

STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH ANXIETY AND "NOT-KNOWING"

From MassArt Counseling And Wellness

The most important thing we can do to take care of our mental and emotional wellbeing during moments of uncertainty is: stay grounded in the present-moment.

Anxiety and fear want us to focus on the future. The what-if, what-if, what-if...

Some strategies for supporting yourself coming back-to or staying grounded in the present-moment, include: grounding skills, breathing, and addressing concrete, immediate needs.

Grounding techniques are simple strategies to help:

- Stay in the present-moment
- Reduce "spaceyness" and perseverating on fear
- Cope with anxiety
- Reduce physical and emotional reactivity
- Return to the space where we can engage in problem solving and supporting each other

Mental Grounding Techniques:

- Remind yourself that you are here, in this moment. Remind yourself what time it is, what date it is, who is around you.
- State to yourself: "I am in the present," "I can handle this," "I am in control right now," "This feeling will pass"
- Name three things that you can see, smell, hear and feel in the moment. Do this internally or out-loud
- Looking around the room you are in and intentionally notice: colors, people, the shape and size of things. State to yourself or someone you feel safe with: "I am here."

Physical Grounding Techniques:

- Stamp your feet on the ground or press your feet into the floor and focus on the sensation of being rooted on the ground
- Notice the chair you are sitting in. Sit up straight and press your spine into the back of the chair. Notice how your body is fully supported by the chair. Nothing to change, nothing to fix.

- Massage your hands or wrap a scarf or Jacket around you so that you feel physically contained, held.
- Engage your five senses: smell lotion that you like, essential oils, or citrus fruit; listen to soothing music; draw yourself a safe space or image or person you love
- Remember that your B R E A T H is a resource available to you at all times

A note on effective breathing: deep breathing can help reset anxiety and fear

- Deep Belly Breathing:
 - Place a hand on your lower belly and take slow, deep breaths so that your hands get pushed out when you inhale and then fall into your contracting stomach when you exhale.
 - See if you can make your exhale longer than your inhale
 - Repeat for at least 6-breath cycles, in & out
- Left Nostril Breathing:
 - Cover the right nostril and breathe deeply in the same manner as previously stated only through the left nostril. In Eastern medicine the left side is the yin (cooling, feminine) side and breathing through this side only is calming to the nervous system

Addressing concrete, immediate needs, services and actions is also essential in coping with fear and anxiety. *This is NOT the time to be focusing or processing feelings. Processing feelings is most effective and containing after the uncertainty has been resolved.*

We are in this together. You are not alone.