



Crossroads Counseling Services, LLC

Prompt, Professional, and Courteous

- Individual and Family Therapy
- Substance Abuse Counseling
- Medication Management

In the words of Ferris Bueller, life moves pretty fast...

How different our world looked three months ago, a week ago, yesterday. We all sit here trying to process and wrap our brains around an extremely, incomprehensible series of events. Now, I am no expert on zoonotic diseases or molecular biology, politics or conspiracy theories, but what I do know is mental health. As a therapist with over 20 years' experience, I know all about mood disorders, whether it be anxiety or depression. I know about the ramifications of trauma. I know the struggles of watching your loved one battle addiction. I know what it is like to feel afraid and out of control. The current state of our world will undoubtedly have a significant impact on us all. So, what do we do? What do we do right now, in the very midst of this occurring all around us?

Here are my two cents for ways to navigate these stressful times:

- 1) Breathe – Too often we forget to take in intentional oxygen. As you read this right now, inhale deeply through your nose for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, exhale through your mouth for 4 seconds and rest for 4 seconds. This is known as “Four Square Breathing”. This is a great, portable coping mechanism. Our breath is always with us. It naturally relaxes the body. It’s a great way to re-center and connect to the present moment.
- 2) Mindfulness – I love everything about mindfulness. Now trust me, you can be the average Joe and practice mindfulness. All too often, there is an underlying assumption that you have to be some sort of Zen Master-in-training to get this concept. Essentially mindfulness is paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment without judging something that is happening in everyday life. It is the practice of being aware and present. Really living in the here and now. With all that is happening presently, how many of us are lost for hours on our cell phones or other electronic devices? We especially need balance now! We need to protect our brains from becoming overwhelmed with the barrage of incoming information (or misinformation!). Mindfulness also includes formal practice or meditation. But again, don’t be scared away by “meditation”. This comes in many forms. Give it a try! Great mindfulness sites include mindful.org. Some great apps to download on your phone include Headspace, Calm, Insight Timer, Breethe, Smiling Minds, Aura
- 3) Process your feelings – Social Media is lit up currently. Everyone needs a place to put their feelings, questions, thoughts, and opinions. Utilize your platforms wisely. Trusted friends and loved ones may be a better place to process your emotions. There is a number of therapeutic benefits from the ability to “process your feelings”. We all get that “feel good” state after a really good conversation with someone. Better outlets outside of social media include actual dialogue with others (as we practice “social distancing” of course!) or journal your feelings. It’s important to not stuff those feeling inside. Encourage your loved ones (especially children that may really not have a full understanding) to share their feelings. Identification and validation of feelings is an ongoing theme in therapy.

- 4) Find humor – We all get this is no laughing matter, but it is imperative to keep humor and joy present in our daily lives. Tell a joke, be goofy, play during this time. I've read countless articles that speak to the validity of humor and improved overall mental health. Laughter releases the "feel good" neurotransmitters: dopamine, serotonin, and an array of endorphins. We all can use a bit more of this positive brain boost!
- 5) Safety in Numbers - We are all universally suffering on this front in some degree. We are all in the same boat. There is something comforting in knowing that we are "all in this together". If at any time in history we've need to be on the same "team", this is the time. Keeping this mind set is extremely helpful if we are feeling isolated and lost. Community and Unity should be our goal. Let's come together to support each other. We need to assist one another in easing the anxiety and emotional pain.
- 6) Reach out to loved ones – Check in! Be present with your loved ones. Ask how they are doing. Process some feelings. Take advantage of this time to connect with those relationships that matter. Or take advantage of this time to build or repair relationships. We all need one another (see above!)
- 7) Resiliency – One thing I consistently learn in this profession, is humans are resilient! History has shown over and over, that we can take a punch and keep coming back. "This too will pass" is one of those phrases repeatedly popping in my head. This is certainly not an attempt to minimize our situation, but certainly a realistic (and necessary thought) to alleviate the "doom and gloom" mentality that can be enormously consuming right now.
- 8) BE KIND!!! – Please, Please, Please, be kind! Panic breeds panic. Too many times, the feelings of being out of control lends to outrageous, entitled, and/or ugly behavior. We get that people are on edge and may not be the best "behaved" during scary times, but this is a time to be especially mindful of who we are and how we treat others. Tap into your own integrity. We can use a catastrophic event and turn it into an opportunity to do good and treat people well. The one thing we DO have control over currently is how we are as people and how we treat others. Reflect on who you are.

