MENTAL HEALTH: COPING WITH HURRICANE SEASON DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

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Over the years, I have become more sensitive to the tremendous stresses and strains all of us face in our daily lives. For many of us, it is not the physical symptoms of Covid-19 that plagues us but rather the isolation, the uncertainty and fear that has mentally pushed us to the breaking point. And as if all of that was not enough, along comes hurricane season and the high likelihood that over the next couple of months Covid-19 will have to share center stage with reports of tropical storms, hurricane watches, and hurricane warnings as storms develop hundreds of miles away off the coast of foreign lands and slowly advance towards us. We have all become too familiar with the steady march over many days as the cone of danger zeroes in Florida and the east coast of the United States.

So, what to do? We cannot change the existence of or the nature of hurricanes, including their scope, destructiveness, or unpredictability. Nor can we change the media's love affair with hurricanes and report on every second of their life from birth off the coast of Africa as a small weather event to the aftermath days and weeks later. All of this creates significant anxiety, even for veterans who have weathered many tumultuous years.

For starters, plan and be prepared. And be flexible with your plan to address likely changes. There are ample resources available to help you create the details of a good idea and make the necessary preparations. Aside from the physical benefits of a plan, what planning, and preparation do for us is it gives us a sense of control, which is a strong antidote to uncertainty. It helps us mentally know what we are going to do, how we will do it, and have the resources to do it.

Next, filter the media. Do not engage in the non-stop social media, print media, broadcast media, cable media, and on and on, which will bombard you every second of every day for weeks on end if you allow it. And by the way, that includes your family, friends, co-workers, and random people who you never cared about their opinions previously but now treat like they are accredited, meteorologists. If you have made a plan and have prepared, then there are minimal media and other credible (and mostly not credible) sources have to offer you other than giving you information about the storm itself—location, speed, scope, and expected arrival. Given the speed with which storms move—very slowly, instead of hanging on every report every second of the day, tune in only at set times a couple of times a day and only to the extent the storm is more and more likely headed your way.

Finally, focus on you—exercise—which hopefully you do now—and continue to do so. Sleep—stay on your regular sleep schedule. Stick to your routine. And if you are not already doing so, consider adding meditation, mindfulness, or some similar technique to your routine to calm your mind.

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