

## **Cultivating a trauma informed and compassionate presence, as leaders and community members**

Here are some thoughts and strategies I've been using that are trauma informed, and that have supported me to show up as a compassionate presence, with clients and colleagues, as well as with my family and friends. Some of this has been directly inspired by correspondence with one of my mentors/teachers Marian Mason-Martinou.

### **As you read, consider if this might be useful to foster resilience within yourself, your family, community, and/or to share with clients**

1. Viewing the health emergency from the lens of trauma. Much of what is conveyed in the media about COVID19, social and otherwise, falls into one or another version of fear activation – this could be a flight reaction (avoidant, detached, downplaying), a fight reaction (panic, hoard, fret), or freeze (don't know what to do, feel stuck and powerless). This is understandable. And each person we encounter, whether it is a client, colleague, or family member, whatever their reaction may be, deserves to be met with respect and care - especially ourselves! As a clinician/staff member it is vitally important to gauge our own reactions, and treat ourselves with respect and care.

Remembering that folks who have experienced trauma in the past can/will re-experience (fear, doubt, abandonment, loss) as a result of the changes this health emergency is requiring.

2. I'd like to suggest a response to this emergency, for ourselves and for others, that seeks to come from an educated, compassionate, courageous and proactive stance. For this we need to hold multiple perspectives and integrate multiple feelings.

### **Practices we can share that support the holding of multiple perspectives and integrating multiple feelings:**

BE PRESENT WITH WHAT IS. We need to remember that doing everything possible to stay or return to a regulated, calm, present state is of the utmost importance. When we notice someone in distress, we can lend them our regulated nervous system, and vice versa. Telling someone not to be fearful doesn't work. Offer empathy, and a listening ear. Allow their sharing to touch that in you which also feels fear. Feel it. Let it move through and be acknowledged rather than be stifled. Be with, rather than against.

And then look for creative ways forward, even just the smallest step or gesture. Making a shopping list, understanding how much food or supplies we will need for a week or two to avoid multiple grocery trips (as finances allow). Calling family members more isolated than we are. Reaching out for support and contacting community resources for basic needs.

Be aware of how you speak of this unfolding event and to whom. Be especially attentive to how you portray it to children and youth. Theirs is the world to explore and adventure forth into. Let us keep circles of sanity, laughter and decency alive as much as possible. Let us listen for what they are ready to hear and can integrate without falling into added anxiety and despair. Speak from a stance of listening and calm.

Create rather than React. I find that taking in too much information without acting on it can overwhelm our systems and shut us down. We need to stay attentive to balancing the intake of info, the consumption of news, with being creative, with engaging in ways forward. This could be as simple as every time you hear some worrisome news, you light a candle and send thoughts and support to the world, to the most vulnerable, to the decision makers and leaders.

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