

Pre-conditions for Trauma during COVID PANDEMIC

Bessel Van der Kolk, a prominent trauma therapist and author of *The Body Keeps the Score*, explains that this Pandemic sets up some pre-conditions for trauma. Which is why we need to be especially intentional about self-care and other-care during this time.

Here is his list of pre-conditions for trauma and some of my recommendations for this self-care/other care:

1. **Lack of PREDICTABILITY AND CONTROL** over our lives
2. **Loss of safety** – there is no vaccine yet, no guarantee that we won't get the virus, but what can we do to make it less likely – social isolation, hand washing and quarantine, but also keeping our nervous systems safe and well regulated (not in alarm/psychological unrest as we are constantly scanning for danger) – have a good weep, have a good laugh daily
3. **Immobilised** – our body shuts down in trauma - not moving much – stuck indoors in a small space – make sure you move regularly – exercise is vital at least 20 mins of cardio 3 times a week – but daily at this time of deep vulnerability is very important.
4. **Loss of connection** – this is an attachment deficit that we need to be intentional about taking care of - reaching out – a symptom of depression is withdrawing from relationships – reach out to those you know who are vulnerable and if you are the vulnerable one, make an intention to reach out to at least one person a day – if you live alone it is even more essential. Learning to be ok with being by yourself (solitude) without feeling alone.... Are you a good friend to yourself? Self-compassion and collecting tears of loneliness – we were never meant to be alone.
5. **Feelings of HELPLESSNESS** – (being a victim) this is understandable when feeling overwhelmed – and so we may numb out to not feel the deep vulnerability. Watch out that you don't numb out (that's the roots of addiction: substance abuse as well as other forms – engaging with porn – that's an epidemic in our churches at the best of times – it will be rife now, other forms of addiction would be over eating/comfort eating, gaming, gambling and workaholism.... That will be a road of futility in these days when some are over-worked, and others are under-worked).
6. **Loss of time and rhythms** - dislocated and disorientating time – so make sure you put in your own rhythms and schedules – eat and sleep at same times, get dressed, go for a run, do meditation practice, reaching out time, going inward time... journaling and reading. Resist the fear that this will go on forever, catastrophising – Julian of Norwich: all is well, and all manner of things will be well.... Hold on to future hope and find daily hope.... Watch what you expose yourself to – too much news of devastation will overwhelm you especially if you are a Highly Sensitive Person.
7. **Loss of a sense of purpose** – that can be feel the existential angst of what is the point of our existence. Engage in spiritual practices to remind yourself that beyond this imminent distress-filled space is a transcendent reality – the Trinity is holding you and ultimately you are in safe hands. Romans 8:28 – nothing (not even plague pestilence or COVID can separate us from the love of God) as attachment beings our biggest fear is to be separated – from others and our self as well as with our deity.