Self-Efficacy to Cope with Coronavirus

Just describing this time as “difficult” feels strangely inadequate. It’s the big things like the fact that people are dying, that loved ones are alone in nursing homes, that others have lost their only source of income. It’s also the smaller things like juggling kids and career, often as the rest of the world watches on Zoom. Even simple trips to the grocery store suddenly feel oddly intense. It’s only natural to feel powerless as the coronavirus shuts down our daily lives. **We are not in normal time, we are in pandemic time.**

None of us need any help identifying this time as stressful. But what can we do about it? How do we navigate and cope with our current stressful state? Researchers have shown that improving our "self-efficacy" may help. This is our confidence to perform well in a particular part of our life, like coping with a global pandemic. Here are four ways to build self-efficacy:

1. **Personal Mastery.** Our past experiences influence our confidence that we can perform the same task successfully today. Think of a seasoned teacher giving instruction to her students. She has done this so many times. She has confidence in her ability to do it again and will likely successfully teach. Although, no one has personal mastery dealing with a global pandemic, all of us have experienced times of great distress. How did we cope with those situations? It is important that we reflect on our past hard times, pick out the positive ways that we coped and apply them to today’s situation. **We all have mastery in our lives, let’s find it, remember it and apply it now.**

2. **Positive Modeling.** This is our observation of how other people have performed a task well. Modeling expands our own personal mastery and allows us to learn from others.

   We can talk with our social networks for best practices on how to successfully cope with COVID-19. Do you have children that you are now homeschooling on top of work? Ask your friends for tips of their most successful practices. Do you have anxiety around going to the supermarket? Learn what others have done to dampen those anxious feelings. Are you unemployed or under employed as a result of coronavirus? This is so hard and yet, again, **you are not alone.** Seek out others in the same position and actively pursue resources available to help you gain new employable skills and get financial assistance. **As we identify specific needs we have during this pandemic, we can seek out others who have dealt with it successfully and learn from them.**

3. **Coaching.** A coach teaches and inspires more novice learners to succeed at a task or in a life domain, like coping with COVID-19. Coaches guide us. They encourage us. We all need that persuasion and reassurance, especially now when the words “uncharted territory” are being told to us daily by our employers, governments and health officials. Although we are all learning about coronavirus together, so many of the parts of this pandemic- **the social isolation, the financial strain, the health fears- are not new and many people have insight and encouragement that they can offer us.** Additionally, each of us has an inner coach that can
We each have encouragement to offer and, the act of coaching will also improve our self-efficacy to battle coronavirus.

4. **Listening to our Bodies. Our bodies speak to us and, it is up to us to listen.** Your body might be saying “I have pain in my stomach.” Don’t be afraid to stop and focus on the bodily sensation and ask your body what it wants to say to you. As we listen closer, we might realize it is saying, “I have pain in my stomach because I am fearful about the pandemic.” Try to get to the core emotions of sadness, fear, anger, joy, excitement, sexual excitement and disgust. Sometimes simply acknowledging your body’s own contribution to your feelings and self-efficacy is enough to release the physical sensation (like stomach pain) and move on. Tools we can use to help acknowledge our body’s feedback include a good cry, sleep, meditation and prayer, journaling, talking it out and exercise. If none of these are helping, it’s a sign that professional help might be necessary. If that is the case, seek it out. Find that coach, find that model to build up your own personal mastery to interpret and walk through your emotions and physiologic feedback.

Improving our self-efficacy will look different for each of us. That’s because we all have different strengths and weaknesses. And this pandemic is not fair. Sometimes structural changes are needed to address the inequities and other challenges of this pandemic apart from our individual or collective ability to cope. The hope is that as we read the above and reflect, we are able to identify ways we can positively contribute our expertise and coaching abilities to our social networks and also seek out those around us that can cheer us on and model what we need- all while continuing to listen to our bodies and what they are trying to say to us. And when the dust settles, we can look into self-efficacy based programs (like the Chronic Disease Self-Management Program) in our area to continue our self-improvement.

Although self-efficacy is a personal attribute, it is very much influenced by those around us. We are in this together. We can help one another. We can offer what we have. We can learn from one another. **We can get through this together.**

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