

Finding and Creating Normal

Jared Whitmire M.S.

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I am feeling somewhat strange, reaching out to all of you in this format. Yet, during this time, writing may be another way to connect with the community as a therapist. Firstly, it has been a pleasure to see so many families work together and face the challenges that currently face us. Also, as individuals, we all may encounter unique challenges due to COVID-19, but as a collective, we are together in this effort to find normal. Normal—I would like to keep that in mind, but if we can, let us put that aside for the moment. Instead, I would like to talk about something called the “rippling effect.” The “rippling effect” is a term I first read described by Irvin Yalom, a writer, and therapist who has had a significant influence on me, and now I would like to share this with you.

The “rippling effect” is when each of us affects one another consciously or unbeknownst to us throughout our lives. Spend a moment to think about tossing a rock into a pond. As the rock enters the water, it quickly submerges, creating a sound before it slowly vanishes from view. Although the rock is gone, the water continues to rise and fall, gently pushing the water toward the shores.

I wonder with the time we have collectively— if we can share with others the influence they have had on our lives. Spend a moment communicating to loved ones, friends, and acquaintances the waves they have created in your life. As a therapist, I can honestly say witnessing people rise up to personal challenges, circumstances, and life changes have certainly left a positive effect on me. Change is rarely easy, and we must keep that in mind when we face our most recent challenge. We may be socially distant, but maybe others are still affecting us in another way.

Finding normal

Shift your attention to what you can control, not what is outside of your control. It is not hyperbolic to say COVID-19 is changing a lot for many of us. However, if we focus on what has changed and ignore what can still feel normal—we are not doing ourselves any favors. I was taken aback by the stories I have heard of people reaching out and celebrating with one another in creative ways.

Create when facing boredom

Rollo May argued that boredom is something we must all learn to face in childhood. Now that our world has, in some ways, shrunk—it has also created a space for everyone to explore something meaningful. The challenge is finding meaning in something and not to judge it. What one finds meaningful could be something profound or possibly something small. Whatever pursuit or activity you find only matters in that you have found it meaningful.

Enjoy being outside when you can

It is essential to be socially distant, but at the same time go for a walk, take a run, sit in nature, take in all that is around you at that moment. Also, take time for yourself to do this alone. I can imagine a thought begins to appear when you think of this— “Where do I have the time to do this.” If this is you, which being fair, sometimes it is me as well! Maybe we do this for 5 minutes and make the most of that time.

