

**Presbyterian Disaster Assistance
Emotional and Spiritual Care Tips
Spring/Summer 2020**

4-7-8- breathing

Close your mouth and with tongue touching soft palate beside upper front teeth, inhale quietly through your nose to a (silent) count of four. Hold your breath for a count of seven. Exhale audibly through your mouth to a count of eight. This equals one breath cycle. Complete four cycles, then breathe normally. *What is important is the ratio of 4-7-8 for inhale, hold, exhale. You will be able to slow it down, which is desirable. Do it at least twice a day.* [Dr. Andrew Weil. www.drweil.com] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRPh_GaiL8s

Releasing Ritual

Design a ritual for the end of the day in which you release to God's care the people, concerns or situations that feel incomplete, worrisome or demanding of more attention.

- You might write the list of those on a piece of paper, fold it, and place it in a special container on your desk or somewhere in your home with a commitment to leave it there until tomorrow.
- You might doodle or create colors on a page to express the feelings you have of frustration or fear or trouble letting go of.
- In the morning, you can return to paper to bring fresh energy, or you may find you have released the concerns sufficiently to move on in new ways.

Centering Prayer

An ancient and beloved spiritual practice that might serve us well in these days of developing new ways of being present to others is the Centering Prayer. It can be a way of recalling the ground of our being and being fully present to the Divine at any point in our day.

Sit comfortably erect, feet on floor, hands on your lap, eyes closed or almost closed. Allow a word or phrase that soothes you come to you. It might be a word like peace, hope, joy, love, or a phrase such as "peace like a river" or "the honey of loving-kindness." Create your own phrase.

Repeat that word or phrase over and over in your mind until you come to a place of stillness and are not focused on anything outward. If people or things come to your mind, release them lightly and allow them to move on.

Take as much time as you can for this, starting with 3-4 minutes and adding time as it works for you. You can set a gentle chime or timer to gently draw your awareness back to your presence, or end the tie of centering prayer as it naturally occurs.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Many of us carry stress in our bodies without being aware of it. A time-honored technique that can help relaxation in body and mind is the intentional practice of progressive muscle relaxation.

The process is to tighten your muscle groups as firmly as you can, then release them slowly, consciously letting go of all the tension they hold. Be sure to breathe as you relax each muscle group. You may choose to include a prayer word as you breathe, such as peace, calm, love. Begin with your facial muscles, moving to neck, then shoulders and back, downward to upper arms, lower arms, wrists, hands and fingers, then downward to torso, then pelvic area, and on to thighs, calves, ankles, feet, toes. When you finish, pause to note how you feel and savor the experience.

Being Kind and Compassionate- To Yourself!

In these ever shifting, unpredictable times of virtual worship services and pastoral care, home schooling, working from home, and doing our best to stay healthy and keep others healthy, we are all learning as we go. Most of us are making a few mistakes along the way. A common theme in the emotional and spiritual care wisdom being shared in these days is to be as compassionate and kind to *ourselves* as we strive to be with others.

We will stumble from time to time, and we can accept the reality that we may not be as patient as we'd like to be, or as competent as we wish we could be (fill in your own goals for yourself here). Yet we can learn, let go and move on, as an important form of self-care. We'll start over again tomorrow as we do our best, treating ourselves with kindness, forgiveness and compassion.

Getting Grounded

If stress is getting the better of you, or when you find your focus slipping away from what you are trying to accomplish, try a grounding exercise. One type involves using our hands or feet to touch something and focus on that physical contact.

- Find something with some texture to it—a pen or pencil, paper clip, a coin in your pocket, your clothing, a chair, or sofa.

- Let your fingers quickly and quietly explore the object.
- Invite your mind to attend to what you are physically touching: notice the size, shape, texture, etc.
- You may also use your feet to tap the floor or bump against the chair.
- This simple exercise of intentional touching and noticing can usually bring you back into a more focused and alert state quickly.

A Peaceful Place with a Wisdom Figure

Imagine yourself in a place that is restful, peaceful, relaxing. It might be the swing on a beloved family member's porch, the beach, a favorite park. Take yourself there fully in your imagination: listen to the sounds; smell the scents; feel the quality of the air on your skin; notice the movements and stillness. Then imagine that you are sitting with someone who has been a wisdom figure in your life: a pastor, a family member, a friend, a teacher. Tell this person what's happening with you, where you are with it, what your longings are. Feel free to ask your wisdom figure a question or for help. Listen for a response and take some time to reflect on this experience.

Gratitude

Regularly reflecting on and writing about what we are grateful for can improve our sense of well-being, increase our resilience and enhance our awareness of being connected to God. Consider making a habit of taking a gratitude walk. It can be done in a minute as you walk from one room to another or on a longer walk outside. Walk as slowly as you can.

When you look, listen, touch, and smell, be especially receptive to sights, sounds, sensations, and smells that you perceive as beautiful or awe-inspiring. Be receptive to observing things that elicit in your heart a sense of wonder, joy, or peace. Be willing to practice saying "thank you" silently as you notice all that is around you and whatever comes to mind for which you are grateful.

A prayer for this and all seasons of life [Thomas Merton, 1915–1968]

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore, I will trust you always, though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.