
Ditch Your COVID-19 ANXIETY



by
Taking 100%
Responsibility

an *advanced* mental
health technique

i-fearless
with DAVID STONE

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The coronavirus pandemic is challenging our ability to stay calm and focused. And the many tips about deep breathing, fresh air and limiting your exposure to the news will certainly help you cope with the stress. But if you want to go beyond mere coping and take your mental health to the next level, you need to adopt some more advanced techniques.

The first step to completely and permanently freeing yourself from worry and anxiety about COVID-19 (and anything else that stresses you) is to take 100 percent responsibility for how it is affecting you and your life.

Worry and anxiety are thoughts that we entertain **INSIDE** our minds.

The things that cause us to have these thoughts are always circumstances, events, people, etc. that are **OUTSIDE** and external to our minds.



Coronavirus is rampant and the economy is collapsing. There's a shortage of disinfectant wipes, flour and toilet paper. The government is delayed in getting relief checks out. . . All of this is happening **OUTSIDE** your mind.

IF ONLY THEY WOULD...

Because the things we worry and fret about are always out there in the physical world, external to our minds, we easily and conveniently develop the thinking habit that, "If only those circumstances would change, I wouldn't have to worry so much." So we complain about those circumstances and blame those we feel are or ought to be responsible for them.

- "If the government had responded more quickly we wouldn't be in this mess."
- "If they'd let businesses open back up I wouldn't feel so cooped up and stuck."

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- “If the big pharmaceuticals weren’t so profit-driven, we’d have a vaccine by now.”
- “Why can’t my (spouse) (kids) (parents) (roommate) understand that I need some space to myself?”

We spend an inordinate amount of time finding the culprits, passing judgment and placing blame on them for the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

And nothing changes. As long as we invest our time, our energy and our emotions in blaming and complaining about how things are, we will never be able to stop worrying and enjoy the peace of mind that we crave.



SURRENDERING YOUR POWER

As soon as you place the blame for your circumstances on someone else, you surrender all your power. As long as you believe that someone else’s behavior is responsible for your situation and emotional state, you have handed all your ability to change things over to them. Because unless they decide to change the way they’re acting, your situation will remain exactly the same.

Now, it’s pretty obvious that external conditions or someone else’s actions **HAVE** resulted in your circumstances. After all, **YOU** didn’t start this virus. And it **WAS** somebody else who bought up all the disinfectant. And it **IS** the government that’s imposing all the restrictions on your freedom of movement.

But expecting them to or insisting that they change the way they behave in order to please you, though, is a fool’s game. It’s simply not going to happen.

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It's both tempting and easy to blame foreigners, politicians or the health care system for whatever is happening around you. But it does you no good at all. Because, at the end of the day, it's you who is doing the worrying, you who is losing sleep and you who is suffering the high blood pressure. Since none of the rest of them are stepping up to bring an end to your anxiety, if it's going to happen, it's up to you.

Looking for others to provide the solutions to your problems distracts you and wastes your time and energy. It's far more effective to look for the solutions inside yourself. The pandemic is happening. By assuming 100% responsibility for what happens next, you take 100% of the power to resolve the problem for yourself.

We each have the ability to attract conditions and circumstances to ourselves through the thoughts we think, the images we hold in our minds and the behaviors we exhibit in the world. And we each create our moods, our successes, the quality of our relationships and our mental health by our thoughts and beliefs, the visual images, both actual and mental, that we focus on, the emotions they create and our actions. And we each have full and complete control over our thoughts and beliefs, the visual images on which we choose to focus and our actions.

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No one can tell you what to think, what to imagine or what to do. You always have a choice. Admittedly, sometimes the choice is between two bad options, but the fact is, you always have the choice. And in that fact lies your power.

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There is a simple formula that can help you understand and embrace this idea of taking 100% responsibility for whatever is happening in your life:

$$E + R = O$$

Event + Response = Outcome

An event takes place – an outbreak of COVID-19 sweeps the country, you're furloughed from your job, you're prohibited from going out and gathering with friends.

What happens next is entirely within your power to control. If you don't like the outcomes you've been getting up until now, which include sleepless nights and high blood pressure, you have two choices:

1. You can blame the event (E), for your circumstances and your anxiety.

This choice, however, leaves you powerless. All the ability to change your outcomes lie with others, the government, the doctors, the economy, your boss, your roommate, the alignment of the stars, if you want. And not one of them is offering to change things to please you.

2. You can change your response (R), to the event (E) until you get the outcome (O) you want.

It's helpful to define "events" as, "the way things are." In other words, the "event" is the fact that you're stuck inside while a pandemic rages and the economy is tanking.

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Millions of people are facing the same circumstances (events) that you are now facing. Some percentage of them have decided that they are powerless and destined to suffer whatever dire consequences this menace will dish out. They suffer the non-stop agony of acute anxiety.

But many others chose to take the power into their own hands. They've changed their thinking, they've changed their communication, they've changed the pictures they're holding in their heads. And mentally and emotionally, they're thriving.

Let's take a look at some examples of the 'events' that are unfolding and see how the two choices might play out.

You've just come back from the grocery store where they made you wait in line to enter, there was no toilet paper and people were ignoring social distancing guidelines

Choice #1: You phone your like-minded neighbor and spend an hour commiserating about how terrible it all is. During the call the two of you cite six other ways in which life has become far more inconvenient. You pour yourself a stiff drink in order to calm your nerves and spend a restless night certain that your throat is feeling a bit sore and you've got a fever coming on.



Choice #2: You remind yourself that we're all in this together and everyone is doing the best they can. You feel gratitude for the dedicated grocery store staff as you put away all the food and supplies that they worked so hard to have available. You cook a healthy meal and then climb into bed and sleep like a baby.

