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How to Manage Your Mental Health in the Face of Coronavirus Uncertainty

By Kelly Banas, LPC
 Triad EAP Provider
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As a result of COVID-19, our world is currently living in a moment of deep uncertainty, fear and confusion. We fear for the health of our loved ones, those who are immunocompromised, those who are elderly, those who are working in hospitals and clinics, and those who can't afford to stay home due to the nature of their work or (lack of) benefits.

Some of us face these fears looking at the circumstances of our own lives as well. It seems each day brings a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how serious the situation has become.

In a matter of seven days in the United States, we've gone from an awareness of COVID-19 as a growing epidemic oceans away to one which has spread rapidly through concentrated communities on both coasts and in the midwest of our own country, taking on pandemic status as it continues its spread worldwide. The quarantined status of Italy has begun to look more like a future possibility for our lives in the United States and many other countries rather than an unrelatable sacrifice of epic proportions.

In this new reality, many of us cognitively understand what is happening, the precautions we must take collectively, the altruism required to "flatten the curve" of pandemic spread and reduce the likelihood of gravely overwhelming medical systems

all at once.

As our daily (even hourly, given our rapid news cycle) collective consciousness and awareness of what COVID-19 entails grows, our individual and global anxiety is also spiking massively. As a licensed mental health therapist, I'd like to offer some thoughts on how, in this time where heightened anxiety seems unavoidable, we can calmly, confidently and courageously manage our mental health and wellness.

Let it RAIN

[Tara Brach](#), Ph.D., Psychologist and Meditation teacher, provides the helpful acronym of RAIN to mindfully and compassionately address difficult emotions, circumstances and thought patterns. While I've used her acronym many times myself and with my clients through the years, I find it particularly apt for this moment we're in. The four parts of a RAIN practice can be done individually, or with a partner or therapist and are as follows:

R- Recognize what is happening, right now; simply name it. You may recognize a feeling (anxiety) an unhelpful thought (related to fears, work, loved ones, the government, etc.) or a bodily sensation (chest tightness, knots in the stomach, headache, racing mind). By slowing down enough to be able to name what is happening right now,

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 Available M-F
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 Crisis help available
 after hours and
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WHAT IS AN EAP

An employee assistance program is designed to assist employees with personal problems and/or work-related issues that may impact their job performance, health, mental and emotional

CONFIDENTIAL HELP

Triad is bound by strict privacy standards. The only information your employer sees is statistical and demographic data – no names or identifying details are given.

Triad EAP's network of licensed counselors are highly qualified, credentialed professionals with expertise in various areas.

Through These Tough Times, Triad EAP Will Be Here For You

By Amy Weitzel
 Triad EAP

Last week we met to strategize what would happen when COVID-19 made an appearance in Colorado. We had no idea that we would be full-speed ahead with that plan by Monday morning. As organizations are planning how to handle the potential physical, mental and financial fallout as coronavirus cases are being confirmed each day, Triad EAP has already been working behind the scenes to strengthen our already strong infrastructure. Here's what that looks like today.

Provider network: We already have a telehealth network in place. What this means is that we provide counseling via a secure teleconferencing platform that is HIPAA compliant. We are encouraging more of our counselors to adopt this practice to practice social distancing. Counseling guidelines in the past have required that certain clients are seen solely in a face-to-face format including marriage clients or children. However, in the interest of social responsibility, Triad is leaving that to the discretion of the counselor. If counselors are still choosing to see clients face to face, we are asking counselors and clients to adhere to the following guidelines: Reschedule the appointment if anyone has symptoms of or has potentially been exposed to someone who has COVID-19. Symptoms include fever, cough, or shortness of breath. Also, since people can be asymptomatic for up to two weeks, if you believe you have come in to contact with someone who has COVID-19, we ask that appointments be rescheduled. If someone has visited a medical facility, traveled in an affected area, or have come in to contact with someone who has in the last two weeks, please reschedule the appointment.

Website: The Triad website has current information from reputable sources such as the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO). There is also a link with an interactive world



map showing locations where the disease has spread and information from the Colorado Department of Health. You can also find information that we have sent to our Provider Network relating to best practices during this unprecedented time.

Webinars: For our legal-financial and work-life clients we have a pre-recorded webinar available called "Build Psychological Immunity During the Coronavirus Breakout." This week, we have a live webinar available for all EAP clients called "Keep Calm and Carry On: Maintaining Your Composure During a Pandemic Panic." To register for this webinar, head to the Triad website, and find the registration link under the Coronavirus Info tab.

