

- Burnout / Mental health

## Healthy distractions a survival tool

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What does one do when the reality around gets frightening and shocking by the day? Relatives or friends with fever, cough or breathlessness ringing up desperately seeking help to find a hospital bed, oxygen cylinders or an ICU. Or you waking up and noticing your spouse coughing? How do you live through and cope with this helpless feeling for nights and days along with the fear that it could be your turn tomorrow?



Emotional fatigue and burnout are emerging as new terms in this crisis. Several frontline health-care workers attending to critical and dying patients every day are exhausting their stores of emotional energy. One young doctor who was continuously on Covid duty for a month, hanged himself recently, leaving behind a pregnant wife. How do we deal with this type of frustration?

In these times, distraction, the bad word that kept us from concentrating on studies or work, is reappearing with in a new 'avatar', this time with a new prefix as healthy distraction.

There is a real story behind today's post. Last evening my 45-year-old niece called and said that she was planning to spend the evening doing riyaz, a local term for singing and practicing notes! I did make a how can you, when 'Rome is burning' kind of snide remark, but soon remembered that she had recently braved her 80-year-old mother's Covid trauma and her husband's cancer surgery. Her tool kit for survival was certainly better than mine!

Healthy distraction is now emerging as a necessity to maintain our sanity. Constant thinking of what is going around us or wondering what might happen next is not changing things. Nor are our feelings of fear and sadness at the devastation and deprivation of our neighbors making them go away. Sure, we must do what we can, but learn to take our minds off and distract ourselves for short periods to reduce the impact of continuous negative thinking.

People are using distraction to deal with pandemic isolation, anxiety and burnout. Our devices such as cellphones often come handy, as do watching TV. Music, reading, DIYs, videogames, puzzles, gardening, painting or even fantasizing could help provide that much needed escape in a positive way when the emotional grind gets overbearing. And we need to resort to them from time to time without feeling guilty.

Mind fullness is a very valuable technique. It requires engaging with the present: the now and here state rather than the fear of future or grief of the past. As does meditation. Both these are techniques of mind control that are helping people cope.

To survive the coming days: Think about what you do when you need distraction. Assess whether it is a healthy distraction

Try something new to distract yourself that gives you a positive escape.

Build positive distraction habits. It is like giving the exhausted car engine of your mind a break in order to make it run longer.