



“Life will give you whatever experience is most helpful for the evolution of your consciousness. How do you know this is the experience you need? Because this is the experience you are having at the moment.”

-Eckhart Tolle

CENTER YOUR HEART AMID CATASTROPHE

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It's been over a month since Wuhan was locked down in an effort to halt the COVID-19 outbreak in China. It feels such a long time, especially as our lives have been turned upside and down, as we don't know when the epidemic will end or when life will go back to normal. So much uncertainty to endure and drastic changes to adapt. We are all challenged by an epidemic that is beyond our control when we are isolated at home feeling disconnected and lonely, fear for our own life and that of our loved ones, and anxious about the unknown. On top of all these, we try hard to stay hopeful, to find the motivation and focus to study or work from home. All these naturally bring an increasing array of challenging emotions and thoughts as

the epidemic continues.

How can we center our heart to do what matters in the present moment amid the current catastrophe? Here are the steps to **R.I.D.E.** the wave of catastrophe.

Recognize

Recognize what you are feeling and thinking. This is essential. A diminished moment-to-moment awareness of our internal experiences (such as difficult thoughts, emotions and urges) will inevitably create automatic reactions, often driven by deep-seated fears and insecurities.

Mindfulness is the vehicle to connect our internal

experiences with the present moment and help us get in touch with our heart and vitality. Mindfulness helps us cultivate curiosity and create space for vulnerable emotions – such as fear, shame, grief, sadness, loneliness, anger, insecurity – that we normally unconsciously avoid.

Try the following mindfulness activities to advance your recognizing skills.

1. Breathing Colors

Choose two different colors, one to breathe in and one to breathe out. Blue works well for the in-breath, as it matches the cool feeling of the air coming in. Red works well for the out-breath, as it matches the warm feeling of the air leaving your body. However, choose the colors you want, for the reasons you want. Close your eyes and pair each color with its breath.

2. Spaceship

Imagine you have a spaceship that can lift you to your favorite place, real or imagined. Climb into your ship, count down from 10 to one, and then blast off to your destination. Notice what emotions come up as you immerse yourself in the experience. Let this positive memory impact you. Stay at your destination awhile and practice breathing, and then ride back home via your rocket ship or another means feeling relaxed and refreshed.

3. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 Senses

To increase your awareness and ground yourself in the present moment, list five things you see, four things you hear, three things you feel, two things you smell, and one thing you taste.

4. Seeking Clarity

Take a jar, fill it with water, and put in fine sand, glitter or another substance that can be shaken up. Once the lid is tight, shake the jar. Notice the chaos as the sand or glitter moves about the water, with the water being cloudy or unclear. Then, mindfully watch as everything slowly settles, ultimately bringing clarity to the water.



5. Gratitude Journal

End your day with a gratitude journal, writing everything you can think of on it, both big and small. Meditate on the journal for several minutes. Note any changes in your emotions. Alternatively, write a thank-you letter to someone, being specific about what the person did to receive your gratitude.

Insight

“When we let go of wanting something else to happen in this moment, we are taking a profound step toward being able to encounter what is here now.”

- Jon Kabat Zinn

The next step is to develop insight into our difficult feelings. Don't judge yourself for feeling anxious, lost, sad, lonely, or whatever the difficult emotion may be. The feelings tell you that you are a normal human being who has a heart and who cares during this incredible stressful epidemic. Instead of fighting, suppressing or



running away from these emotions, or getting overwhelmed by them, we open up to them and allow them to be as they are. Being willing to experience uncomfortable emotions allows us to move into *Acceptance*.

Practice the following *Acceptance* skills to cultivate a different relationship with your feelings.

1. Breathe Into It

Breathe into this feeling. It's as if your breath flows into and around it. See if you can soften up around the feeling, loosen up, and hold it gently.

2. Objectify

Imagine this feeling is an object. Is it liquid, solid or gaseous? How big is it? Where does it start and stop? Is it moving or still? Is it light or heavy? Is it at the surface or inside you? What shape does it have? What color? Is it transparent or opaque? What does the surface feel like – hot or cold, rough or smooth, wet or dry?

When we turn a feeling into an object, it

encourages openness and curiosity toward that feeling: we approach rather than avoid, allowing us to see that the feeling is not bigger than we are; that we have space for it. This leads to acceptance.

