



# MANAGING COVID EMOTIONS: TAKING CARE OF OURSELVES AND EACH OTHER

---

Webinar recording: **April 21, 2020**

URL: <https://ubccpd.ca/managing-covid-emotions-taking-care-ourselves-and-each-other>

**Disclaimer:** Information on COVID-19 is changing rapidly and much of the research is preliminary. Assessment and management protocols are suggestions only; they do not take the place of clinical judgement. Please check with your own health authorities and local medical health officers as policies and support for the suggested approaches to patient care may vary between regions.

This summary was prepared by Dr. Anne McNamara.

## Webinar Summary

### Brief Summary of Clinical Pearls

- Be aware of emotions, name them, practise mindfulness using the S.T.O.P. method
- Be aware of self and peers, request and offer peer support
- Take care of your body, mind and social needs
- Elevate your emotional experience in any circumstance by focusing on what is important to you and giving up an attachment to something that might be making you feel 'stuck'

### Naming our Emotions

- Difficult emotions such as fear, feeling overwhelmed, frustration, anxiety and grief, occur when situations are threatening, or a threat is ignored. They are crucial for safety. **We can be "grateful for the discomfort of our sanity".**
- We often see challenging emotions as a sign of weakness or failure. We might blame ourselves, feel shame, or ignore these emotions. This may result in loss of receptivity to more positive emotions.

- Living and working in this COVID-19 pandemic is evoking many new emotions for physicians, including grief (both current and anticipatory), gratitude, feeling overwhelmed, excitement, curiosity, discomfort and fear.
- Accepting our emotions rather than reacting to them can give us a measure of peace with the situation.

## Peer Support

- Peer support is a bi-directional meeting of equals, both of whom are givers and receivers.
- A recent study of rural physicians who reported a good experience with peer support described it as, “**critically important**”, “**vital**”, and “**life-saving**”. Most participants felt they would not have continued in medical practice without it.
- In the study, peer support often started because the peer reached out and asked about the participant’s well-being. This was generally a brief conversation.
- The self-reported benefits of peer support included: increased compassion for self and others, improved ability to ask for help, better delivery of medical care, increased strength, deeper relationships, increased sense of self-worth, and better physician recruitment and retention.
- How to get started:
  - Practise using small issues.
  - Choose peers you know to be trustworthy, safe, and willing to be vulnerable.
  - Find something less than perfect and initiate a conversation: “I noticed...how are you?”, “this just happened to me...has this happened to you?”
  - Be prepared to be rejected. Rejection is not about you but about the capacity of your peer to be involved.
  - Gradually expand the group with whom you share.
  - Be curious. Listen attentively and generously. This will validate your peer’s concern. Normalize or reframe the situation if able. Listen without trying to fix.

## Survival Skills for Self Care

- This is a time for learning to be purposeful, deliberate, and about self care.
- Meet your body’s needs to cope with the **physiologic changes** that occur at times of perceived danger and stress:
  - Eat life-giving foods and drink water
  - Create a routine for good sleep. If sleep is poor, rest the body and limit stimulants
  - Take breaks
  - Be physically active
  - Try movement therapies (e.g. tai chi, qi gong, yoga, walking, stretching)

- **Breathe:** Use “box” or “strategic” breathing any time you become aware of tension in your mind or body:
  - in 2,3,4 hold 2,3,4, out 2,3,4, hold 2,3,4 and repeat.
  - You can do this in the moment while donning or doffing PPE or pausing before procedures.
- **Meet your mind’s needs:** Notice, name and acknowledge your feelings and emotions. Be self-compassionate. Ask specifically and directly for what you want or need from others.
- **Be the boss of your technology:** choose your information inputs, limit your screen time. Restore space in your head, go into your “nothing box”.
- **Check your language:** use “why don’t we..?” or “what’s important today?” rather than complaining or being critical.
- **Consider what you are learning:** what is new to me right now? Meditate, or enjoy the meditative calming of activities, hobbies, art, reading, gardening, cooking.
- **Meet your social needs:** Social connectedness is one of the key predictors of the psychosocial outcome and impact of stress. It is a major driver of well-being and resilience. Pay attention to the three elements of social connectedness:
  - Socialising – shared activities with others.
  - Social support – practical/instrumental, informational, emotional.
  - A sense of belonging – being connected to and valued by something (e.g. a group, association, club, sports team, church) that is greater than oneself is protective of resilience.

## Reframing

- Acting in the face of difficult circumstances can be challenging and yet there is still the possibility to be the author and creator of your own experience.
- In the current Covid-19 pandemic, although we are all in the same storm, we are not all in the same boat so everyone’s application of these tools will be unique to their situation.
- Three tools to **Transform your Experience** and to create more of what you want:
  1. Elevate your attention to focus on something important and of value to you personally. What do you want to have happen? What brings meaning and purpose to you? Sit in silence and stillness to ask this question of your soul. By making this, and not what you do not want, your focus will generate an elevated emotional experience.
  2. Decide what your decision will require you to give up. For example, a perception or attachment to something being different than it is. This is often an “I should” statement (e.g. I should be fearless). Ask yourself “is this true?”
  3. Consider that **time is of the essence**. Take actionable steps and make decisions in alignment with what you want to put your attention on.

## Resources

- **How an Eagle Tackles a Storm:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7yHttTCNNA&feature=youtu.be>
- **Taking Care of Yourself During COVID-19 – a list of resources prepared by Dr. Birinder Mangat:**  
<https://ubccpd.ca/sites/ubccpd.ca/files/taking-care-of-yourself-during-COVID-19.pdf>

## Thanks to the speakers on the video:

- **Dr. Rahul Gupta**, Family Medicine – Gibsons, BC
- **Dr. Dana Hubler (moderator)**, Family Physician – Comox, BC
- **Dr. Lee-Anne Lavery**, Orthopaedic Surgeon – Trail, BC
- **Dr. Anne McNamara**, Respiriologist – Surrey, BC
- **Dr. Tandi Wilkinson**, Emergency Medicine Physician – Nelson, BC