

"The natural healing force within each one of us is the greatest force in getting well." Hippocrates

The global coronavirus (COVID -19) pandemic is affecting us all. It is testing our humanity, faith, and our capacity to cope with these unprecedented circumstances with hope, courage, and determination. For our DFCI patients, families and staff it is a double challenge. Our patients are especially vulnerable as they are already bravely fighting cancer and are now facing another threat to their health. Our devoted staff are working tirelessly to care for and protect patients, as well as their own families at home. Understandably, it is an immensely stressful time for all. We DFCI chaplains, are currently working offsite and cannot physically visit with patient due to strict social distancing requirements aimed at reducing the spread of the virus. While we are socially distanced, please know we are spiritually connected. We continue to offer our spiritual and emotional support and guidance by telephone, email and this website.

Allow me to share with you here some strategies for coping and building resilience. The importance of the mind body connection has been well documented. Our faith, thoughts, emotions, and physical well-being have mutual effect on each other. Maintaining our mental and spiritual health is now even more important as we self-isolate in our homes, away from our normal social connections, friends, family. As it is important to maintain physical hygiene, like washing our hands, we must maintain hygiene of our thoughts, manage our emotional response and make choices that enhance our physical and mental well-being.

We each have within us inner peace, serenity and balance. Anxiety, fear, external and internal stressors chip away at our natural state of balance and calm. We can return to this natural state by engaging different spiritual practices. Meditation, prayer, and even silence are all powerful practices that can guide us toward inner peace and relax our minds and bodies. We can use these practices to help us find joy and calm even in difficult times.

Silence

Allow yourself to be still. To be silent. Keep in mind: Holy Scripture informs us: "Be still and know that I am your God." Psalm 46, 10. Silence is a primary language of God. Mother Teresa offered the following message: *"The fruit of silence is prayer, the fruit of prayer is Faith, Love and Hope that enhance inner desire in our hearts to serve God and our neighbor."* In the moment of inner stillness, we connect to our own spirit and God's spirit within in our hearts and be inspired from above. It is in the stillness, that many are inspired to create and discover. *"The silence is very important. The music is not in the notes, but silence in between"* Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. *"I think 99 times and find nothing. I stop thinking, swim in silence, and the truth comes to me."* Albert Einstein.

Centering Prayer Guidelines:

- Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence.
- *The sacred word expresses our intention to consent to God's presence and action within.*
- *The sacred word is chosen during a brief period of prayer asking the Holy Spirit to inspire us with one that is especially suitable for us.*
- Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
- When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.
- *"Thoughts" is an umbrella term for every perception, including sense perceptions, feelings, images, memories, plans, reflections, concepts, commentaries, and spiritual experiences.*
- *Thoughts are an inevitable, integral and normal part of Centering Prayer*
- At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes."

Meditation/Relaxation Response Guidelines:

- Pick a *focus word*, short phrase, or prayer that is *firmly rooted in your belief system*.
- Sit quietly in a comfortable position.
- Close your eyes.
- Deeply relax all your muscles, beginning at your feet and progressing up to your face. Keep them relaxed.
- Breathe through your nose. Become aware of your breathing. As you breathe out, say the word, "One," silently to yourself. For example, breathe IN...OUT, "ONE", IN...OUT, "ONE"; etc. Breathe easily and naturally.
- Continue for 10-20 minutes. You may open your eyes to check the time, but do not use an alarm. When you finish, sit quietly for several minutes, at first with your eyes closed and later with your eyes opened. Do not stand up for a few minutes.
- Do not worry about whether you are successful in achieving a deep level of relaxation. Maintain a passive attitude and permit relaxation to occur at its own pace. When distracting thoughts occur, try to ignore them by not dwelling upon them and return to repeating "ONE". With practice, the response will come with little effort. Practice the technique once or twice daily.

Serenity Prayer: *O Holy One, give me serenity to accept the things that I cannot change; courage to change the things that I can; and wisdom to know the difference.*