

A wooden rowing boat is shown from a high angle, floating on a body of water. The water is a deep teal color and reflects the sky above. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds. The boat is made of light-colored wood and has two oars visible inside. The text is overlaid on the image in a white, serif font.

Mental Resiliency in Challenging Times

Session 2, day 2: COVID shutdown mental health struggles and strategies

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8) Stuck with your families

- In past generations and traditional communities young people learned their identities from their families and continued their traditions living as adults close to their families. It might have been repressive, but it was straightforward.
- In our complex, diverse culture young people are urged to pursue their own talents and dreams, find their own lives, careers, families, and dreams, creating their own traditions. This allows for far more diversity, innovation, and personal expression, but it's far more difficult.
- It often tears people in two – one who stays young around their families, meeting their expectations and one who explores and grows surrounded by new peers. This process of being torn apart often peaks in young adulthood.

Being stuck with families and isolated from peers, can feel extremely repressive, unable to find understanding or grow emotionally.

Asserting independence strategies

- The two extremes – drifting back to old dynamics get along or isolating to avoid being ‘sucked back in” – both have considerable risks for depression, because neither one allows expression of your growing independent self
- Parents will reflect back to you, your childhood self, while peers reflect emerging selves. You need to retain peer reflection.
- The rebellion against parents itself isn't the goal, it's the means. The goal is growing self-expression. Make sure you keep tapping into emerging positive self-expression

Parents, and even teachers: Compliance and cooperation itself isn't the goal either. Try to promote positive self-expression even when (maybe especially when) it isn't what you want them to do.

Dealing with family trauma

- Some families are unfortunately abusive, neglectful or traumatizing. Sometimes there's nothing "post" about PTSD/ The trauma is still actively happening in the family.
- The survival strategies children have developed as their "loyal soldiers" may be self-defeating or problematic in lots of ways (including emotional detachment and deadening, cutting, restrictive eating, substance use, etc.) but it's keeping them alive.
- School may have been an escape or sanctuary, but now its closed.
- Avoiding isolation is the most important thing to prevent suicide.

9) *Feeling powerless and helpless*

- Hiding while waiting for someone to create better testing, treatments, and a vaccine may be the most realistic strategy, but it feels powerless (“Can’t I do something to help?”)
- Uncertainty and lack of information can add to feeling helpless, but non-stop seeking out information won’t lead to mastery. It will lead to burnout. How much and which sources of information are helpful to you and which ones aren’t?
- Just because we’re medically powerless, doesn't mean we're powerless over everything in our lives or have become helpless people. We can still set and achieve many goals.
- Paradoxically, one of the best ways to feel less helpless is to help someone else. You don’t have to have your act together to help someone else. You just need to care and connect. Sharing struggles builds empowerment.

10) Lost experiences and opportunities

- Despite efforts to virtually replace lost experiences, there still are losses to be grieved, memories that weren't made, connections with tradition that were broken
- However, it's unlikely that of the losses are truly damaging to you or the person you'll become over the long run, if you keep going and prepare for a post-pandemic future
- Your future might be delayed, and opportunities need to be postponed

A tee-shirt said, "Class of 2020: Our graduation was cancelled , but our dreams haven't been"

11) Neglected roles

- Our self-identity and our relationships come together in the roles we have in life. (We may be a son, older brother, struggling musician, aspiring boyfriend, surfer, sliding-by student, film aficionado, pot smoker, social justice champion, etc.)
- The shutdown may have taken away the opportunity to live in some of our roles and diminishes us and our relationships as a result.
- If we're down to just pandemic victim as our only role, most of us has been shut down

Find creative ways to keep living in and connecting to others in your major roles to keep as much of yourself and your relationships alive. Make blocks in your schedule for important roles.

12) *Creating a “personal retreat”*

- The pandemic shutdown shares many features with personal retreats – loss of normal routine, disconnection from the outside world, isolation, lots of time for thinking.
- Many people struggle with the disorientation of retreats in the same way we’re struggling with the shutdown, so usually they have a guide or leader or set program until you’re very experienced. The “breaking down” is what creates the opportunity for change and growth.
- Productive retreats are intentional, focused on opening up possibilities for growth, not just wallowing. They can focus on lots of different goals (for example, enhancing creativity, resolving emotional trauma, sobriety, getting closer to God, opening up your Chakras, getting physically healthy)

Set a retreat goal, get some tools and guidance and go for it.

13) Finding meaning in suffering

- Suffering is much easier to bear if it has a meaning or purpose. The purpose can be individual (like protecting your grandparents) or shared as a common goal that can bring us together (like preventing the spread of corona virus). It helps a lot to have a clear vision, leadership that brings people together, and shared heroes to avoid breaking down and infighting.
- Corona virus is a difficult “enemy” since it’s hard to see, it’s within us, it’s pervasive, and it’s hard to anthropomorphize.

Meaning making is essential for people aspiring to level 4, looking for higher purposes in life. Meaningless suffering acts like throwing water on the coals of our life’s passions.



Orange county beach



Hollywood anti-racism protest



Las Vegas reopens

*“Live free or die”
The allure of irresponsibility?*

We're loosening the shutdown, opening ourselves to more corona virus infections and deaths

Is that considered decisions accepting the risks or fleeing into irresponsibility?