

Central Student Counselling

Dealing with your inner life during the corona crisis

Focus on the things you can control.

The corona crisis is impacting and challenging us all differently: physically, emotionally, socially, financially... And each of us is responding in different ways.

For many of us, fear and worry are part of our response. This is a normal and natural reaction to challenging situations where there is danger and insecurity. We then often lose ourselves in worries about things that are beyond our control. And even though this is human and normal, it is unfortunately rarely helpful.

You can't control how everything in the world will develop, and you also can't suddenly control your feelings or get rid of all of your natural fears. But you can influence how you deal with the situation – what you do – here and now. And this is key.

Find a way of dealing with your unpleasant thoughts and feelings.

For some, this extreme situation might trigger a personal crisis or even emotional overload. This may lead to emotional chaos, where your thoughts spiral and painful feelings overwhelm you. This is when you need to put on the breaks.

Here, in brief, is an effective way of dealing with unpleasant thoughts and feelings:

- **Recognise all of your thoughts and feelings.**
Observe your inner life as though you were an interested researcher and name what you observe, without judgement.
- **Direct your attention to your body.**
Find a way to sense your body again (e.g. breathe slowly; notice where your body contacts the ground or your chair; stretch your arms, legs or neck)
Important note: This exercise is not about distracting you from your inner world or helping you avoid it. The goal is to perceive both at the same time.
- **Direct your attention to what you are doing.**
Become aware of where you are and focus on the activity you are doing at this moment:
 - Look around you and notice three things you can see.
 - Notice three things you can hear.
 - Now focus your attention on what you are doing right now or what you want to do next.

Note: Please don't skip the first step, as it is very important to notice your thoughts and feelings, especially when they are unpleasant. If you skip the first part, this will become a distraction technique, which is not what it is intended to be!

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Do things that are important to you.

Think about what specific things you can do to act according to your values in this challenging situation:

- *Which simple things can you do to take care of yourself and those around you?*
- *How do you most want to use and spend the time available to you – now mostly at home?*
- *How can you tend to your body, spirit and soul?*
- *Would you like to learn something new, such as meditation, playing music or a new craft?*
- *How can you best use this time to get ahead – either in your studies or in your personal life?*
- *What can you do now – no matter how small – to make life better for yourself and others?*

Once you have a few answers to these questions, act on them and come back to the questions regularly.

Have compassion for yourself.

A number of different unpleasant feelings may arise: fear, anger, frustration, grief, guilt, loneliness, insecurity, confusion and many others. When these feelings arise, it is especially important to practice being compassionate and gentle with yourself.

Ask yourself: *'If someone I love was in the same situation and felt the way I feel right now, what would I do to treat this person lovingly and compassionately? How would respond to them? What would I say or do?'* Then treat yourself exactly the same way.

Look for support.

Look for all the support you can get – from friends, family, neighbours, and professional individuals and organisations – in person or online. Even if it feels strange at first, talking and drinking coffee together via phone, Skype, Zoom or FaceTime can be just as fun and beneficial as meeting in person. You could also possibly use the time to call people you haven't spoken to for a long time.

The Student Counselling Office also continues to be available to support you. Feel free to send us an email if you would like to arrange an individual discussion, which can be held either by phone or by video (studienberatung@haw-hamburg.de).

Adapted from 'Face Covid' by Russ Harris