

Speaker 1 ([00:07](#)):

Please stand by, we're about to begin. Thank you for joining us for today's webinar, Managing Anxiety, Coronavirus Fears and Concerns brought to you by Cigna's Employee Assistance Program. Please note that copies of the presentation slides and handouts are available for download in the drop down box on the lower left side of the player window. Our presenter today is Dr. Tom Troast. Dr. Troast has over 25 years of experience as a clinical therapist, university faculty member, administrator, EAP affiliate, and small business owner. Dr. Troast holds a doctoral degree in educational psychology from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and a master's degree in counseling from Michigan State University, and now, Dr. Tom Troast.

Dr. Tom Troast ([01:00](#)):

Thank you, and hello, everyone. It is a pleasure to be with you today, and certainly one of the things I enjoy, along with my private practice, and working with individuals is the opportunity to talk to groups about a variety of, of personal and professional topics, and, and certainly at times of emergency, or crisis to get information out to folks, um, the best way we can to address their needs. Um, as my intr- as my introduction, um, discussed, uh, I'm a, a therapist here in southeastern Wisconsin, and work most of my days with individuals, and families in individual counseling.

Dr. Tom Troast ([01:39](#)):

I want to point out a few things as we start today. One is that this is not a medical seminar. Uh, I'm not a physician. Um, I would refer you to the CDC, or the World Health Organization, uh, for any medical questions. Uh, those are the two websites I think that provide, uh, the best information, especially, with the medical issues that are going on, and we're going to talk about today is dealing with the psychological aspects of this very, very important topic. Um, and again, if you have specific workplace questions, you know, things like sick leave, or can I stay home, or what do I do if I'm quarantined, certainly you want to direct those to your manager, or HR department, so I want to be sure that we all understand that there are some of those ground rules.

Dr. Tom Troast ([02:22](#)):

Today, what we want to do today is we certainly want to talk about this topic, and provide some assurance to all of us as we go through this stressful time. You know, the, the coronavirus outbreak, which as many of us know now has been declared by the World Health Organization to be a pandemic, has triggered incredible shifts in our daily norms. Change is the order of the day in our schools, in our places of worship, our restaurants, the bars are closed, and major events [inaudible 00:02:54] our sporting events, and March Madness are all canceled. Travel is restricted. We're seeing where supplies are now being hoarded. Words that we haven't even talked about for a long time like quarantine, and containment areas are now part of our everyday vocabulary, and we can go on, and on, and on, right?

Dr. Tom Troast ([03:13](#)):

These unexpected, and in some cases, unprecedented responses to this illness can really compound our fear of this disease, right? And, and I want to share with you that it's certainly justifiable that we're anxious and, and in times like this, it can be hard to manage that anxiety we're, we're in a place that maybe we've never been before, and we, and we can't eliminate those feelings, but hopefully, today, what we can help with is to find some way to gain control over them, where we're going to talk about self-management, we're going to stress that we're all in this together, and maybe collectively, and individually, we can find some ways to, to manage the stress, and this anxiety, so let's go to our first

slide, and talk about our goals today. Um, we're going to explore the unique aspects, and the impact of this disease.

Dr. Tom Troast ([04:12](#)):

And then, we're going to learn about recommended responses, so we're going to do some, some, some facts stuff there too, and then, maybe review some normal reactions, and strategies for coping with anxiety. You know, I, as a, as a clinician, uh, I've completed a lot of laps around the sun, and I've been working with, uh, schools, and individuals for many years. W- w- this is a place I'd never been before. Uh, I've never seen a collective anxiety like we're dealing with today, so we're going to do some things today to maybe walk us through this anxiety, and, and look at this coronavirus from a couple angles to help us, help us get through this, so we know, right? That while the coronavirus is not new, as we look at this slide about the growing sense of threat, you know, the common cold, right? It's caused by a form of the coronavirus, right?

Dr. Tom Troast ([05:07](#)):

But, this coronavirus, a- as we've seen it labeled, you know, COVID-19, is new, right? That means we don't have all the answers. We don't know how really it's going to spread, and how it impacts humans. We're getting more data, right? It was declared, as we said, a, a public health emergency, uh, uh, of international concerns at the end of January, uh, January 30th. As this story unfolds, and evolves on a daily basis, heck, on an hourly basis, we are seeing the spread of this disease seeming to be more rapid, and widespread than the common illnesses that we know, or even other infectious disease outbreaks. This is something maybe we've never experienced before. We are all scrambling to understand, and, and what does this mean? What does it mean to us as individuals? We're all struggling with that.

