

Safety, Predictability & Control in the Midst of COVID-19

Riverside Trauma Center's guiding principles of trauma-informed care, **safety, predictability, and control**, grow out of the knowledge that trauma is an overwhelming physiological response in which a person experiences a felt sense of vulnerability, loss of control, and immobilization.

For many people the current pandemic of COVID-19 is increasing these feelings in ourselves, our families, and the people we work with. Here are some ideas to increase a sense of safety, predictability, and control:

Safety

Physical Safety begins with following the guidelines on physical precautions recommended by credible sources such as the CDC. We can reduce the spread of COVID-19 by washing our hands and social/physical distancing for example. From a trauma-informed lens safety goes far beyond just physical safety, and includes:

- **Minimizing the harm** from things like of loss of income, delayed access to medical care (for other issues), loneliness, etc.
- **Reducing unnecessary sources of toxic stress.** For example, if media/ social media viewing is increasing your anxiety, consider limiting your exposure: Stick to credible sources and significantly reduce the frequency of checking social media.
- **Increasing a sense of internal and emotional safety** by engaging in healthy and fun self-care activities: yoga, mindfulness, living room dance parties, crafting, video games, hiking, whatever works for you.
- **Maintaining and fostering relational and social safety** is perhaps the most significant determinant of how people fare psychologically both during and after a potentially traumatic experience. Stay connected to your loved ones, even if physically distant. Reach out to your neighbors who might be isolated. Practice patience and kindness with the people you live with.

Predictability

Even as things in the wider world may feel chaotic and unpredictable, it is important consider ways to maintain or build structure and routine in your own life.

- What are the **rituals and routines** that you/your family consistently do? How can you maintain (or start) those during this time?
- What kind of **schedule** would you like to try to maintain during this time especially if you or your children are home? Discuss it with members of your household and write out a plan.
- What will help you feel as **organized** as possible in your own life? To-do lists? Setting goals?

***We may be vulnerable,
but we are not
powerless.***

Control

While so many things feel out of control right now, it can be helpful to think about what you do have control over.

- When we **help others**, we are foremost helping ourselves. What can you do to feel like you are helping? (E.g.; Write cards of encouragement to potentially isolated or vulnerable groups or letters of thanks to health care providers or first responders; hold or contribute to online fundraisers for those who are economically impacted, etc...)
- Is there a skill you want to learn? Another language? Playing an instrument? There's an app or a website that can help you. **Small islands of mastery** are a great way to help give you a little sense of control.
- Give yourself and your children **choices** (within a predictable structure) and **collaborate** on decision making.
- **Focus on your and your family's strengths.** What you focus on grows. Focusing on strengths can increase your sense of control in your own life as well as your sense of relational safety.