

How to make friends with fear and choose *creative resilience* in these crazy times

By **Debbie Craig**

I sit here on the eve of our president's announcement of our country's shut down and state of emergency in pensive reflection. I have just finished facilitating Dr Joe Dispenza's Neuro Change weekend Program that encourages people to become aware of their choices and their moment-to-moment states of being. We examine how to build new neural paths and habits (and prune old limiting ones) to manage stress, change and for boosting self-belief, energy, health and life results.

I have also spent some time today diving back into world news, social media feeds, calls with friends and family and news about how people and organisations are reacting and responding to this global crisis. There are some amazing stories of people being proactive, creative, brave and supportive of others in their time of need. There are also other sensational stories and selective facts that are spreading fear, hopelessness and panic resulting in staying home, stock-piling and trying to stay in safe in their own worlds.

And neither of these are right or wrong, good or bad. It is just people doing what they feel they need to do as their unconscious programming plays itself out.

There are, however, significant ripple effects of these different approaches to massive, uncertain, disruptive and complex change to our way of life. And we have some choices as to how we approach this. What if we could make friends with fear rather than being driven by it? What if we could choose creative resilience with ourselves, our families and our teams or communities to care for each other and adapt proactively to keep life going in a way that is safe and sustainable?

MAKING FRIENDS WITH FEAR

Human beings have a natural fear of change out of a need for self-preservation (and the comfort of the familiar and the status quo). A little fear can be healthy to remind us to be vigilant in new or uncertain situations. However, if we allow fear and self-preservation at all costs to drive our moment-to-moment feelings and behaviors, we develop a physical and chemical survival-based stress response that are not built for continuous activation. Our bodies are flooded with stress hormones (adrenaline and cortisol among others), our creative, thinking part of our brains shut down, our empathy and intuition becomes non-existent and we focus all our attention on the outside world. We worry about having enough (food, money, resources) and we worry about having enough time and space to prevent a threat to our bodies or our loved ones and we become self- and lack focused. We keep worrying, reading, thinking and imagining worst-case scenarios. We call friends and complain about the risks, we go to the shops and see the empty shelves, grab what we can and then we watch the news and notice the death tolls rising. Each time we worry again and remind ourselves of our anxiety and fear, we re-trigger the stress response, re-flood ourselves with chemicals, eat poorly, sleep less and slowly but surely break down our body's ability to recharge, rebuild and regenerate itself at a cellular level thereby severely weakening the immune system. When we are stressed, we have a perception gap between what is imagined and what is real and often feel isolated, threatened and fearful. We put life and fun on hold. We become even more susceptible to infections.

- How could we **make friends with fear**?
- How could we be more effective through **observing our fear with compassion**, putting it in perspective through **focus on gratitude** what we DO have in our lives and deciding **what we can** and cannot **control** about our environment at this time?
- How do we **utilise initial fear** to being aware, informed, safe and taking conscious steps to be safe ...and then move beyond it?
- How could we actively and **consciously choose creative resilience** to make the most of the frightening change we are facing?

CHOOSING CREATIVE RESILIENCE

When we choose creative resilience, we notice the fear, acknowledge it AND then choose creative and community-sustaining mindsets and actions we can face the change or potential threats with optimism and hope. **Our energy flows where our attention goes!** We are then more able to stay calm and notice the opportunities and positive examples that others are showing us in the world. When we are calm and hopeful, our central nervous system can relax and allow our brains to focus on new possibilities and connections. Our bodies produce DHEA and other positive, feel good hormones, that energize us and help us regenerate and heal. We start to think creatively and collaboratively about how we can do business on-line or with minimum physical risk. We have the energy to reach out to communities that are learning daily, sharing important insights and spreading constructive messages of hope. We also have capacity for compassion for the vulnerable and affected and energy to contribute to solutions. We have better conversations, eat better, sleep better and build a strong immune system and a healthy empowering mental and emotional state. We become less susceptible to infections. We continue building our ideas and networks for the future and use our time differently and effectively for empowered thoughts, feelings and actions rather than the automatic fight, flight or freeze response.