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Your company just announced that the furloughs will continue for at least another month.

Choice #1: You instantly begin to tell yourself stories about how this is likely the end of your career and how hard it is for someone your age to start over. You catastrophize about never being able to find another job, your savings being drained and pushing a shopping cart down the street as you live on cat food. You have too many beers at dinner and spend the night with an upset stomach and a headache.



Choice #2: You feel gratitude for the bit of money you've put away for a rainy day (if this isn't a rainy day, what is?). You recall all the news stories you've been reading lately about why 50+ can be the best age to start a business. You have an open conversation with your spouse and let them know that you're kinda scared and you're going to need to support each other through this. Then you decide to get serious about launching that online course about building wooden boats that you've been promising to do for years.

Your spouse, your children and your dog are driving you up the wall

Choice #1: You begin to snipe at them and even pick fights because you need some relief from the boredom. You blame them for pushing your sensitivity buttons and slam the door on your way out of the room. You have no patience with your son who's broken down in tears because he hasn't seen his girlfriend in two months.



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Choice #2: You call the family together and have an open and safe conversation about the stress that everyone is feeling. You set the tone and clear the air by apologizing for any of the things you've said or done that has caused them stress or annoyance. Together you brainstorm about ways you can avoid stepping on each other's toes during this time of too much togetherness. The next grocery run includes ice cream and their favorite pizza.

CHOOSING THE LEAST WORST OPTION

There are times when none of the choices you have are appealing. For example, in the early days of the great recession, I was unable to make the mortgage payments on a house that I was trying to sell. The bank foreclosed and I went through about five years of rebuilding my credit rating.

At the time, though, I had some choices, none of which were good. I needed money and had exhausted every legitimate resource I could think of. So my remaining choices included:

- Getting drunk, complaining about my bad luck or bad treatment and worrying about what was going to happen
- Robbing a bank
- Defrauding or conning someone
- Defaulting on my mortgage

In this case I chose the “least-worst” option and settled in to work my way back out of the hole in which I found myself.

Right now, most of our options are lousy and none of the choices we're left with are appealing. But this is an opportunity to think about how we want to show up during this crisis. We all see ourselves as caring and resilient. Here's the chance to prove it. Which is much more productive than looking for someone or some circumstance to blame. And which is entirely within your control.

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YOU ALWAYS HAVE A CHOICE ABOUT YOUR ATTITUDE

Even when all your choices are bad, the last choice you always have is your attitude. You may have heard of Victor Frankl. He was a Jewish psychiatrist in Austria in the years leading up to WW2.

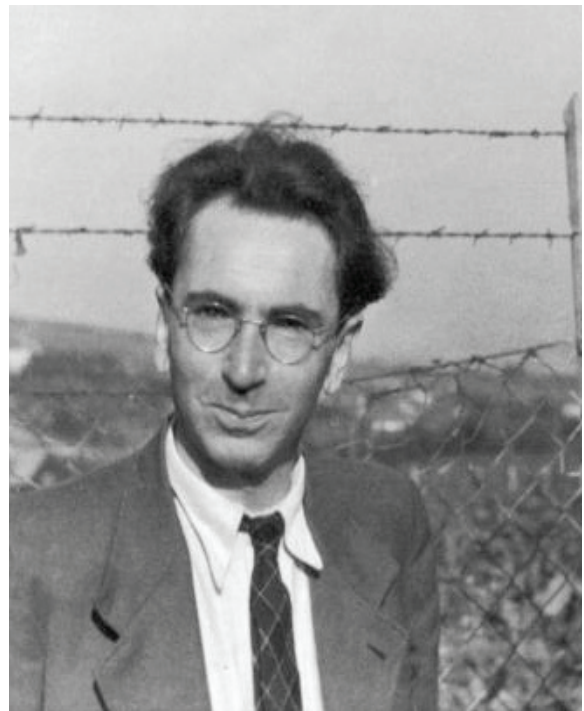
As with millions of his faith, he ended up in a concentration camp in the most horrendous conditions possible with people dying all around him.

It makes coronavirus look like a spa vacation.

Frankl, however, made a decision. He decided that no one would own his spirit and he chose to find meaning and purpose. He discovered that those people who chose hope survived longer and, following the war he wrote a book about his experiences that has become a classic: *Man's Search For Meaning*.

The choices in front of you may not be great and choosing A over B may land you in water that is only slightly less hot. Make the best choice you can under the circumstances, then own that choice! And maybe that choice is to change your attitude about the circumstances.

You always have a choice about your attitude. Resent the restrictions or change your mind about them. Damage your relationships or change your mind about how you show up in them.



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Let's face it – life HAS handed us a sour one. But the more we resent and fight against our current “what is,” the harder we push against it, the more “what is” will push back. The more you protest that it's not fair or right, the more you'll discover that “what is” is bigger and stronger than you. The more you worry, the higher your blood pressure and the more unhappy you become. Meanwhile, nothing changes.

When you relax and accept our current situation for what it is, though, you regain the power to choose your response and influence your outcomes to those that are much better suited to your preferences.

This coronavirus “event” (E), is out of your control. The “response” (R), is 100% yours to choose. The “outcome” (O) becomes yours to determine.



About David Stone

David is a transformational teacher and leader, dedicated to helping people overcome the anxieties, worries and self-doubts that keep us all from achieving our highest potential.

Fed up with the fear, anxiety and self-doubt that got in the way of the life he wanted to live, he set out to find a better way. Now he shares what he's learned through books, workshops, online courses, keynotes and blogs.

He's an inspiring and engaging speaker and change agent. He has a gift for making tough topics accessible and helping people enjoy the expansion of their comfort zones. He firmly believes that your parachute can't open till after you've jumped out of the plane.