Dr. Tom Troast ([06:01](#)):

So, as we learn more and worry about the impact on, on these core areas of our lives, uh, uh, of course our health, but our work, and our daily routines, our finances, our, our loved ones, the feelings of anxiety, fear, and stress, and, and even panic, right? Can grow. We're seeing news of local cases right there in our towns. It's leading every news broadcast, right? It makes it really real that people are infected. There are people in quarantine, and even just being tested can test, can really intensify our feelings, and this is certainly so if someone we know or someone close to us becomes ill, or someone close to us is more compromised. I think I hear that from so many folks worried about grandparents, or someone that has a chronic illness, and none of this is surprising.

Dr. Tom Troast ([06:57](#)):

If you are experiencing some of these feelings or know others who are, know that you're not alone. One of the challenges many times when I do webinars is I throw that out there, that maybe you're not experiencing it, but you probably know one, know someone who is. Know that we're not alone, but we don't want to just end the conversation there. You know, with, just like with other sources of anxiety in our lives, the question we need to answer, and, and hopefully, we're going to talk about it today is how do we manage all this in some healthy way? That's, that's where we're going today, so we're going to unpack a little bit, you know, and, and look at some of these reasons why this is so, so challenging. How can we confront this together? But then, also, look at it from our individual perspective, you know.

Dr. Tom Troast ([07:49](#)):

We, we, we don't have to quarantine our ability to grow, and learn, and even at times like this, we, we can learn, and, and we can learn different ways of handling anxiety, so our next slide is this threat, and this growing worry that, that is building and building. We live, you know, we, right? We all live with illness every day. Of course, we do. We've gotten through flu season, you know, but why does this feel different? Why this is creating more anxiety? If we were together, I'd ask you that question, and I think I know some of the reasons. A lot of folks would say, well, it's on television constantly. We've had movies about contagion. The speed of this is so different. Maybe it's because of certain age groups have been identified as being more vulnerable. Maybe it's how we're responding as a country, and questions about our leadership of local, state, county, federal leaders, all those things, right?

Dr. Tom Troast ([08:45](#)):

It feels different, right? So, there are some unique factors here that impact anxiety, and, and let's talk about those. First, right? Fear increases when the threat is unpredictable. Unpredictability is, is an important component of fear. It could be anywhere. We, we always, we're always vulnerable. We're wired to equate the unknown with danger. That's part of us, right? And, without the answers, we stay focused on the danger, and this could lead to more fear, not less, right? 'Cause we're focusing on it. Second, fear increases when you can't exclude yourself from the risk. You know, when bad things happen to other people, we look for ways that we're different from them. They, they're from a different country. They're, they are different social economic class, they're different ages, different nationality, and on, and on, and on.

Dr. Tom Troast ([09:41](#)):

The global spread of this illness, and the fact that anyone can get sick has removed that illusion of safety. We think about the, the, the relatively short history th- of this disease, for example. It was focused in China originally. You know, I think fear just really escalated when we realized this was not just going to be in China. This was a pandemic, you know, and it's increased our fear. We, we, uh, we haven't been excluded from it. As I've said a couple of times, right? We know that fear also increases when we're in uncharted territory. How this version of the coronavirus will behave, and how the disease will play out, we don't know yet. Even medical experts are not sure where this is going, how it will impact daily life, our jobs, our savings, our schools, our activities is also evolving in unprecedented ways.

Dr. Tom Troast ([10:39](#)):

I, I, I, I work in a metropolitan area here in, in Milwaukee. It seems like it's a different society this week, right? We don't have a practical, or emotional blue- blueprint yet. I had to think about all this. We're left with this unsettling sense of uncertainty, right? It's uncharted, and then, certainly it's all amped up, right? By this new cycle that's coming at us 24/7. From accurate information to misinformation, the alarm appears relentless. The bold headlines, the images, the highly charged reporting are designed to, to get our attention, and they do, right? This is, this is good for ratings in many ways, right? Many of us find ourselves repeatedly drawn in, and we're experiencing constant spikes of anxiety as a result, so these factors, these unique factors, and the [inaudible 00:11:39] nature of the fears involved that they trigger in us a, a fairly natural stress response.