Coming up, Triad will also have live webinars available for all clients during various times. You can register for these webinars with attendance capped at 100 attendees. Amy Weitzel, Vice President of Development, and Marti Montoya, Clinical Director, will be discussing EAP benefits and how to maintain resiliency during these uncertain times. If you cannot attend, each session will be recorded and you can watch at a later date. Be watching your emails for details about these webinars.

Ongoing Communications

Our DIY (Do It Yourself) Newsletter typically comes out every quarter. We are shifting this to every other week over the course of the next few months to assist employees who may be self-isolating or struggling in other ways due to COVID-19 and the impact it could have on our mental health. If you have a suggestion you'd like to see us cover in DIY, please contact myself (amyw@triadeap.com) or Kenra Haftel (kenrah@triadeap.com).

Stay healthy and safe during this time. We are here to support you – we are in this together. You are not alone.

(Let it RAIN ... Continued from page 1)

you begin to take some control of the narrative of what is happening, when everything else around you feels out of control. You can practice this step by speaking aloud what you notice, mental identification, or by writing it down.

A- Allow whatever is happening to be here without restricting, avoiding or trying to move past it. “It makes sense that I am anxious right now, and I allow anxiety to be here” — is an example of a phrase that you can speak or write to signify your allowance of the current state you are in. Sometimes our prolonged experiences of painful emotions are exacerbated because we try to fight what’s happening. When we allow ourselves to fully feel what we are experiencing in the present moment, we can often move through the sensation more quickly. When we fight it, resist it and avoid it, it just keeps coming up, often more powerfully each time. When we allow for the existence of a painful sensation, feeling or emotion, we create a new way to relate to it.

I- Investigate with care what you’ve recognized and allowed to be present. More than likely, there is a vulnerability being expressed through your current emotional state. Without judgment, ask questions internally, aloud, or on paper to more deeply understand that vulnerability. Brach suggests the following questions for inquiry: *What most wants attention? How am I experiencing this in my body? What am I believing? What does this vulnerable place want from me? What does it most need?*

N- Nurture with Self-Compassion — You’ve done the hard work of pressing into what’s happening by identifying it, allowing it to be there, and investigating it further. Now, offer yourself compassion for looking inward, for sitting with a painful emotion in order to learn from it rather than react to it. You’ve discovered more about the part of you that is anxious, scared or hurting. Now offer it kindness, gentleness and love. As in previous steps, you might continue to speak aloud, write or simply mentally identify phrases that offer self-compassion. Some example phrases might be “I offer myself love and care in the fear I feel right now” or “I’m here for you. I’m here for myself no matter what happens.”

RAIN will not change COVID-19’s impact on your life, your business, or the health of your loved ones. But it will offer you a chance to understand your reactions, to slow them down and to become more responsive to the true need beneath them that is fueling anxiety or any other emotion you’re encountering.

Just as we want to slow the spreading of the germs that cause COVID-19, we also want to slow the spreading of our emotional reactivity to it, to create space between the anxious thoughts to truly understand them with insight and awareness.

Kelly Banas, LPC, is a counselor in Gunnison, CO.



Cleaning during the Coronavirus Outbreak:

We can do a lot to help slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus. As we hunker down and limit our exposure to public places it is also a great time to deep clean your home, vehicle and office workspaces.

Cleaning vs. Disinfecting vs. Sanitizing

- **Cleaning** refers to the removal of germs, dirt and impurities from surfaces. Cleaning does not kill germs, but by removing them, it lowers their numbers and the risk of spreading infection.
- **Disinfecting** refers to using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces. This process does not necessarily clean dirty surfaces or remove germs, but by killing germs on a surface *after* cleaning, it can further lower the risk of spreading infection.
- **Sanitizing**: a substance, or mixture of substances, that reduces the bacteria population in the inanimate environment by significant numbers, but does not destroy or eliminate all bacteria.

Make a routine cleaning of frequently touched surfaces (for example: tables, doorknobs, light switches, handles, desks, toilets, faucets, sinks) with household cleaners and EPA-registered disinfectants. For disinfection, diluted household bleach solutions, alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective. To see a complete list of EPA-registered disinfectants that are capable of killing the virus visit:

<https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>

Contact Time: For many products the difference between sanitizing and disinfecting comes down to how long the solution is in contact with the surface. The EPA product list has the contact times needed for each product to function as a disinfectant. For many products that claim to work as a disinfectant the contact time required can be anywhere from 5—10 minutes. Read the labels, check the EPA registry and let’s do what we can to annihilate this virus.