

FACE¹

F = Focus on what's in your control

A = Acknowledge your thoughts & feelings

C = Come back into your body

E = Engage in what you're doing

Let's now explore these, one by one:

F = Focus on what's in your control

When we are facing a crisis of any sort, fear and anxiety are inevitable; they are normal, natural responses to challenging situations infused with danger and uncertainty. It's all too easy to get lost in worrying and ruminating about all sorts of things that are out of your control: what might happen in the future; how the corona crisis might affect you or your loved ones or your community or your country or the world – and what will happen then - and so on. And while it's completely natural for us to get lost in such worries, it's not useful or helpful. Indeed the more we focus on what's not in our control, the more hopeless or anxious we're likely to feel. So the single most useful thing anyone can do in any type of crisis – Corona-related or otherwise - is to: **focus on what's in your control.**

You can't control what happens in the future. You can't control Coronavirus itself or the world economy or how your government manages this whole sordid mess. And you can't magically control your feelings, eliminating all that perfectly natural fear and anxiety. But you can control what you do - here and now. And that matters.

Because what you do - here and now - can make a huge difference to yourself, and anyone living with you, and a significant difference to the community around you.

The reality is, we all have far more control over our behavior, than we do over our thoughts and feelings. So our number one aim is to take control of our behavior - right here and now - to respond effectively to this crisis.

This involves both dealing with our inner world – all our difficult thoughts and feelings - and our outer world – all the real problems we are facing. How do we do this? Well, when a big storm blows up, the boats in the harbor drop anchor – because if they don't, they'll get swept out to sea. And of course, dropping anchor doesn't make the storm go away (anchors can't control the weather) - but it can hold a boat steady in the harbor, until the storm passes in its own good time.

Similarly, in an ongoing crisis, we're all going to experience 'emotional storms': unhelpful thoughts spinning inside our head, and painful feelings whirling around our body. And if we're

¹ (Harris, 2020)

swept away by that storm inside us, there's nothing effective we can do. So the first practical step is to 'drop anchor,' using the simple **ACE formula**:

A = Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings

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Let's explore these constructs one by one:

A = Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings

Silently and kindly acknowledge whatever is 'showing up' inside you: thoughts, feelings, emotions, memories, sensation, urges. Take the stance of a curious scientist, observing what's going on in your inner world. As you do this, often it's helpful to put this into words, and silently say to yourself something like, 'I'm noticing anxiety,' or 'Here's grief,' or 'There's my mind worrying' or 'I'm having a feeling of sadness' or 'I'm having thoughts about getting sick.'

And while continuing to acknowledge your thoughts and feelings, also

C = Come back into your body

Come back into and connect with your physical body. Find your own way of doing this. You could try some or all of the following, or find your own methods:

- Slowly pushing your feet hard into the floor.
- Slowly straightening up your back and spine; if sitting, sitting upright and forward in your chair.
- Slowly pressing your fingertips together
- Slowly stretching your arms or neck, shrugging your shoulders.
- Slowly breathing

Note: you are not trying to turn away from, escape, avoid or distract yourself from what is happening in your inner world. The aim is to remain aware of your thoughts and feelings, continue to acknowledge their presence and at the same time, come back into and connect with your body, and actively move it. Why? So you can gain as much control as possible over your physical actions, even though you can't control your feelings. (Remember, F = Focus on what's in your control)

And as you acknowledge your thoughts & feelings, and come back into your body, also

E = Engage in what you're doing

Get a sense of where you are and refocus your attention on the activity you are doing.

- **5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Exercise**
 - Look around the room and notice 5 things you can see.
 - Notice 3 or 4 things you can hear.
 - Notice what you can smell or taste or sense in your nose and mouth
 - Notice what you are doing
 - End the exercise by giving your full attention to the task or activity at hand.

NOTE: Please don't skip the A of ACE; it's so important to keep acknowledging the thoughts and feelings present, especially if they are difficult or uncomfortable. If you skip the A, this exercise will turn into a distraction technique – which it's not supposed to be.

Dropping anchor is a very useful skill. You can use it for handling difficult thoughts, feelings, emotions, memories, urges and sensations more effectively; switching off auto-pilot and engaging in life; grounding and steadying yourself in difficult situations; disrupting rumination, obsessing and worrying; and focusing your attention on the task or activity you are doing. The better you anchor yourself in the here and now, the more control you have over your actions