

‘FACE COVID’

HOW TO RESPOND TO THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

‘**FACE COVID**’ is a set of practical and psychological steps to respond effectively to the coronavirus crisis, using the principles of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). Here’s a quick summary of the key steps:

F = Focus on what’s in your control
A = Acknowledge your thoughts & feelings
C = Connect with your body
E = Engage in what you’re doing

C = Committed action
O = Opening up
V = Values
I = Identify resources
D = Disinfect & distance



Let’s unpack these, one by one

F = Focus on what’s in your control

When we are facing a crisis such as the coronavirus pandemic; fear and anxiety are inevitable. In fact, they are natural responses to challenging situations. Our nervous systems’ fight and flight response kicks in and physiologically gets our bodies ready to act. However, often we get lost in worrying and ruminating about things that are out of your control and the more we focus on what’s *not* in our control, the more hopeless or anxious we’re likely to feel. So the single most useful thing anyone can do in any type of crisis – coronavirus-related or otherwise - is to: **focus on what’s in your control.**

You can’t control what happens in the future. You can’t control coronavirus itself or the world economy or how your government manages this pandemic. You can’t magically control your feelings, eliminating all that perfectly natural fear and anxiety. But you can control *what you do* - here and now. And that matters.

So during this crisis, when you experience an ‘emotional storm’ i.e. unhelpful thoughts spinning inside our head, and painful feelings whirling around our body, the most practical psychological step is to ‘drop anchor’, using the simple **ACE formula**:

A = Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings
C = Come back into your body
E = Engage in what you’re doing

Let's explore these one by one:

A = Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings

Silently and kindly acknowledge whatever is 'showing up' inside you: thoughts, feelings, emotions, memories, sensation, urges. Take the stance of a curious scientist, observing what's going on in your inner world.

And while continuing to acknowledge your thoughts and feelings, also

C = Connect with your body

Come back into and connect with your physical body. Find your own way of doing this. You could try some or all of the following, or find your own methods:

- Slowly pushing your feet hard into the floor.
- Walk barefoot outside
- Feel sunshine on your face for a minute
- Slowly straightening up your back and spine; if sitting, sitting upright and forward in your chair.
- Slowly pressing your fingertips together
- Slowly stretching your arms or neck, shrugging your shoulders.
- Slowly breathing

Note: you are not trying to turn away from, escape, avoid or distract yourself from what is happening in your inner world. The aim is to remain aware of your thoughts and feelings, continue to acknowledge their presence and at the same time, come back into and connect with your body, and actively move it. Why? So you can gain as much control as possible over your physical actions, even though you can't control your feelings.

E = Engage in what you're doing

Get a sense of where you are and refocus your attention on the activity you are doing.

Find your own way of doing this. You could try some or all of the following suggestions, or find your own methods:

- Look around the room and notice 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can touch, 2 things you can smell
- Be curious about what you are doing and give full attention to the task or activity at hand.
- Say something like "here I am - finishing this report from home today - I'm doing the best I can with what I've got"

COVID

C = Committed Action Committed action means effective action, guided by your core values; action you take because it's truly important to you.

Ask yourself 'What can I *do* right now - no matter how small it may be - that improves life for myself or others I live with, or people in my community?'

O = Opening up

Opening up means making room for difficult feelings and being kind to yourself. Difficult feelings are guaranteed to keep on showing up as this crisis unfolds: fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, guilt, loneliness, frustration, confusion, and many more. We can't stop them from arising; they're normal reactions. But we can open up and make room for them: acknowledge they are normal, allow them to be there (even though they hurt), and treat ourselves kindly.

V = Values

Committed action should be guided by your core values: What do you want to stand for in the face of this crisis? What sort of person do you want to be as you go through this? How do you want to treat yourself and others? Your values might include love, respect, humour, patience, courage, honesty, caring, openness, kindness etc. What can you say and do that will enable you to look back in years to come and feel proud of your response?

I = Identify resources

Identify resources for help, support and advice. This includes friends, family, neighbours, health professionals, emergency services. Make sure you know the emergency helpline phone numbers, including psychological help if required. If you have a Mental Health Care Plan from your GP, you are eligible for the new TeleHealth option which allows for you to have an appointment with your psychologist via telephone or FaceTime/Skype. Stay connected to your social networks and if you are able to offer support to others, let them know; you can be a resource for other people, just as they can be for you.

One very important aspect of this process involves finding a *reliable and trustworthy* source of information for updates on the crisis and guidelines for responding to it e.g. the World Health Organisation website. Avoid endlessly scrolling through social media as this can result in attentional bias and can trigger panic.

D = Disinfect & distance physically

Wash and disinfect your hands regularly. Practice social distancing as this is for the greater good of our community. And remember, we're talking about physical distancing – not cutting off emotionally. This is an important aspect of committed action, so align it deeply with your values; recognise that these are truly caring actions.

In Summary

So again and again and again, as you face challenges around you and emotional storms rage in within you, come back to the steps of FACE COVID:

F = Focus on what's in your control A = Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings C = Connect with your body E = Engage in what you're doing C = Committed action O = Opening up V = Values I = Identify resources D = Disinfect & distance

Reference:

Adapted from Dr R Harris (2020)



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