

PRACTICING GRATEFULNESS IN A CRISIS



Noticing things in our life that we appreciate or are thankful for is an essential part of building happiness and supporting our mental health. The feeling we get from acknowledging positive aspects of our life is known as gratitude. People with higher gratitude often demonstrate improved interpersonal relationships, better physical health, and show greater resilience in times of crisis.

While gratitude can occur naturally it is possible for us to increase this feeling with effort. This article intends to highlight the value of practicing gratitude as we live through the COVID-19 crisis.

It is a reality that good things do not stick in our minds as easily as bad things. This is a trait built into the human brain that helped us survive in the course of our evolution. Constant attention towards what is wrong or what could be better would have been advantageous for humans in the past.

Today, from a mental health standpoint this trait often places us in a mindset that pays little attention to the positive aspects of our lives. This can place our mental health in a vulnerable position that may become overwhelmed with negative thoughts and emotions during a crisis.

A helpful analogy is to think of a cyclist riding against the wind. It is likely as they ride they are having constant negative thoughts and feelings about how hard it is to peddle with the wind resisting them. Now imagine the wind changes to move with the cyclist, initially they would feel happy for the help. However, soon the wind would likely leave their consciousness and be taken for granted. The cyclist's focus would shift towards other things that might be difficult or unhelpful.

This is a normal human brain in action, and like the wind there are many things in this crisis that we cannot help or control. Therefore, we need to practice changing our natural focus to notice and appreciate the things we can be grateful for. This will help us move through times of crisis in the healthiest way possible.

Practicing gratitude and appreciation is an essential part of life, and crisis management. For more gratitude strategies, contact the EAP line for assistance on:

1300 878 379



Gratitude has the power to help release us from toxic emotions. If we are focusing on things we appreciate it is hard to also be envious, angry or sad at the same time. By practicing gratitude we are improving our ability to put our minds in a healthier more resilient space. Studies using fMRI scans have been able to show distinct forms of brain activity in participants experiencing gratitude as compared to emotions like anger or guilt. Gratitude has the power to change you and your brain.

SOME PRACTICAL TIPS TO HELP:

- Begin by developing a mindset that you are willing to practice being grateful as a skill. There will be times during this crisis when you simply do not feel like being grateful for anything. However, just because we feel strong resistance does not mean we cannot practice. Even if you have to force yourself to begin it can have profound positive effects. Gratitude gains momentum over time with practice.
- Build a gratitude routine: when you wake up the morning of before going to bed create a habit of bringing yourself into the present moment and acknowledging things you are grateful for. If nothing comes to you straight away, sit with that for a moment and wait. You are tapping into a powerful force and sometimes that takes time.
- Use a gratitude journal to list things you are grateful for, no matter how small. Try to add new things each day and become as creative as possible. These could include people, resources, experiences or opportunities. Even if you do not feel gratitude at the time still make an effort to write something down. A small list of 5 items per day is sufficient.
- Take photographs of things in your life that make you happy. Creating a gratitude album can boost the awareness you have for positive aspects of your environment. For example you could take a photo of your fresh cup of coffee in the morning or your friends, family or pets.
- Reach out to someone important in your life and express to them how grateful you are that they are in your life. Taking the time to tell someone you are grateful for them will hopefully have a positive impact on their day and give you a feeling of satisfaction.
- Help build accountability and support by finding a gratitude partner. Team up with someone close to you to practice this skill by sharing your gratitude list and brainstorming new ideas. This can motivate you and encourage you to maintain this behaviour and help foster skill development.
- Developing an increased ability to practice gratitude does not need to be a huge task. Taking a few moments each day to notice and appreciate things can have a huge positive impact on your mental health. Do not become disheartened if you miss a day of practice here or there. Acknowledge you slipped up and then get back into your routine.

Like any skill, the benefits of gratitude will take time to become apparent. Be patient with developing this skill and give the benefits time to grow. Few people look back on their lives and wish they had been less grateful. Move towards practicing daily gratitude as a guiding principle in your life and you will be well equipped to face any crisis in the future.

For more information, visit our website at www.veretis.com.au or see our additional resources available at veretis.com.au/psych-up