

## ***Letter to the World***

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Dear World,

These are challenging times. There is a lot of information about COVID-19 floating around out there, and it just adds to other stressors we have in our lives. We live in a time of instant access to world news whether it's via television or social media. When life feels like it's out of control, I would ask that we all remember the **control** that we do have during times like this.

**I can control how much time I spend watching the news.** We need to stay informed, but we don't need to continuously watch the television news or social media. Find other things to focus on as well.

**I can control what I focus on each day.** We can focus on negative things in life or we can focus on what is positive in life. I'm sure you've heard it before, but there is always something positive. Sometimes it becomes necessary to realize the things we take for granted each day. It's called counting your blessings. I am a big believer that the little things in life are important. Take time to notice what we all have a tendency to take for granted.

**I can control who I interact with each day.** Socialization is important. We just need to be careful how we interact these days. Even if one is self-quarantining, we still need socialization. The amount of interaction differs for everyone, just focus on what you need.

**I need to be heard.** This is so important. I tell my counseling students that people need to be heard and their feelings need to be validated. Let's all make it a point to really listen to others. We are all different and will have differing feelings about our world right now. Please just listen to understand each other without judgment. One of my biggest pet peeves is someone saying "you shouldn't feel like that." The reality is that I do feel like that! I may want to change how I feel, and maybe would like your help to change, but please validate what I feel. It doesn't have to be difficult, it's just about listening and understanding.

**I can remind myself of what has helped me in the past during a stressful time.** I believe we all have a "tool box" that we fill during our lives. It contains those things we have found that help us during troubling times. The issue I have found is that we tend to forget what's in our tool box when we are struggling. I encourage folks to write down what has worked for them and just look at it during difficult times. Something that might be useful is a "stress first aid kit." I have a colleague, Maggie Denning, who I have made several stress management presentations with in the past. She said to me one day, "we have medical first aid kits, why don't we have stress first aid kits." What a great idea. It's something to go to in times of distress. I would encourage folks to put together their own "kit." It does not have to be hard. Mine includes basic things to remind me of what is really important in life. Family and friend pictures, little items that are

important to my life (e.g. Special Olympics silver medal), etc. Whatever reminds you of happiness and peace can be included.

**I can just remember to take care of myself.** We need to remember to just take care of ourselves. I believe we need to make this a priority. I often hear that this is selfish and putting ourselves first. I would argue that if we don't do that, we cannot continue to take care of those who need our assistance. Oh we can for a while, but eventually if we aren't taking care of ourselves, we will fail in our attempt to take care of others. It's really okay to focus on yourself and what you need.

**I can remember to just breathe.** We typically don't breathe right. Take a deep breath in and slowly let it out. Deep breathing can calm us down, usually we don't think about this simple act. Try it and relax.

Be well.