GETTING BEYOND THE AMYGDALA HIJACK

So how do we build the resilience to stay positive, hopeful, creative and calm and not succumb to the fear when life seems to be turning upside down around us?

The amygdala in our brains is a pattern recognizing machine. It seeks the familiar and the known and alerts us to the unknown or unfamiliar (ANY CHANGE or perceived THREAT!!) by activating the sympathetic nervous system, releasing stress chemicals and putting the body on high alert to be ready for action - fight or flight. This happens without our conscious awareness within nano-seconds of us thinking or feeling something scary. So how do we stop it and choose a different response?

We need to learn to consciously activate the parasympathetic nervous system that calms and relaxes the body and brings the body, the heart and brain back into homeostasis or balance. We need to use our metacognition (awareness of self, thinking, emotions, actions, impact) to observe ourselves in the midst of our daily lives and pause, reflect, choose and re-engage for healthier responses. We need to set a new base-line for how we respond to change and uncertainty, that gives us time to examine our options and choice before going down the limbic system rabbit hole.

TECHNIQUES FOR REMEMBERING OUR CHOICE

It takes conscious awareness, energy and continual effort to stay in CREATIVE CHOICE instead of automatic habits AND SUCCUMB TO FEAR. Here are a few ideas that can enable change at practical and a deeper sub-conscious level, and align neural pathways for the version of yourself you wish to be.

1. Breathing

One of the simplest and most powerful ways to adjust our stress response, calm our brains and bodies down, activate our immune system and tap into our inner wisdom is the art of breathing fully and deeply. Deep slow breathing stimulates the relaxation response and automatically decreases heart rate, blood pressure, and skeletal muscle tone, and has been proven to increase organ and overall physical health, immunity to disease, reduce anxiety and insomnia and result in greater calmness, presence and acceptance.

For even greater results, try the Heart Focused Breathing Technique from HeartMath: Focus your attention on your heart area. Breathe a little deeper than normal, in for 5 or 6 seconds and out 5 or 6 seconds. See more on www.heartmath.com

2. Mindfulness

The simplest description of mindfulness is a moment-to-moment awareness of one's experience without judgment. Mindfulness can be practiced when sitting quietly, walking in nature, prayer, meditating or doing practices such as yoga and Tai Chi. We can also learn to practice mindfulness while sitting in traffic, cooking or washing dishes. It is an intent to be aware, a slowing down and deepening of breathing and a slowing down brainwaves from Beta to Alpha State. There are many scientifically researched benefits of mindfulness including improved quality of thinking and decision making, empathy, intuition, inspiration, memory recall, self-esteem and reduced tendencies toward moods, depression, heart disease, illness and fatigue.

3. Learning and Sharing in Community

It is also good to stay in touch with supportive friends and loved ones (some of them virtually) and to be able to talk about how you feel, what you can do and support each other to stay in a healthy state of mind. Create space to talk about fears, change, creativity and positive possibilities in your team and organisations. Share tools that work for you with others. Use this time to learn a new skill and practice being flexible and creative. We are after all, connected and inter-dependent on this beautiful planet of ours, both physically and energetically. Be part of the solution and building a world we can all be proud of.

For more excellent resources to support yourself and your loved ones during this time, have a look at the following:

- **Positive affirmations to condition your sub-conscious mind to be safe and healthy**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Zyhb8Pz2hM&feature=youtu.be>

- **Article on why-slowng-your-breathing-helps-you-relax**

<https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20200303-why-slowng-your-breathing-helps-you-relax>

- **The Heart's Intuitive Intelligence – a path to personal, social and global coherence**

<https://www.heartmath.org/about-us/videos/the-hearts-intuitive-intelligence/>

- **Discover How to Rewire Your Brain with Neuroplasticity**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bbLP-as1ABk>