Dr. Tom Troast ([11:46](#)):

Uh, and we need to look at that, so as we look at our, our next slide, right? We want to do some understanding. Remember, right? We, we, we're wired to be attuned to anything that seems like a threat, that's who we are. The brain triggers this, this wonderful cascade of neurotransmitters that kick

off this hard wiring, the fight, flight or freeze response, and that leads to various physical, and emotional reactions, and they're designed to get us away from the threat. We want that, we want that wiring. It protects us in many ways. However, as we've noted, this virus is a little different. We can't see it, can we? We can't hear it. We can't even be sure how to get away from it. The result is that our body systems stay on this high alert, and it creates physical, and mental sensations of anxiety, and, and just tension, and how this looks, it really varies from person to person. It's different from you than it is for me, but there are some common sensations, and there are some actions that include these, these, these factors, right?

Dr. Tom Troast ([12:47](#)):

Certainly, worry, worry, anxiety, and panic. Some people are more able to absorb this and, and they're amazingly they keep worry in check, but others are more likely to kind of zoom in, and focus on the worst case scenarios, and are less able to manage feelings of anxiety and even panic. Then there's a feeling of helplessness, maybe even a sense of paralysis, really unable to know what to do, and where to start, and, and what I'm hearing from folks a lot is this sense of exhaustion. You know, that it's really kind of overwhelming. It, it seems to be following us, and is tiring us, and a lot of that's from the helplessness. So we also see difficult concentrating, difficult trouble sleeping. You know, we, we, we go to bed thinking about this.

Dr. Tom Troast ([13:34](#)):

You know, I, I talked to clients, people watching the news all the way until bedtime, and then they have trouble sleeping. There's certainly feelings of frustration and anger. You know, why, why can't, why is this happening? And, this isn't fair, and all those types of ideas. Let's not dismiss a sense of grief and loss, and I think this is really powerful. You know, our, our lives have been appended, right? It's not business as usual. I, I find myself, you know, that, that things have changed. I, I, I find myself even now missing somethings, missing the daily routine, missing a busy office, missing some staff that are not here. There's feelings of grief and loss, and we may be struggling with the inability to be with others, for example. Even the, the illness or deaths of people close to us, these are really powerful feelings, and leaves us grieving these losses.

Dr. Tom Troast ([14:29](#)):

So, I, I, I think it's important we don't dismiss that there's some real grieving going on, and then, of course, we're going to be hypervigilant about, about our health. Signs of infection, about transmission, feeling even pressed to hoard supplies beyond what's recommended. We see this on television, and on the internet, right? You know? Um, you may find yourselves even obsessively checking the news. I find myself seeing staff members and people that are not people that walk around with their phones in their hands, staring at news briefs, and they're doing it now, right? Almost obsessively, so do you see any aspects of your experience, tap on the brakes for a second, and think about what, what for you is on that list? What's happening there? Maybe stress or anxiety even show- showing up in other ways. How does it feel in your body, your thoughts, your reactions, even your action?

Dr. Tom Troast ([15:23](#)):

You know, having this threat reaction is entirely normal. It's part of our hard wiring, right? But, it's not necessarily helpful being aware, and recognizing signs, and being responsive to them to really help us manage this in a healthy way, so let's start working on that. Let, let's see what we can do to, to move forward, and of course, where we begin in our next slide is, let, let's look at some facts, right? Let's, let's

see if we can even desensitize a little bit by staring at some facts you're looking at. Let's do some detective work, and really get some things. What do we know at this point? You know, 'cause we know that a good way to manage any fear is getting education. The more we know, the more we can take effective steps, and put fears to rest, and as you may be aware, our understanding of this outbreak is constantly evolving. I don't think we can emphasize that enough, right?

Dr. Tom Troast ([16:19](#)):

It's vital to get information and updates from reputable sources of medical information. We have to be careful that we're looking at sources that have been vetted, and of course, the ones that we know of, the CDC, and the World Health Organization. They have set up websites, they have set up communication. It's there, right? W- we want to, we want to use them. That, that's where we want to go. So, let's do a, a kind of a brief review of what we know at this time, at this moment. Well, what is it? What are we dealing with? Well, this is a, this is from a family of viruses that are found in humans, and animals. You know, the coronavirus is from a family. Some are known to cause illness ranging from the common cold, right? To severe diseases, such as the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome. We know it is MERS, right? And, severe acute respiratory syndrome, SARS. You may have heard those before.

Dr. Tom Troast ([17:15](#)):

This coronavirus has been designated COVID-19. It's a new form of the virus. It's a novel part of this virus. The symptoms. You may have heard about it. Some, some fever, a cough and shortness of breath. Currently, it's been found that symptoms may appear in as few as two days, or as long as 14 after exposure. It's one reason why we're hearing about the two week quarantines, right? Then there's transmission. Most often, it's spread person to person via, mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, or sneezes. Very similar to how influenza spreads, these droplets can land in the mouths, or noses of people who are nearby, or even possibly inhaled into the lungs. That's how this is transmitted. Treatment right now, similar to other viral illnesses like the common cold, there's no anti-viral treatment recommended for this infection. There's no inde- no vaccine on it, right? They're working hard on it, but there's no vaccine at this time. Those infected should receive care to relieve symptoms. That's what the treatment is.

