

Advocate Aurora Health

Employee Assistance Program

Keeping Ourselves Healthy

Adapted from Bessel Vander Kolk, PhD

Throughout decades of trauma work and research, we have learned more about what could be considered **preconditions of trauma**. Specifically, areas within our lives we have learned are equally important to attend to stay healthy, amidst situations that might otherwise be considered traumatic.

The following are normal experiences we may notice as we cope with acute or prolonged stress, along with strategies to minimize any lasting impact:

- **Vulnerability** – *Feelings of being exposed, faced with uncertain or unpredictable outlook*

Consider creating a calendar, daily and for a longer term, making plans wherever we can. Include social, emotional and physical plans (even virtually) with dates to look forward to, as well detailing daily schedules and practicing consistent routines to foster our sense of control.

- **Immobility** – *A sense of wanting to DO something but we just can't*

Our bodies will want to react with fight/flight; honor this (fight) energy and do something constructive. Our stress hormones can be self-regulated with breathing exercises, yoga, exercise and or projects.

- **Isolation** – *Feeling of being physically or emotionally disconnected*

We all naturally need to be seen, heard and given attention. Consider the power of voices and faces as we consider creative outlets to play games, share eating/drinking times, or checking in with others.

- **Desire to numb ourselves** – *We may want to avoid unknown or uncomfortable feelings*

We need to feel alive in our physical bodies. Notice what you are going through, by way of meditation or mindful moments and simply share your experiences with others. The time and attention required to check in with our body, label, and share with someone, will automatically serve to reset that emotion.

- **Loss of sense of time** – *Feeling like you might be drifting, without certain end in sight*

Adversity and stress can feel heavy and long lasting. Tuning in to the normal sequence of nature, hours of sunlight, temperatures and bodily physical sensations will increase our self-awareness and increase our tolerance for what feels endless internally.

- **Loss of safety** – *Becoming more aware of physical and emotional safety*

Explore what makes us feel safe both inside and out. Privacy is needed at times, space away from others to retreat for a time can help us refuel, especially if we have others depending on us. For others, reassuring physical touch can otherwise serve as a good grounding strategy.

For additional information, please contact Advocate Aurora Health EAP at 800-236-3231 or visit aah.org/eap.