

# The New Normal

It's time for us to accept that this pandemic, and social isolation, are here for awhile.

But in addition to that, our reality has changed, possibly for good.

We're in a new normal.

Some things that have changed for many of us:

1. **A sense of restriction:** We're not able to do our usual things — not only work and school, but things like haircuts, dentists, coffee shops, restaurants, bars, shops and more. That can feel very restricted.
2. **Heightened uncertainty & anxiety:** Things are incredibly uncertain right now, for all of us — for our health, the health of loved ones, the state of the world, the shaky economy, our individual financial situations. And that's just the start of it. All of this uncertainty is triggering feelings of stress, fear and anxiety in most people, in different ways.
3. **A feeling of isolation but also (possibly) togetherness:** For many people, social distancing has created a feeling of isolation that can be very hard to handle. But for many, there can also be a feeling of togetherness - we're all in this together, no one is excluded. Some are creating that feeling of togetherness by doing video calls, by connecting others online, or by taking part in community or group efforts to help.
4. **Contraction when we're feeling overwhelmed:** It can all be too much. And when we feel that sense of overwhelm, we can want to shut down, exit, turn away, avoid. We avoid hard tasks, we go to distraction, we avoid our healthy habits. This is all completely normal!
5. **A sense of disruption:** Our old habits have been disrupted — we can't do all the things we're used to doing, and that gives us a feeling of being upended. It's frustrating to have things disrupted, and can make us feel afloat.
6. **Irritation with others:** Being isolated with the same people every day can cause friction. And that brings up all of our issues, all the ways we respond (and they respond) when we get triggered.
7. **Wanting it all to be over:** Impatience! We just want to go back to normal. It's hard to accept the way things are.
8. **Wanting to feel something meaningful:** This can all feel very unanchored. And in this feeling of groundlessness and instability, we can yearn for some kind of meaning. Some sense of purpose.

You might not be experiencing all of these, because every person is experiencing the new normal differently.

But it is a new normal.

So the question is: will we resist it, or can we use it as an opportunity?

We can complain about the new normal. Hate it. Stew in frustration about it. That's one possibility.

Another possibility is to use it as a growth opportunity.

## The Opportunity That Life is Giving Us

Life is always opening doors for us, giving us a gift. We just don't often recognize it.

For example, this morning, life gave you an amazing gift of a new day. Many people who are on their last breath would give anything for such a miraculous gift — and yet, we often will take this gift for granted. Fritter it away. Complain about much of it.

We waste the opportunity that life has given us!

So being aware of this ... how can we use this new normal as an opportunity and a gift?

**The first idea I'd like to offer is that the new normal is just highlighting the difficulties we often felt before, but could more easily ignore.**

We could pretend that we weren't constantly being disrupted, that we weren't very restricted, that we didn't have massive uncertainty in our lives. We could pretend that we weren't craving connection and meaning, that we weren't irritated by others.

We're very good at fooling ourselves.

But now, we can't pretend (as much). We are faced with these realities, and we can either resist and complain ... or we can look them squarely in the face, and accept them.

**The second idea is that these are opportunities to grow — to train, to become more resilient.**

So for example, we could train in each area I mentioned above:

- If you're feeling restricted, let yourself feel the feeling of restriction. It's probably something you've felt many times before but didn't face it. Can you shift this feeling, after you've felt it, to see the sense of openness and freedom and gift in each moment?
- If you're feeling isolated, can you use this to connect to yourself more, as if you were a monk in a monastery? Can you let yourself feel the feeling of isolation, and give yourself some compassion?
- Let yourself feel the craving for connection and meaning. And then see how you can

create that for yourself, each day, without any certainty about whether you're doing it right.

- If you're irritated at others, can you rise above your narrative about the other person, and see that you're both feeling fear and pain? That you both are dealing with this with anger, irritation, frustration? That both of you are resorting to old (unhelpful) patterns? Can you practice compassion for them (and yourself) instead?
- If you're impatient and wanting it all to be over ... can you practice patience instead? Let yourself be with the pain and frustration you're feeling, and be willing to face it and sit in the middle of it? This is an incredibly powerful practice that will strengthen us for whatever we face in the future.
- Can you practice this patience with everything you're feeling: overwhelmed, irritated, frustrated, anxious, uncertain, fearful? And bring self-compassion to that as well?

So you can get a sense that we're practicing a few things with whatever we're facing:

- A willingness to feel what we're feeling
- A willingness to face and sit in the middle of difficulty (patience)
- Compassion for ourselves and others
- The ability to create connection and meaning

What would it be like to use the gift of this new normal to get stronger during this crisis? To practice these incredibly transformative practices?