Dr. Tom Troast ([18:31](#)):

And then, outcomes. You know, current information reports indicate that, and quoting directly from the, from the CDC, "Many cases are mild, but the disease hits the elderly the hardest. Currently, the fatality rate is still evolving. With, with all the testing that's going on, we're just getting more information, but it contingences- it continues to be significantly higher in those who are elderly, especially those with chronic health conditions, or who are already critically ill." Trusted sources remind us that we don't want to get ahead of what we actually know. That can cause panic for us, and act in ways that are not helpful, and certainly, not healthy, so what we can do is plan, and prepare based on what we know. In other words, my friends, it's, it's kind of deep breath time.

Dr. Tom Troast ([19:24](#)):

Let, let's, let's catch our breath. We're, we're looking at this virus. We have the facts. Let's, let's, let's be factual, and let's see what we can do. Our next slide, and I think this is a really critical, a really critical slide. The key recommendation being shared is this, prepare, don't panic. I, I, I think that's, that's a great mantra for us as a society right now. Preparing not only helps us to be more ready, but also, offers actionable ways to respond to these fears, so let's, let's talk about how do we prepare? We've heard, I, I

hope all of us have heard about practicing healthy hygiene precaution. You know, this is critical, and if we go over to the other side of the slide, what's healthy hygiene? Well, washing your hands, but doing it for 20 seconds. You know, if you have to use a sanitizer, fine, soap and water are, are really important. You've seen on the internet, perhaps. If you're not sure what 20 seconds is, wash your hands and sing happy birthday to yourself.

Dr. Tom Troast ([20:30](#)):

When you're done with the song, probably your hands are, are already to go. Avoid touching your eyes, your nose, and your mouth. Remember we talked about transmission. Cough and sneeze into your elbow, or covi- cover with a tissue, then throw it in the trash. You may or may not have the virus, right? You don't know, so help us, help all of us. Sneeze into your elbow and cover it, right? And then, clean and disinfect frequently, especially touched objects and surfaces. We want to do that a lot. Your desk, your phone, your computer, you know, the door knobs, everything that you're dealing with, practicing these hygiene habits. Some other thoughts, we go to the other slide, we want to certainly practice social distancing, avoid close contact, especially, with sick people, and if you become sick, seek care, talk to your manager or HR.

Dr. Tom Troast ([21:20](#)):

Learn about what's your company's policies, what's in place, and, and how we're going to deal with this. What type of communications are going out? You want to have a preparedness plan in the event of a quarantine. That could happen. So, having a packing list that you can make and check off. It's like you're going for a trip. Taking action, and knowing that you're ready can help us all feel more confident and calm. Consider concerns such as your own childcare, directors from your workplace, and again, having supplies that you need probably for about two weeks. You know, food, medicine, household goods, disinfectants. I stress with a lot of my patients, certainly be sure you have your medicine, right? That you have those prescriptions, and we are advised, prepare realistically, not to panic.

Dr. Tom Troast ([22:09](#)):

We don't want to deprive our fellow community members by going overboard, right? That, that, we're part of that community. You want to talk to family members who may be live elsewhere, knowing that they have what they need, and how you're going to stay in contact. That could be really reassuring, connecting with others, and then, of course, follow the updates from the World Health Organization, and the CDC, and local public health officials. We all love the internet, and social media, and other media outlets, but they may or may not have reliable information, be cautious about that. There is a great deal of misinformation being circulated about cures, and what to do, and things you can make. Be very careful about that.

Dr. Tom Troast ([22:59](#)):

The World Health Organization generally is seen as the go to authority for global information, and the CDC is another sound source, especially, for specific directives, and information in the United States. You know, use your state public health agencies, your local county public health department, or your healthcare professional for sources of information. There are even hotlines being established out there, right? But again, go, go to vetted sources, you know, and for some, we know that these preparations can really be sufficient to reduce anxiety, but most of us can still struggle, right? Because, we're going to have worrisome thoughts and feelings, so let's talk about that next. Let's, let's, now we've done this. We d- we've looked at the disease, we've looked at some recommendations.