I hope the above is helpful in some way! If you are really feeling overwhelmed and need professional guidance, reach out! Many of us therapists are ready and able to conduct telehealth sessions as needed. This is a really easy and accessible way to get additional help during these uncertain times.

Be well and be kind,

Angela Solis, LCPC, CADC, CCTP
Owner/Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor
Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor
Certified Clinical Trauma Professional
Crossroads Counseling Services, LLC
www.crossroads-helps.com

www.Crossroads-Helps.com

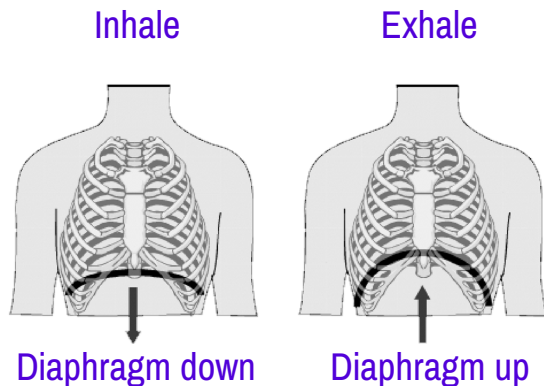
13550 Route 30, #302 • Plainfield, IL. 60544 • 815-941-3882 (Phone) • 815-941-3884
1802 N. Division St, Suite 509 • Morris, IL. 60450 • 815-941-3882 (Phone) • 815-941-3884 (Fax)
601 W. Norris Dr., Suite B • Ottawa, IL. 61350 • 815-941-3882 (Phone) • 815-941-3884 (Fax)

Diaphragmatic (Belly) Breathing

Find a comfortable lying or seated posture. If you are seated, try to avoid slouching. Feel free to close your eyes as you practice each part on this handout.

As you settle into your comfortable position. Scan your body and notice any tension in your body and try to relax these areas. Specifically bring your attention to your abdominal area and release any tension in this area. The stomach muscles should feel soft, relaxed, and supple.

Next, bring your attention to your breath. With each breath, try to create a visual in your mind of the action of your diaphragm muscle. As you breathe in, the diaphragm moves downwards, flattening out, pressing down towards the abdominal cavity. As you breathe out visualize it returning back up into its dome shape. Do this for a few breaths.



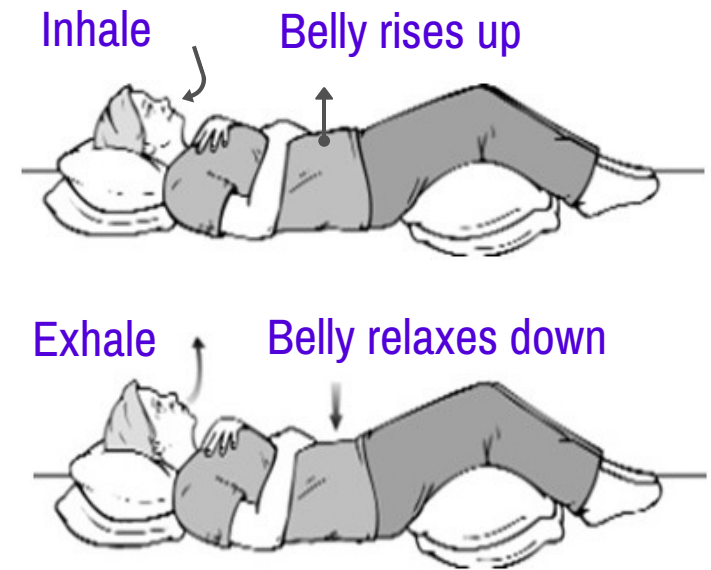
Then notice as you breathe in a feeling of expansion in the abdominal area; a filling of the belly with air. Maybe you can notice a sense of rising and falling of the belly. If you are not sure you can place your hands on top of your abdomen to feel it. If this doesn't work, place your hands at your sides of near the lower ribs, as you breathe in, you should feel an outward movement of your ribs into your hands, and then a gentle return back in on the breath out.

