life skills is just as important at this time (i.e. cooking together, instituting an individual time in the house to talk to each child, going on a walk, or teaching a skill that you have). You can also teach family history, have your children read to you or create an in-house or backyard scavenger hunt. All of these activities can be academic tasks crossing science, history, and math by adding a few questions, or by having children write a simple paragraph or complete a reflection. There are also so many school-based and online resources specific to your child's age. Most importantly, take some time for yourself by instituting a daily chill out time in which everyone takes a moment to pause.

- (6) **I am alone, isolated and sad. I find the days are simply running together, and I look up and find that I have not eaten or taken a bath.** This is not unusual for some individuals; particularly, those who have previously struggled with anxiety and depression. Start to build a group of individuals who reach out to you during this pandemic for different reasons and at different times. Create a list of people you will also reach out to as well. Giving back to others helps us to get out of our own feelings knowing that others need us too. Utilize your phone or calendar as a tracker to maintain hygiene and structure. Post a daily message on your phone that requires you to answer or reflect through your feelings. Institute a structure of when you might journal call friends, eat, watch television, or go for a walk. These are hard times that will trigger many challenges old and new. Social distancing does not mean social isolation. Institute self-care immediately. If you do not have anyone to turn to, please think about the resources listed on this document.

Take Care of You, and Be Kind to You.

Dr. Sampson

Other Resources:

- The Center for Disease Control (<https://www.cdc.gov>)
- Online Learning Resources (www.weareteachers.com)