Dr. Tom Troast ([23:52](#)):

Let's, let's bring it to- uh to us, and let's talk about managing thoughts. Anxiety, and fear can be really powerful. I think we all know that. After all, these are the emotions that trigger us to keep safe, so we, we, we use these right? But, to manage anxious thoughts and feelings, you need to find a reset that works for you. This is the heavy lifting that we're talking about, a reboot. So, well, let's talk about a few different approaches in these upcoming slides. So, first, consider ways to replace anxious, anxious thoughts with reality. Just went through the virus, and the data, and the, and facts, so we're going look at reality. We want to first put your risk into perspective. We're encouraged to think in terms of probability, rather than possibility. The risk of contracting this virus in the U.S. is still relatively slow. It's important to stay aware and informed, but try to make sure that your level of fear does not exist your risk factors.

Dr. Tom Troast ([24:56](#)):

And, if you have specific concerns, that's when you turn to your healthcare professional. We want to put the disease in context. I think the word itself pandemic is really spooky. It's very scary. If you've seen television shows, or movies, and they talk about pandemic, it's always really frightening. It me- it really simply means that cases of this new disease are showing up around the world, and they may spread rapidly, because people generally don't have immunity, but this doesn't indicate... the word pandemic doesn't indicate how dangerous it's likely to be. We're exposed to health risks every day. The good health habits you use to reduce- or to reduce your risk of communicable diseases, again, going back to washing hands, these are precautions recommended for the co- the coronavirus. We've got to be careful about flawed assumptions about the threat posed by others. We've seen this, right?

Dr. Tom Troast ([25:53](#)):

For example, believing falsely that someone's nationality, or their ethnic, ethnic background automatically makes them a danger needlessly heightens our anxiety, and can really lead to damaging actions of personal attacks, or shunning. Stay with the facts. We've reviewed them, and finally, remind yourself of the emotional cost of that worst case scenario thinking, and what you can just, you can find this all over the place on the internet, on social media. While anxiety is a natural reaction, as we said, ruminating about the worst things that can happen doesn't change anything. It just wears us down. I think this is where we get exhausted. Panic can grow when we overestimate the threat, and underestimate our ability to cope with it, and this is where that reality reset can help.

Dr. Tom Troast ([26:48](#)):

And, I want to say that again, panic can grow when we overestimate the threat, right? And, it also grows when we underestimate our ability to cope with it, and this is why we need a reality reboot. I think that's really important, but that's our power. That's where we can get through this. Well, let's talk about balance in our next slide. We can also look ways, look for ways to bring balance to our thoughts when they feel like they're tipping too far towards anxiety and panic. I, I would probably make the argument that we've all been there already, right? How, how could we not? So, how do we, how do we bring this, this to balance? A couple of thoughts, you want to move, and move our thoughts to the present. Again, fear thrives on thoughts of what could happen. There's that word, what could happen. It really helps fear.

Dr. Tom Troast ([27:43](#)):

It's all the what ifs that feed one another until the worst case scenario seems inevitable. Instead, take a long, deep breath, and bring your thoughts back to the now, to this moment. Try to take note of what is constant, what's unchanged, what's okay in your world right now. What's there, right? Again, that fear is going to be driven if we get locked into what could happen. Second, focus on what you have control over. You know, the news stories, and the images about the spread of disease, or the unexpected impacts on the other parts of our lives can really make us feel paralyzed, can really make us feel helpless. So, we ask ourselves, what's within my control today? Perhaps it's making preparations as we talked about, or something simple, and calming, calming, maybe it's taking care of the garden, cleaning up the junk drawer, whatever it is. Organizing your house.

Dr. Tom Troast ([28:41](#)):

Maybe it's just using strategies that calm your thoughts. I, I tell clients that I've been working with, both clients here, and students, do something simple, physical, simple, physical. Do something. You've been meaning to clean out that, that closet, that file drawer, whatever it is. Focus on what you can control. I think using a mantra is really powerful too, phrases that you can repeat mentally to reset the moment. Simple messages that can narrow your focus, remind us that we're solid despite the unpredictability. Uh, classic examples, this too shall pass, or I'm going to take, take this one day at a time, maybe a poem, or a meaningful passage may bring some sort of comfort and reset. I, I challenge sometimes, especially, students go find me something, bring me back a mantra from a, from an author, from a poem, whatever it is, you know? I know for myself, I use a very simple mantra sometimes in times like this, and it goes something like this.

