

Our Loss of Control in these Uncertain Times



We cannot control what happens with COVID-19. But, we can control our attitude and our response. The goal is to prevent the spread of the virus, limit overloading medical professionals, and minimize the communal panic. **Each of us, collectively, has a role to play.**

COVID-19 presents an opportunity to practice differentiating what we can change from what we can't. What we have influence over and what we do not. There is admittedly a lot we cannot control right now. We need the space and grace to vent and express our concerns, so long as we do not become consumed and preoccupied by them. We cannot predict the future. We don't know how long this pandemic will last. We cannot control the actions of others or the amount of toilet paper at the store. But, there are things within our control and **we can choose to focus on these things.**

What we tell ourselves during this time paints the narrative of our experience, delimits what is possible, and shapes our actions. If our narratives are overly dictated by external forces outside our control, we lose the ability to become the

authors of our own stories. If instead we shift our perspective to focus solely on our thoughts, attitudes, and actions — which are under our control — we will aid our individual well-being and limit our anxiety, as well as best serve our community and loved ones.

Aside from following the [CDC recommendations](#) we might begin to develop a plan to keep us remaining calm:

- **Turn off the news; limit social media use; and create boundaries around discussing COVID-19;**
- **Find fun, entertaining things to do at home;**
- **Avoid hoarding, as doing so hurts members of our community who lack resources to do so;**
- **Avoid tying up medical resources we don't need, as people need these for their jobs;**

COVID-19: Compassion in Action

- **Use our time wisely and learn a new skill, practice an old hobby, engage with people from a distance, creatively;**
- **Avoid spreading misinformation about the virus;**
- **Share stories of hope and resilience instead of fear and panic;**
- **Cherish the people we love;**
- **Help others in more vulnerable situations; and**
- **Be kind and gracious during this time of stress. Band together — from a distance.**

What else CAN you reasonably do? You can try this exercise. Focus on one aspect of your life, either that has drastically changed recently, or about which you are feeling a sense of stress or fatigue. Perhaps it is working from home. Or having your children home with you. It might be your fear of COVID-19 or your fear for your loved ones. Possibly, it is your finances.

Once you have chosen something, make two lists. On the first, list what about this time is leading to your fatigue, worry, or fear. On the second, list what about this time is



feeding your resilience. For example, if you recently found yourself working from home, on the first list you might note that you are distracted by your new environment, feel a lack of structure, and miss interacting with your colleagues. On the other list, you might relish sleeping in longer, avoiding your commute, and taking mini-breaks to play with your dog. There are no silly responses! It may be more challenging to list that which is maintaining your resilience. If so, perhaps go about your day and come back to this list later. When you're satisfied with both lists, underline those responses where you feel you have some control. Cross out those responses where you do not have control.

When conducting this exercise, many people realize that there are more aspects of our experience that aid our resilience around which we do have control. We can choose to focus mindfully on these experiences, be intentionally grateful for these positive facets of our lives, or seek to increase or maximize these aspects of our day. Relatedly, those aspects on both lists that are outside our control, we might attune to less frequently, talk about with others less often, or choose to 'let go of.' It is likely that there are some aspects of our life that we find fatiguing, around which we have control and can therefore change. For instance, if I find my new work routine and lack of structure fatiguing, I can create a daily schedule/routine/process for myself. Once you have completed both lists and identified the things around which you have control, consider what you would like to do in the coming days about anything you listed as under your control.

Amidst uncertainty and a disruption of life as we know it, intentionally engaging with our lives beyond COVID-19 and focusing on that which is within our control, will help us regain some of our power over our own (socially distanced) destinies.