Relax your face, neck, and shoulders as you do this. See if you can keep the upper chest area from moving as you practice the belly breathing.

Continue to take in natural, smooth breaths. With each breath in, sense the expansion of the relaxed abdomen. With each breath out, feel the gentle return back in of the abdomen. Simultaneously, continue your visualization— inhale and visualize the diaphragm moving downwards; exhale and visualize the diaphragm returning back up into its dome shape. Maybe you can even sense the moment of your diaphragm within.

Continue to breathe like this for another 3 - 5 minutes, gradually taking in longer breaths, keeping them smooth and slow.

At the end, take a moment to notice how this breathing exercise made you feel.



YMCA COVID-19 Mental Health Tips

Week 1: COVID-19 anxiety – Talking points

What I am seeing in our community in my therapeutic practice... fear, loss of control, anxiety, boredom, isolation, loneliness

What is anxiety?

What is a panic attack?

I am seeing wide range of responses from initial onset in US cases and how this is progressing week to week (day by day)

Some of the more common responses include:

- 1) Fear and anxiety related to actually contracting COVID-19
- 2) Fear and anxiety related to economic struggles (loss or reduction of work)
- 3) Stress with quarantine, too much time with my partner and kids
- 4) Fear of the future progression of COVID-19 and shelter in place (exposure to too much media)
- 5) Inability to see extended family and friends
- 6) Gaining weight/drinking too much
- 7) Boredom
- 8) Stress with e-learning

Ways to cope:

- 1) Breathe!
- 2) Mindfulness
- 3) Process feelings
- 4) Spiritual connections
- 5) Exercise
- 6) Limit exposure to social media/news
- 7) Good sleep
- 8) Healthy diet
- 9) Hobbies/Activities
- 10) Focus on the positive (i.e. family time, COVID-19 recovery numbers)
- 11) Journal

Upcoming Topics:

- Seniors who may be lonely or worried about how to secure the things they need
- High School seniors who may be struggling with the possibility of a canceled graduation ceremony, prom etc. I'm not sure if they'd participate, what do you think?
- College students
- Anyone who may be dealing with grief/loss
- Unemployment
- Helping parents discuss COVID-19 with their children
- Dealing with all of your family in such close quarters all the time!
- E-learning anxiety
- Gaining weight/drinking too much alcohol in quarantine

Each session to end in some therapeutic strategy to help manage symptoms and stressors including CBT strategies, mindfulness, and grounding techniques to minimize catastrophizing and reduce emotional hijacking!

7 Attitudes of Mindfulness According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, Director of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Centre, 7 Attitudes are necessary for the foundation of mindfulness being. Here are some paraphrases from his book Full Catastrophe Living (pp 33-40):

1. NON-JUDGING: Being an impartial witness of your own experience requires that you become aware of the constant stream of judging and reacting to inner and outer experiences that we are normally caught up in, observe it, and step back from it. Just observe how much you are preoccupied with liking and disliking during a ten-minute period as you go about your business.

2. PATIENCE: A form of wisdom, it demonstrates that we accept the fact that sometimes things must unfold in their own time. We intentionally remind ourselves not to be impatient with ourselves because we are tense or agitated or frightened. We give ourselves room to have these experiences. Why? Because we are having them anyway! Each moment is your life in that moment.

3. BEGINNER'S MIND: An open, beginner's mind allows us to be receptive to new possibilities and prevents us from getting stuck in the rut of our own expertise. No moment is the same as any other - each one is unique and contains unique possibilities. Are you able to see the sky, the stars, the trees, with a clear and uncluttered mind?

4. TRUST: Developing a basic trust in yourself and your feelings is an integral part of meditation training. It is far better to trust in your intuition and your own authority, even if you make some mistakes, than always to look outside yourself for guidance. If something doesn't feel right, why not honour your feelings? It is impossible to be like somebody else. Your only hope is to become more fully yourself.

