



## It's OK: Addressing Your Own Stress During COVID-19

The following are tips for 3CMA members shared by Brenda Rabalais, PhD, LMFT, and founder of Lee's Place, a not for profit trauma, grief and loss therapy center.

1. In times of high stress and crisis, you turn on your sympathetic nervous system which brings increased heart rate and high blood flow which creates greater anxiety.
2. Your fight or flight response starts in your stomach and sends a message to your brain. To calm that, breathe deeply from your stomach with only your tummy moving. Do this 8 or 10 times in a row.
3. Consider creating a mantra to go with your tummy breathing, for example, on the exhale think to yourself: "I'm OK, all is well." Being in the present is how you get out of anxiety. This is not meditating for an hour, it's just 60 seconds of tummy breathing that gets you back in your body, in your center, and it makes you feel stronger.
4. Watch out for symptoms of stress such as not being able to sleep, living on caffeine and sugar, feeling buzzed inside and wanting anything to bring yourself down. That's when it becomes a problem.
5. To help address stress, create a ritual for leaving work and for being off. Intentionally set your mood and consciously determine to leave work at work. Go through a process of taking off your professional hat and putting on your mom, dad or spouse cap. Intentionally change your mood, by a ritual such as turning up music, rolling down your car windows, putting materials aside, or shutting/locking the door. Any ritual that says, "I am leaving my work world and turning off my vigilance switch".
6. Humor is a fabulous tool in times of stress. Laugh about whatever you can laugh about. Get light with each other, especially in your own group. Tell your stories with each other, debrief with each other and let it out.
7. Not knowing creates anxiety. Stop to think of what skills you have coming into the situation and what tools you have in your tool chest to help *me* cope. People without as many tools feel more anxiety. People with more tools, like a sense of trusting themselves, don't have to know how COVID-19 will play out.
8. When others don't listen to your good counsel on how we should be communicating, remember, it's not about you. Do the best you can, provide the best counsel possible, and the other person is responsible for how it is addressed.
9. When you are anxious about not being able to be at home with your family, remember that this is temporary. Tell your children "I have to be here now to help people through this crisis. My job is to help tell people what is going on and I have to be there." When kids know they are loved, they are going to be fine.
10. When you are home, make "play" a priority. Turn off any media, turn off your phone, don't talk about the virus. Really get in there and play, engage and use this time with your family to learn new things together. That's the benefit of having a ritual: turn off your professional life and turn on your family life.
11. It's going to be OK. Take a bigger perspective that this too shall pass. Take time to think about the good you are doing and what you are doing well. That can help ease the path for communicators and help you get centered again.

See the accompanying video with Dr. Rabalais. A special shout out to Lee's Place ([leesplace.org](http://leesplace.org)) and to producer/videographer Charlie Belvin ([CharlesBelvin.com](http://CharlesBelvin.com)) for their assistance with this video production for 3CMA.