

12 Gentle Reminders for Self-Care and Wellness

We are living in uncertain times, and we work in a demanding sector with repeated exposure to trauma and even violence. All of this can easily compound the stress that we already feel from the nature and intensity of the work we do. Here are 12 gentle reminders for these stressful times.

1. There are no wrong or right feelings in times such as these; you may feel a myriad of feelings and be gentle with them. They will come up and stay – honour them, give them names, and breathe.
2. Notice how are you feeling; write it down, share it, or name it silently or out loud to yourself. We all process feelings differently.
3. Move your bodies in whatever way feels good and nourishing – walking, running, stretching, at the gym, or on the land – out in nature.
4. Feelings of stress and anxiety and ultimately of not “feeling safe” may stir conscious or unconscious memories of past times in your life when you didn’t feel safe. Notice it – name it – suspend judgement. All feelings are okay.
5. Anxiety likes to trick us into thinking that if we “have all the information” or “more information” that THEN we will alleviate our uncomfortable feelings, but really, they just make us feel more anxious. Notice when you need a break from talking about it, reading about it, etc.
6. Focus on anchors for yourself – routines that are based in connection with yourself or with others. Anchors can include your morning coffee/tea, calling a friend or family member on the way home from work, taking your pet for a walk, tending to your plants, etc.
7. Know that this feeling or worry about safety will exacerbate past feelings of not being safe for those that we work with as well.
8. Since most of us are living right now in the feeling part of our brain, it can be very difficult to access the thinking part. Remember to learn or teach, we must feel safe first.
9. Remember clients are ALWAYS listening, wondering, and ALWAYS asking two questions: Am I safe here? Am I wanted here? Help narrate discussions of this for your clients and for your own families.

10. Clients don't say "geez I sense a lot of tension and things have changed and I am scared, sad, confused, worried." Instead, they demonstrate these thoughts and feelings with their behaviors. They melt down, they become demanding or argumentative. This is normal, while not fun, it is okay. They are just saying please someone **help organize** what's happening and see my feelings. By the way, we do the same; hence people arguing over shopping carts and toilet paper. So, apply this also to everyone you work with, your family, friends, neighbours, and yourself.
11. Breathe. First, remember to breathe and then explore different breathing exercises until you find the one that feels right for you.
12. Recite a mantra "It will all work out" "I can do hard things" "I am calm" "I am healthy" – whatever you can think of. The biggest reminder though is to allow space for your feelings and the feelings of those you are working with - no need "to do" but rather just be.

(Adapted from Leah Niezwaag, LCSW, IMH-E® Gentle Reminders.)

