

Mental Hygiene: Controlling the Pandemic of Fear

ACKNOWLEDGE: Thank you for being here and participating in this safety talk. I know your time is valuable, so I will ensure every moment of this talk is worth your while (*make eye contact with the entire group*).

Training Tips:

Ask a lot of questions: While delivering your Safety Talk, ask questions that ‘hook the mind’ and engage your participants. The simple act of asking questions is a High Impact Training technique!

Raise a hand when asking questions: Directed to your audience, you’ll often find that people are more willing to answer your questions and become active participants... try it out! Also, pause for a moment after asking a question; waiting for and encouraging responses from the group.

Provide an example of a personal experience: (or a recent news event) For instance: “A close friend of mine once _____”, or “Just last week _____”. This is a very effective method to help participants relate to your topic. It often helps them to realize: ‘*Yeah, this could affect me. I should listen to this.*’

What’s in it for Me? (WIIFM): With COVID-19 among us, personal and physical hygiene has been the highlighted topic, but mental hygiene is just as important! I am here to deliver a brief safety talk on how to control and manage your emotional state if your feeling anxiety and fear.

ASK: How many of you have felt some amount of fear or anxiety around the COVID 19 pandemic? (Encourage, wait for and acknowledge those who respond)

Dr. Deepak Chopra recently stated: “*Emotions are far more contagious than the virus.*”

Manitoba’s Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Brent Roussin has stated “*Fear is also contagious.*”

Dr. Christine Northrup, Best-Selling Women’s Health Author and deemed as most Trusted Physician according to Readers Digest, has said, “*Fear feeds the virus.*”

Can you see a pattern here? We all need to be highly aware of how fear and anxiety develops and spreads, so we can help our teams and families through these challenging times.

ASK: Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you literally “worried yourself sick?” That’s because you actually did! Our autonomic nervous system is made up of two branches: the sympathetic nervous system and parasympathetic nervous system. The sympathetic nervous system is our “flight or fight” response, this protects us from real or perceived danger. The parasympathetic nervous system regulates our breathing, heart rate, digestion and urination and is also known as the “rest and digest” system.

DID YOU KNOW

Our brain and nervous system cannot be in fear and gratitude at the same time?

When we are constantly overwhelmed with dramatized news day after day, its normal for people to feel fear and anxiety. Living by the hormones of stress for an extended period of time throws our bodies into sympathetic overdrive. To our brain and body, thoughts of fear and anxiety have the SAME effect as if we are being chased by a saber-toothed tiger!

The body living in stress is the body living in survival mode and living in the state of stress actually weakens our immune system!

Why? When in the stress response, our body produces and pushes hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol into our extremities to facilitate the massive amounts of energy needed to outrun (or fight) a threat. For example, in nature, animals are in the survival (stress) response for a short period of time while being chased by a predator. Once they outrun the threat, they immediately go back into parasympathetic (rest and digest) state of being. **Human beings are the only creatures who can automatically turn on and remain living in that stress response for hours, days weeks and months...and just by a thought alone!** Over time living in the stress response depletes vital life force. It's actually putting their immune response into more of precarious position.

To make it worse, when in stress:

- Blood flow is shifted from the forebrain to the mid brain
- We become very narrow focused (on ourselves).
- We lose access to the frontal lobe of our brain where executive function or higher thinking resides. This is the part of the brain that allows us to experience empathy, compassion, morality, and kindness. Its where we see the big picture and solve problems effectively.

If we don't practice emotional hygiene, we can suffer greatly from COVID19 related fear, anxiety and stress!

SO HOW CAN WE PRACTICE EXCELLENT MENTAL HYGEINE?

The first thing is to recognize that we turn on the stress response in our body every time we think anxious and fearful thoughts. So be aware of the thoughts that we are dwelling on. Do things that help your body to turn on the parasympathetic response so energy returns to your core to nurture and repair your brain, heart and other vital organs and bodily processes. We can get into this state simply and quickly by slowing our breathing and heart rate down, while focusing on thoughts of appreciation, gratitude, kindness, cooperation, empathy, and all the things that are going right in our personal lives and within the world.

Other ways to support a positive state of being during these unknown times:

- **Limit your News intake!** If we listen to the dramatized news and expose ourselves to the high emotions of anxiety and fear, our bodies will be constantly pushed into sympathetic overdrive. (Just like a deer being chased by a wolf not just for minutes, but for days and weeks....over time, bodily systems will break down and wear out.)
- **FACTS OVER FEAR.** Ensure you are getting your news from credible sources from such sources as the CDC, the World Health Organization and local governments.
- **Practice self awareness.** What emotions are you really feeling? When you notice you are in worry or fear, consciously try to emotions of appreciation, gratitude or compassion. Positive emotions change the

physiology of your body to produce vitality hormones like DHEA and help to boost your mood and immune system.

- Take a walk in nature. This is where our parasympathetic nervous system shines! Nature calms us down, helping the brain and heart return to balance.
- Practice mindfulness, meditation and yoga which all encourage the parasympathetic nervous system and the production of life giving, rejuvenating and immune boosting hormones and neuropeptides.

SIMPLE MINDFULNESS PRACTICE: This is a very simple practice and can be done anywhere! Sit down quietly and close your eyes. Slow your breathing down and tune into your body. Can you feel your heart beating? Now, notice your breathing. Breathe into the count of six, hold your breath for a count of two, and breathe out for a count of four. If you do this for several minutes, you will immediately start to feel your body relax. Your breathing will slow down, your heart rate will slow down, and anxiety fear will subside. Keep in mind, this takes practice. If you keep at it, you will get better at it over time and be able to make the shift more quickly.

Facilitator, remember to:

1. Ask for the commitment of your employees,
2. Answer all questions,
3. Thank them for their time and
4. Document that this safety talk occurred.

RECORD OF SAFETY TALK

Company Name:	Work Location Dept.:
Talk Given by:	Date / Time:

Results of inspection, demonstration or other activity or suggestions during talk:

List of All Employees Who Attended the Safety Talk:	
Name (PRINT)	Signature
1.	
2.	
3.	
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Signed: _____

Position Held: _____