Dr. Tom Troast ([29:44](#)):

I've been be- I've been here before. I have, I've been here before at a time of crisis, at a time of emergency and I- and I've gotten through it. I just, I just need that. I need to know that I've been there. Take a break, change the channels, give your thoughts a break, you know, about thinking what has happened, and what might, what might happen next. Find a reliable distraction that releases you from this grip of worry, a book, a movie, creating artwork, hobby, playing a game, cooking a meal. For the first time I would- I would say, you know, it's all right to go ahead, and do binge watch Netflix for a little bit, whatever it is, you know? Notice what's going on when you realize you haven't been thinking about your worries. Try to find room for that each day, find that place, and as we say down at the bottom, be always aware, but not always fearful.

Dr. Tom Troast ([30:40](#)):

Awareness means paying attention to news that's specific to where we live, and where we might travel. Awareness is not the same as being fearful, living with constant fear, and being, you know, be constantly on alert, can make it harder to deal with the true risk, so that's, that's some real kind of reboot stuff for us to look at, and for us to think about. Let's talk about when it does become overwhelming. Let's look at our next slide, 'cause if thoughts and fears continue to grow and threaten to become panic, and they can, they really can. They can be for a moment, or they can be for the course of the day [inaudible 00:31:24] alarm button seems to, to be [inaudible 00:31:27] right? It can be helpful to do a couple things. Here are some things that, that you can intervene with. Try a thought stopping strategy. You know, unlike the, the approaches we just talked about, the idea here is to quickly shut down thoughts that are beginning to snowball.

Dr. Tom Troast ([31:44](#)):

W- we're not trying to replace them with something more rational, just stopping the threat, the threat of a flood, right? If you notice runaway thoughts, and sensations of panic, just saying, stop, stop, out loud. Just say it. Uh, this has got to stop, right? Visualize even a stop sign or other imagery. See a brick wall. This, this, I just got to stop this thought process, and sometimes st- saying it out loud, or having a solid visualization can really help. Use your senses to fix, to switch your focus away from increasing anxiety. Let's, let's really use our senses, you know. Take that deep calming breath. It's amazing how powerful that is. An intentional, deep calming breath, and then, look around the room, and if you want to try this, I really like this exercise. Real simple, take that breath, and then, first, identify five things you can see. Then find four things you can reach out, and touch.

Dr. Tom Troast ([32:44](#)):

The next, find three things you can hear, then find two things you can smell, and finally, one thing you can taste, even if it's a sip of water. You're going to find that your brain w- can shift away from the emotional focus to accomplish this. It's a pretty simple exercise. It's kind of, it's a real simple mindfulness exercise. I, I think it'd be really powerful, then we want to find comfort. You know, when we're compassionate with ourselves, you know, hormones kicked in, they're they're triggered, and they really chemically de- deactivate the, the fear, the fear circuitry that's inside us. These hormones really help us. When anxiety grows, try small gestures of physical comfort. For example, you might hold one hand with the other, or put your heart, put your hand over your heart, remind yourself that you're not alone with this difficulty.

Dr. Tom Troast ([33:42](#)):

Try, try to give yourself support, and kindness. The way you might encourage, or reassure a friend. Become your best friend, right? And then, support. It's normal to be afraid, and, and let's not, let's not undersell that, but you can find yourself extra support due to his anxiety, especially, if it's going on the majority of time, or you're having trouble sleeping, or you're just completely focused on COVID-19. You might want to think about talking with someone, a friend, a professional, someone in your life that can help you, that you can walk through this. There are professionals out there that you can seek, and, and, and access. We also need to manage our feelings, and let's, let's look at our next side. You know, thoughts and feelings go hand in hand. Of course, they do, all right? That they're, they're connected.

Dr. Tom Troast ([34:33](#)):

Acknowledging and expressing our feelings can help them from weighing us down. We, we need to get them out there, right? We don't want them to weigh us down. So, some thoughts, name your feelings, right? Labeling what we feel c- helps us corral our emotions, and realize that those feelings don't define us. You know, two statements, think about these two statements. I am scared, or I feel scared, right? Y- y- those are two very different sentences. There's a, there's, 'cause I feel, I feel scared creates a separation between us and emotion, that might feel overwhelming. I'm scared feels overwhelming, right? It can help us consider it more rationally, and even, remember that we felt this way before, and we've gotten through it. I know that sounds like real semantical gymnastics, but it really isn't. They're very different statements.

