

23 April 2020

Circular 22-2020

Dear Resident

### **Finding Calm in the Pandemic Storm I**

Ways to cope with stress and anxiety about the coronavirus

Psychotherapist Reji Mathew provides helpful advice for taking stock of our feelings and finding ways to cope during this crisis. He states that National emergencies shatter our cherished sense of normalcy and safety and thrust us all into crisis responses, both individually and collectively. We have to find mechanisms to cope and he suggests the following:

**Make Inner Room for Your Emotions:** Validate your feelings. When the unexpected shows up in our lives, we will have reactions. Our feelings are among the most innate parts of us; they are automatic. Expect to have a range of feelings about what is happening, and that many more may cycle through you over the course of the pandemic. Expect to have a range of feelings about what is happening, and that many more may cycle through you over the course of the pandemic.

**Make note of your vulnerabilities and plan for them:** The challenges of coping with a prolonged crisis can be a strain on anyone. Are you someone who thrives on being outdoors and isolation would be particularly stressful for you? Do news updates elevate your anxiety to the point of not being able to focus on things that you have under your control? Be aware of these types of vulnerabilities and how best to work with them.

**Build in safeguards to manage your emotions:** Are you exercising? Are you getting enough sleep? Are you connecting with people who can provide support? All of these can be helpful. Try to reset each night: breathe, stretch, journal, find a mode of expression that allows you to release the stress of the day. Releasing emotional tension each day can reset your central nervous system, activate the relaxation response and cool your mind-body and spirit.

**Notice the Signs of Safety Every Day:** When a crisis happens, it is normal for our minds to go into the threat response — flight, fight or freeze — and stay there. What can help in cooling down our genetically wired internal alarm clock is to practice noticing the signs of safety every day. Look for community initiatives that reflect your values, and think about contributing. Historical moments of great struggle can also be moments of incredible innovation. Participating in a local community effort that aims to counter the loss of the familiar can be a grounding resource to manage prolonged stress.

**Anchor Your Day to Anchor Your Mind:** Structure your day to anchor your mind to all the things that are meaningful to you. Think of it like a ship sailing in to dock — an anchor is planted to secure the ship in place and keep it from floating away. The human brain does better when you give it something to look forward to, to count on, to be absorbed in; it likes the outside-in approach. Spontaneity has its place, but creating a healthy structure to your day can both focus your mind and give you enough room for the intervals of rest or play you may desire.

**It Takes a Village to Care for Each Other:** There is no us versus them in the COVID-19 pandemic, and it will take the massive whole working inter-connectedly to get through this challenge together.

If you need to talk to a professional counsellor about what you are feeling, please contact our confidential Counselling Support Hotline on 072 356 7127 or email [mel.westcott1@gmail.com](mailto:mel.westcott1@gmail.com).

Warm Regards  
Christine Dempers