

Volume 1, Issue 26  
April 28, 2020

# Fighting Despair

During COVID-19 – CBT Tip #1

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*For some people, the worst of COVID-19 has been the loss of pub nights or dinners out. Others have lost life savings in the stock market crash, or a loved one to the virus.*

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**All reactions great and small during this global pandemic are important to recognize and respond to as being a valid part of your emotional experience. This tip on fighting despair can be used for any scenario you find yourself in with feelings of hopelessness.**

## **Recognize the Fight for Happiness is Real**

Evolutionary psychology provides suggestions as to why our brain and emotional / nervous system react the way they do for adaptation & self-preservation. Something that has always fascinated me is that when we tell ourselves there is no hope about something, our body actually begins shutting down – isolating and withdrawing from situations, engaging in more rumination (thinking and obsessing over our problems), wanting to sleep more to conserve energy... feeling depressed. This is meant to conserve what we have in the face of a powerless situation and lead to resolving it. The narrative or brain command we give ourselves is that powerful. So my first suggestion of how to respond in the face of feeling hopelessness or despair is to

recognize there is another option, there is an internal conflict and *choice*, and how you frame it will result in how you feel and emerge from this struggle.

## Grieve But Don't Give Up

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*Validate your feeling  
of helplessness  
without resigning to  
stay within it.*

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There is a lot to grieve right now during this pandemic – loss has been nation and worldwide, ranging from the loss of small simple pleasures... to the loss of jobs, savings, and the death of friends and/or family members. Sometimes in the onset of our troubles when we feel out of control and overwhelmed... when it seems like there isn't much we can do about a situation and we succumb to despair... this feeling of helplessness moves us into a passive state of accepting the helplessness without fighting back. What's important is to validate that feeling of hopelessness, even acknowledge the desire to give up, without resigning to stay within it.

When you notice these feelings getting stronger (like a 5+/10 from intensity) first, name the feeling. I am feeling \_\_\_\_\_ (hopeless, helpless, unhappy, in despair, desperate, discouraged, lonely, lost, disconnected, sad, heartbroken, grieved – name it!). Say it out loud, write it down, share on social media, add #pandemicproblems.

Second, notice the thoughts most linked to the feeling. I am thinking \_\_\_\_\_ (“there is nothing I can do”, “this will never end”, “I can't win/be successful/be happy”). Your beliefs and thoughts – the things you tell yourself are POWERFUL. Tons and tons of research shows the power of words and self-narratives. It literally changes our brain structure and brain and body responses.

Third, fight back. Can you try on a feeling or behaviour linked to a feeling opposite to your hopeless, helpless, despair, sad feeling? What would empowered, resourceful, strong, happy, optimistic, encouraged, connected, uplifted, inspired or renewed look like? What thoughts connect you to that feeling? FIGHT BACK the despair with an opposite response and keep fighting. Recognize the battlefield is your thoughts and if you win this fight you not only will survive this time of struggle but one day, even if not today, you will be happy once more.



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