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Staying serene in a world of uncertainty

By DR. TINA CHRISTINE L. CHASEK
HealthyMINDS

American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr wrote a very powerful prayer in 1932; you may recognize it. “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change. Courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

The nation was in turmoil when this was written. The Great Depression had a hold on our country, people were out of work, the land turned to dust, and families were starving. Niebuhr was looking for a way to comfort people and give them a sense of direction in a dark time. The Serenity Prayer became that source of comfort and a powerful reminder of what could be done when uncertainty and chaos invade our world.

Things are not so great now. We are facing multiple challenges: the COVID pandemic, racial tension and a terrible economy. Families are hurting, uncertainty looms regarding opening schools and the economy, and confusion abounds over what to do to keep ourselves and our loved ones safe. How do we find serenity amid all the chaos? What can we control? What should we let go of?

The Serenity Prayer reminds us that we have to sort through our situation. We need to look at what things we have control over and what we don’t. Even though there is much we cannot control, we do have things we can do to get us through difficult times.

- Breathe when you feel anxious. A few slow calming deep breaths can do wonders for the body and mind. It calms our nervous system and clears our mind.
- Take a break from the media and the news. You can control what you consume.
- Connect with the good stuff! Spend time with family and people you enjoy being around. Get out in the sunshine. Watch a funny movie and laugh! These all boost the naturally occurring “feel good” chemicals in your body and lead to inner joy.

On the flip side, let go of the things you can’t change. Just as we need to empty the trash every day, we must empty the “trash” in our mind and let go of the things causing us distress. Be honest with yourself on what these things are. Hanging on to them only causes more distress and heartache in the long run. Why do that? In the words of Niebuhr, it is not “wise.”

There is a little-known second verse to the Serenity Prayer:

“Living one day at a time,
Enjoying one moment at a time,
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace.”

Staying serene in a world of uncertainty doesn’t mean we won’t have trouble. We WILL! It means that in the midst of all the trouble, we can have inner peace and a calm heart. The words of the Serenity Prayer ring just as true today as they did when it was written during the Great Depression. Control what you can, accept the things you can’t, and have the wisdom to know the difference. We will get through this; have faith!

To hear more from Dr. Chasek about serenity in these uncertain times, watch the HealthyMINDS video chats on the BCCHP Facebook Page. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the HealthyMINDS group, a collaboration of BCCHP, believed it was crucial to start conversations regarding fears, anxieties and concerns about COVID-19.

To suggest a topic, email Tana Miller at healthy minds@bccp.org.

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