5. NON-STRIVING: Meditation's only goal is for you to be yourself. The irony is that you already are. This craziness may be pointing you toward a new way of seeing yourself, one in which you are trying less and being more. If you think, "I am going to get relaxed, control my pain, or become a better person", you have introduced an idea in your mind of where you should be, and that you are not OK right now. This attitude undermines mindfulness, which involves simply paying attention to whatever is happening.

6. ACCEPTANCE: Seeing things as they actually are in the present. If you have a headache, accept that you have a headache. In the course of our daily lives, we often waste a lot of energy denying and resisting what is already fact. When we do that, we are basically trying to force situations to be the way we would like them to be, which only makes for more tension, which actually prevents positive change from occurring. Acceptance sets the stage for acting appropriately in your life, no matter what is happening.

7. LETTING GO: When we start paying attention to our inner experience, we rapidly discover that there are certain thoughts and feelings and situations that the mind seems to want to hold on to. Similarly, there are others that we try to get rid of or prevent or protect ourselves from having. In mindfulness, we intentionally put aside the elevation of some experiences more than others. Instead, we let our experience be what it is. Letting go is a way of letting things be, without grasping and pushing away. If you have difficulty picturing what letting go feels like, picture holding on. Holding on is the opposite of letting go. Letting go is not a foreign experience - we do it every time we go to sleep. If we can't let go, we find we are unable to sleep. Now we can practice applying this skill in waking situations as well.

Over the past few years, the idea of mindfulness has rapidly been on the rise. Most of us have some sense of what this means, some are masters at this practice and still others might be completely unaware. Mindfulness is often used in a variety of contexts. Since this is the case, I am often asked as to what exactly is this “mindfulness”. Mindfulness can be defined in a variety of definitions. I like Jon Kabat-Zinn’s definition best as it’s simple and concise, “*Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.*”

There are multiple applications for mindfulness. I love the simple idea of using it to be more focused and present on a day to day, hour to hour, minute to minute basis. We live in a world that is so fast paced. We are constantly distracted by our electronics, pulled in multiple directions and rewarded to produce more, at the same time, and as fast as we can. Mindfulness works to help us engage in what is in front of us and take in our environment through all of our senses. When we are mindful, we are observing and attending to what is happening moment to moment without judgment.

It can be helpful to breakdown mindfulness into formal and informal mindfulness practice.

Formal and Informal mindfulness practice:

Formal mindfulness practices include breath awareness, body scan, mindful eating, mindful walking, mindful yoga or stretching, sound awareness, thought awareness, lovingkindness and seated awareness. This is the core of what you do both in class and as homework in an 8-week mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program. These practices have been critical to deepening the habits of mindfulness for me. Sometimes there are magical moments where I feel I sink into the still core of my being and remember a deep truth there. It is centering, humbling and often leaves me feeling less fragmented. <https://www.presentsource.com/mindfulness-at-work/formal-and-informal-mindfulness-practice/>