3. Compassion

Hold this feeling gently as if it is a crying baby or a whimpering puppy. Lay a hand on the part of your body where you feel this most intensely. Imagine this is a healing hand – the hand of a loving nurse or parent or partner. Send some warmth into this area – not to get rid of the feeling, but to open up around it, make room for it, hold it gently.

4. The Breathing Space

Reserve a room, or at least a corner of a room, as your Breathing Space. In this space, you can put a low table with a flower, a little bell and cushions to sit on. Whenever you feel uneasy, embarrassed, sad, lonely, anxious, you can go into this space, sit down, invite the sound of the bell, and practice mindful breathing for 10 or 15 minutes until you feel more grounded.

Defuse

"I am not my thoughts, emotions, sense perceptions, and experiences. I am not the content of my life. I am life. I am the space in which all things happen. I am consciousness. I am the now. I am."

- Eckhart Tolle

Do you sometimes notice a voice inside your head: "Everyone else is doing better than I am."

"I am lonely. No one wants to be with me." "I can't stand this feeling of anxiety." "It's not fair I have to struggle when others do not." ... When we get caught up in such thoughts, we can become trapped in the automatic disruptive behavioral pattern results of taking our own thoughts as absolute reality.

The third step of R.I.D.E., *Defuse*, helps us learn to take a step back and detach from our difficult

thoughts, images and memories. Try the following skills that teach you to look at the thought from your observing self as nothing more than words or pictures.

1. Labeling Your Thoughts

Label your thoughts for what they are rather than just thinking the thought. For example, if you are having the thought “I can’t stand this feeling of anxiety,” make note of it by saying to yourself, “I am having the thought that ‘I can’t stand this feeling of anxiety.’”

2. Notice

Notice the thought and say to yourself, “That’s an interesting thought.”

3. Computer Screen

Imagine the thought on a computer screen. Try to change the font, color and format. Animate the words. Add in a bouncing ball. This will help you create some distance from the thought instead of being hooked or controlled by it.

4. Naming the Story

If all these thoughts were put into a book or movie, titled “The Something Something Story,” what would you call it? Each time this story shows up, name it: “Aha, there’s the ‘Everyone else is doing better than me’ story again!”

5. Insight

Ask yourself: When you buy into this thought, or give it all your attention, how does your behavior change? What do you start or stop doing when it shows up?

6. Neutralize

Say the thought in a silly voice; sing it; say it very slowly; repeat it quickly over and over; write thoughts on cards. All these help neutralize your relationship with your thoughts and put them into a new context, where you can see them clearly for what they are; nothing more than pictures and words; nothing you need to fight with, cling to, or escape from.

Engage

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”

- Laozi

When we are able to stay aware and present with our internal experiences, creating space and holding our painful thoughts and feelings gently, it is vital for us to center our heart by engaging and pursuing our values in the present moment. Values are like a compass offering us direction and keeping us on track on our journey. As the final step of R.I.D.E., we clarify our values, finding a way to Engage in them no matter how small.

1. Explore Values

- Deep in your heart, what really matters to you?
- What do you want to do with your time on this planet?
- What sort of person do you want to be?
- What personal strengths or qualities do you want to develop?

2. Magic Wand

I wave this magic wand, and all these painful thoughts, feelings and memories no longer have any impact on you. What would you do with your



life? What would you start, stop, do more of or do less of? How would you behave differently? If we watched you on a video, what would we see and hear that would show us magic had happened?

3. Set SMART Goals

S = Specific (Specific actions you will take – when and where, what is involved?)

M = Meaningful (The goal is genuinely guided by your values.)

A = Adaptive (Does the goal help you head in a direction that brings vitality to your life?)

R = Realistic (The goal should be realistically achievable.)

T = Time-framed (Set a day, date and time to achieve your goal.)

4. The Tiniest Step

- What's the smallest, tiniest, easiest step you can take in the next 24 hours that will take you a little further in that direction?
- What is the time, day and date when you will take that first step?
- Engage in them no matter how small!

In these difficult times, although we may be far apart, remember always that you are not alone. Together, we will R.I.D.E. the wave of this catastrophe.

