Everyone has experienced a meeting or appointment being moved, cancelled, or postponed. Most of us have likely had a team member not be present for a major event or a student leader whose sudden schedule change impacted months of meticulous planning. We’ve all experienced shifts happening — but never like this. And this shift is real.

In-person classes and council advising is shifting online. Spring programs are shifting to (maybe) the fall. Conference room meetings are shifting to Zoom or Teams. Everything around us is shifting. Every day our plans shift, even from what they were yesterday or last week — which feels as if it were a month ago. Even our family’s daily routines have shifted. Although we are all likely determined to retain some sort of “normalcy,” things just keep shifting. In these times of unprecedented uncertainty, the one constant seems to be: shift.

But what about us? Are we to shift as well? How do we navigate our ever changing lives and the emotional trauma that so many of us now feel as the result of “extraordinarily stressful events that shatter your sense of security, making us feel helpless” (Robinson, et all, 2020)?

**Increase your sense of safety**
We can reduce anxiety with healthy actions that make us feel safer.

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water for at least 20-seconds.
- Cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, arm, or elbow.
- Avoid going to the grocery store at busy times. If possible, get up early or go late when fewer people will be there.
- Create a new family routine for cleaning and disinfecting objects or surfaces in your apartment or house. Make it fun by blaring the same song each time throughout the house and providing treats afterwards.
- Create a plan now for what you would do if someone in your household were to become ill.

**Listen to your feelings**
It’s okay to not be okay during this time. Practice listening to your feelings and responding accordingly.

- Take a break when you need it. Close the laptop, turn off the phone, and just be still.
- You only need to do things “just for today.” Don’t allow yourself to spin into forever, live just in and for today.
● Reframe the idea of “working from home” to simply that you are at home while working and doing the best you can.
● Go for a 5-minute walk around the neighborhood. If you are unable to get outside due to seasonal allergies or weather, do simple stretches in your home.
● Remember that anxiety, fear, and sadness are all normal human feelings. However, if you begin to feel anxious most of the day every day, it might be helpful to talk to a trusted friend about your feelings.
● If it is not healthy for you, limit your screen time and unfollow or mute “friends” whose posts are becoming toxic or too stressful.
● Practicing mindfulness and meditation can be great tools. If those are new practices for you, there are several free apps that can get you started.

Help others & maintain connections (it will make you feel better)
It’s easy to get caught up in yourself and your own fears and concerns. And even though it seems the world has become obsessed with stockpiling toilet paper and string cheese, it’s important to remember that we really are all in this together.

● Put a note with your cellphone number in mailboxes of those in your neighborhood who are elderly or have newborns or young children offering to pick up items they need from the grocery store.
● Call three people every day that you normally wouldn’t check-in with and ask them, “How are you feeling today?” Then, just listen.
● Be a calming and positive influence on those around you. Positivity is contagious.
● Create a Marco Polo or text video thread with your closest friends and just be silly. Give yourself permission to laugh and have fun each day.

As the shifts continue, and they most likely will, it is important to find your constant and your stability. Rome wasn’t built in a day and your self-care plan doesn’t have to be either. Take time for you each day, find new ways to roll with each new shift, and remember that no matter how many shifts happen, some things will always remain the same. Personally, I find great comfort in looking outside every morning and evening to see the sun rising in the east and setting in the west. For now, that is my constant.

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References

