Creating Light in the “Dark Winter”

Stress Resilience

Managing Stress During COVID-19

To say we as a world are under a lot of stress right now is an understatement. As the holidays near and daylight becomes shorter, it is time to reassess how we are nurturing our stress resilience. Some level of stress is good—it can help us reconsider the in-person gathering when we have been asked to stay home or speak up as an ally to someone being dismissed. Stress can help keep us safe and urge us to act on our values. Stress can also be detrimental.

How does your body let you know that you are getting out of balance, heading into unhelpful stress?

- Unable to concentrate and make decisions?
- Feeling angry, irritable, or out of control?
- Experiencing headaches, tight muscles, stomachaches, or low energy?

Understanding our body’s signs of stress is the first step to knowing what to do about it.

Often, we begin our response by trying to manage the impact of stress. In the next few months, instead try first taking a moment to ask yourself two important questions.

1. Is there something I could be stopping or putting on hold during these times?
2. Is there another perspective I could take on this that would alleviate much of the stress?

For example, you may notice that at the end of your extended family virtual video call each week, you feel...
exhausted and your stomach churns. Rather than deciding to take a walk before and after upcoming calls, you might ask if avoiding the calls all together, participating in only every other one, or limiting your time to 30 minutes is possible. Your answer may be yes or no to this first question. If it is no, then move on to question two. Ask yourself what expectations and beliefs you take into these calls. Here is where you might need some input from someone you trust and whose perspective you value. Ask them to help you consider new perspectives to make these calls less stressful for you. Maybe you wanted to experience connection with each person on the call or hoped hurtful family patterns would not repeat in virtual gatherings. What perspective on the calls would ensure you feeling neutral or even joy in the aftermath? Maybe you see these as opportunities for covert connecting! You decide to try to make a silent connection with someone on each call through your body language or try to validate someone on each call and watch their reaction to being validated. There are many perspectives beyond the one that you have been bringing to the calls that left you with feelings of stress.

If your attempts to answer and follow-up on questions one and two do not lead to a more satisfying experience, that is when we turn to managing the inevitable stress of our lives, especially during the winter of 20-21. Below is a list you have seen many times and is always worth repeating as we do our self-check on our resilience habits.

- Give your body regular exercise
- Maintain a healthy diet
- Drink lots of water
- Take a break from fatiguing aspects of your day
- Do something creative or novel for you
- Connect with others
- Follow a sleep routine
- Avoid perfection as a goal
- Practice self-compassion when your strategies do not go as planned

Here's to the best we can do to build our stress resilience in the winter of 20-21!

Learn more ways to "Create Light in the Dark Winter” with our other new blogs: Boundaries; Compassionate Action Steps; Compassion Fatigue and Self-compassion; Expectations and Structure; and Mindfulness.