Dr. Tom Troast ([35:29](#)):

I, I, I am, I'm, I'm panicked. I'm feeling panic. Those are really two different statements. We want to understand the feelings of grief, and loss are normal. We can grieve whenever we lose something meaningful to us, whether it's tangible, or intangible. In this situation, the normal rhythms of our life

have been appended. Future plans might be in doubt. We worry about the possibility of being cut off from our loved ones. All of these are felt as loss, and that sense of grief we talked about before. This is really normal. If you're living with the loss of a loved one, the challenge can feel overwhelming. It's important that we seek out support in any way possible. I love the idea about finding our suitors, notice what brings us calm? You know, what, what makes you calm, right? Perhaps it's meditation. Maybe it's song that you love, journaling, running, being in nature, calling a friend, doing a stretching exercise, whatever works for you.

Dr. Tom Troast ([36:28](#)):

Be intentional to work those moves into each day, and frankly, a lot of these things call for us to be intentional. Make this on our agenda. We also want to offer supports to others that can shift our mental or emotional focus, tapping into our own sense of compassion, and doing helpful things, offering kindness to others can really renew us to really open up our hearts. It can be really a, a powerful antidote to the sense of vulnerability and helplessness. Now, of course, you want to remain safe, but consider for a second, where you might, where, where you might offer practical or emotional support, you know? You saw maybe that wonderful news story about Italians opening their windows, and singing together. What a wonderful, what a wonderful image that was. You haven't seen it, it's probably on YouTube by now. These, these Italian singing in a courtyard.

Dr. Tom Troast ([37:23](#)):

Offer to walk somebody's dog. If you have an elderly person in your neighborhood, or your building, what would they might need right now? Again, doing it safely, but how would that feel? And then, of course, have realistic expectations for yourself. There's a lot of unknowns, and you may not have the answer. Maybe we can't even have the answer. You, you can't control every outcome. Give yourself a break, right? And, realize we're doing the best we can. You know, and, and a- again, down at the slides, or at the bottom, what brings that sense of calm? And I, and I use this word a lot about healthy stuff. It has to become intentional. We have to make this part of us to go forward, and certainly, when we talk about intentional things, let's look at our next slide, and we can also use this mind, body connection.

Dr. Tom Troast ([38:17](#)):

Remember, you know, we talked about how the brain responds to danger, and we can go through the biochemistry for the rest of the day, but the brain really triggers that fight, flight or freeze response, right, when we have fear. You, you know what those feel like, right? That, that, that fast, shallow breath, tension, you know? A lot of times it's physical fear. We don't know, we don't know if that dog walking towards us is a friendly dog, or an angry dog, 'cause we don't see the owner, right? We, we, we, we that mind bod- body connection we want, 'cause we want, we want those things to be, to be aware of what's going on, but in situations like this, we can disrupt that response by restoring a sense of calm to our physical body, which in turn can calm the anxious thoughts. So, we want to, we want to trick the brain in some ways. We can do that in a couple of ways, breathing slowly, and deeply as you're able to, right? Can be done in the environ- in almost any environment.

Dr. Tom Troast ([39:15](#)):

And so, a very quick way to damper anxiety, and that means taking slow, deep breaths with a slightly lower exhale, and this stimulates the vagus nerve, the superhighway in our body, and sends a neurochemical signal to the brain that we're out of danger, and it's okay to switch out of fight, flight mode, and I really encourage that, if you've been feeling this way. You know, just take a deep breath in,

hold it, and then, just, you know, give it a couple beats, and let it out through your nose slowly. You can try that now if you want, right? Just go ahead and let it slow down. We also can release muscle, muscle tension using progressive relaxation, and this is just another technique, so you start at the top of your body. You, you tense then release one muscle group after another. Your brow, your neck, your jaw, your shoulders on and on. Doing this not only creates calming cues to the brain, but it also helps us notice how, how this held tension contributes to feeling of anxiety.

Dr. Tom Troast ([40:17](#)):

So, it's, it's creating a physical tension for [inaudible 00:40:21] and then relaxing, right? And, it's sending a signal to the body, tension, relax, not just tension, tension, tension, tension. It's tension, physical, right? And, relax. You can also use this realization. When we use our imagination to create a calming image, this incredible movie theater in our head, our body reacts as if we're actually there. Despite this constant alarm center, we might imagine a calm setting. What's a calm setting for you? Picture your worries as droplets that fall into a pool or anticipate, right? You can do this through guided prompts. There's a lot of online options, right? These gent- gentle techniques can calm that physical, and emotional sensation of anxiety, and slow down those racing, those racing thoughts.