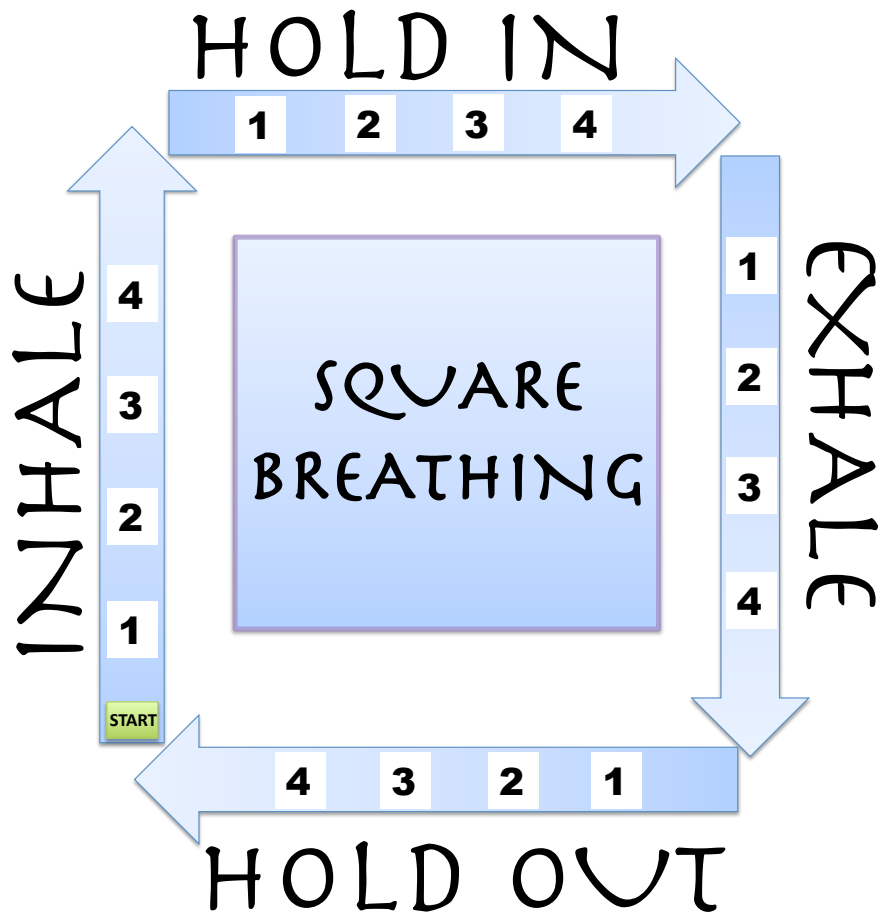
Informal mindfulness is paying attention on purpose in the present moment without judging something that is happening in everyday life. Learning to breathe and not get triggered during a disagreement, getting undermined at work, or supporting someone else who is suffering are some clear times for this. Informal mindfulness may be as simple as being “in the zone” while exercising, being fully present while brushing teeth, chopping vegetables, washing the car, completing a task at work... or listening to another person fully and completely, without planning what to say next or whether what they are saying rings true for you or not. <https://www.presentsource.com/mindfulness-at-work/formal-and-informal-mindfulness-practice/>

Some of the many benefits of practicing regular mindfulness techniques are reduced anxiety and depression symptoms, better sleep, improved clarity and concentration, self-control and emotional intelligence.

This is a very basic introduction of what mindfulness is and just a hint of the benefits that are derived from regular practice! To learn more, please contact Angela Solis, LCPC, CADC, Crossroads Counseling Services, LLC. www.crossroads-helps.com

Anxiety and Depression Symptom check list

Symptoms	Yes	No
Depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day		
Irritability most of the day, nearly every day		
Loss of interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities most of the day, nearly every day		
Loss of appetite or increase in appetite		
Significant weight loss or weight gain		
Difficulty sleeping		
Fatigue or loss of energy, nearly every day		
Feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt		
Diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness, nearly every day		
Recurrent thoughts of death (not just fear of dying), recurrent suicidal ideation without a specific plan, or a suicide attempt or a specific plan for committing suicide		
Low self-esteem		
Feelings of hopelessness		
Excessive anxiety and worry		
Difficulty controlling worry		
Restlessness or feeling keyed up or on edge		
Muscle tension		
Panic attacks (includes 4 or more of the following: pounding heart, sweating, trembling, or shaking, shortness of breath, feeling of choking, chest pain or discomfort, nausea, feeling dizzy or lightheaded, feelings of unreality or being detached from oneself, fear of losing control or going crazy, fear of dying, numbness, chills or hot flashes)		



SQUARE BREATHING

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.
- Close your eyes and begin to focus on your breathing.
- **Inhale for the count of 4.**
- **Hold for the count of 4.**
- **Exhale for the count of 4.**
- **Hold it out for the count of 4.**
- Repeat the cycle
- Continue for at least 4 cycles.

TIPS:

- Be sure to draw out the inhale and exhale so it fills the full four counts
- Relax! Try not to hold much tension in your face, chest or head. Allow yourself to relax in all phases of the breath.
- If it's too hard to use 4 as the counting number, use 3 or 2.
- To help focus, hear and visualize the numbers as you count them

EXPLANATION:

Square Breathing is an effective breath exercise to combat feelings of worry, anxiety and panic. It regulates the breath and heart rate, alleviates tension and feelings of confusion and panic and brings a general sense of peace and order to the mind and body.