Dr. Tom Troast ([41:11](#)):

So, what can we do now? It's action time. Let's look at our next slide, and talk about the moves we can do. A few key moves that can help you feel stronger, and more able to manage. You know, these are really powerful tips. Again, intentional things. Want to stick to your normal routine. The structure and predictability of doing daily tasks helps us feel normal by acting normal. Even small acts of normalcy, eating dinner with your family, keeping to a regular bedtime, or any, any regular ritual you enjoy can help you feel more, more grounded. Maybe you even wish to create more routines as life becomes more confined, right? When we're at home, are there some new routines we need? And, this is really important for our kids. It's important for children. We have a handout associated with this program, reassuring children, and that has tips about talking to, and supporting children.

Dr. Tom Troast ([42:07](#)):

I talk about normal routines, and I was talking to a, a bank executive, and we're talking about she's quarantined at home, and she says, "I think it's really true." She says, "I got to get out of my PJ's. The first day I stayed in my pajamas all day, and I just felt completely discombobulated. Second day, I got up at a normal time. I took a shower. I got out of my pajamas. I, I put on normal clothes, and I felt like it could work, right?" Normal routines. We want to limit news exposure, this goes without saying. You know, even the best reporters, well reported accurate stuff can arouse emotion, and increase fear. Let's get the facts, but it may not be helpful to hear reports over, and over again. Be aware of how you, and your family are responding. Maybe limit television, or online coverage. It becomes distressing.

Dr. Tom Troast ([42:52](#)):

Third, self care 101, prioritize self care. Keep in mind that the value of self care really is, is two fold. It can help us build up our physical reserves, but then, it also helps reduce and release stress. Make sure we're getting enough rest. Talk to your doctor if you have any sleep problems, eat healthy, right? Get that exercise. Find a way to get some exercise, find something you enjoy, and, and let's be careful with the alcohol and substance abuse, right? Those aren't ways to cope. They're certainly not healthy ways, and then, of course, the important part is connecting with others, and this disease really calls for us to

intentionally figure this one out. Talking to others helps us from being alone with our thoughts and emotions, right?

Dr. Tom Troast ([43:37](#)):

Think about that, making regular phone calls, that regular video chat with people in our lives. Get different perspectives, get a chance to talk about how you feel. Remember we talked about getting it out there? This can bring comfort, and help. You're going to feel more helpful, and supported, and for the other person too, it's a chance, right? To put our worries aside. We need to talk, we need to laugh, we need to play, and remember that this stressor doesn't define your life. Find the healthy souls. Who are your healthy souls in your life? Reach out to them, you know, and, and allow yourself to connect, so these are really important moves you can make. If you're struggling right now, jump in, and intentionally take one of these, or all four, get back to some normalcy, watch your obsessiveness with the news coverage.

Dr. Tom Troast ([44:32](#)):

Please use all your resources for self care. Things like activity, and exercise, and good nutrition. Those are powerful antidepressants for us. We need those as folks, and then, of course, we're social beings. Reach out to be with each other in a safe way, but find a way to connect with others, and finally, right? We want to remember our own resilience. When an unexpected and, and really frightening event, such as this, such as this virus, the coronavirus suddenly appears, right? And, it feels like it just came out of nowhere, it easily feels overwhelming, and while this is normal, it's also, remember, your strength and proven ability you have to navigate challenges in your life. We can get through this. Think about times when you faced hardship, sudden loss, or unexpected outcomes. Remember how you managed that, remember? Right? What helped you get through that? What got you there?

Dr. Tom Troast ([45:40](#)):

Those qualities, those responses, and that innate resiliency is still in you, and it's in you now. It's in all of us now. You know, we don't know how this challenge is going to finally play out, but being prepared, staying informed, having strategies to manage these anxious thoughts, and feelings, and tapping into your natural resilience are all tools that can help you weather this storm. You know, there's, there's a natural sense of self protectiveness that we all have, but remember, we're all connected to, and we can help really each other get through these difficult times. You remember the, the mantras we talked about? I'm not alone, I have resolved, I have resiliency. Think about us being together as a community. This is a test of us as individuals, and a community and tells us how interdependent we are.

Dr. Tom Troast ([46:45](#)):

We need to find our strength in ourselves, and in our families, in our coworkers, and our neighbors, and by believing in ourselves, and looking at all these potential intentional activities that can help us through this anxiety will get us through this. We can do this together. We're not alone. I wish you well. I wish you healthy days ahead, and best wishes for all of us, for our community as we get through this difficult time. We are going to get through this. Thank you for joining me today, and I've appreciated sharing my thoughts with you.

Speaker 1 ([47:26](#)):

Thank you, Dr. Troast, and ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for being with us today. That concludes today's webinar.

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