

## Dealing with Things you Can't Control

Source: [Mind Beacon](#)

How long the COVID-19 pandemic will last and what the impact will be... Both of those are simply beyond any one person's control.

It's a better strategy to accept that, at this time, nobody really knows how long this will last. Instead, commit to knowing that it will certainly be over at some time, and find ways to get through it together. So, what are all the things that you might be worrying about right now that you can't control?

### The Future

People try to control the future in all kinds of ways, including obsessively scanning media in an attempt to reduce uncertainty. Or, by compulsively speculating and predicting what will happen next in an attempt to land on something "solid."

They believe that if they think "hard enough" about something, it will prevent something bad from happening. Unfortunately, constant worry and speculation doesn't reduce uncertainty or anxiety, or prevent bad things from happening.

It's a better strategy to accept that the future is uncertain and commit to facing it with your values, strengths, compassion and optimism. Rather than worrying and speculating about a distant and uncertain future, focus on problem-solving in the "now" of this day, this week and this month.

### Your Emotional Responses

Our emotions are natural responses that protect us. They also inform us and guide our behaviour. Even extreme emotions can be telling us something important.

Emotions are not dangerous and you don't have to avoid or control them. On any day during COVID, you may be feeling fearful, anxious, upset, angry, demoralized or depressed. When people are afraid of their emotions or they try to "control" them. It usually doesn't work very well and often leads to more problems.

So, rather than trying to control your emotions, it's a better strategy to accept them for what they are (natural, informative and not dangerous), and commit to managing them as best as you can.

### What Other People Do

You can only control your own actions. You can't control the actions of other people. This is a hard and long lesson for most people. However, most really happy people are that way partly because they've learned to stop trying to control the actions of other people.

For example, if you have a long-term happy relationship with a partner, you have probably learned that you cannot control how your partner loads the dishwasher, organizes their sock drawer, hangs the toilet paper or holds their fork. During COVID you can't control whether or not other people are practicing social distancing or hoarding toilet paper.

For sure, the stakes are higher and you can assert yourself and say something to “correct” them, but you can’t control how they will respond. Say something once and then let it go. They might do what you want them to do and they might not. It’s a better strategy to accept that you cannot “fix” other people and commit to doing what you think is “right” by asserting yourself appropriately when someone is being aggressive or “out of line.”

### **Other People’s Motives**

Not only can you not control what other people do, you can’t control why they do it. Even if you can get someone to do the “right” thing, they may not do it for the “right” reason. People are motivated by different things and, by the time we reach adulthood, our motivations are pretty “set.”

Another way to think about this is that trying to control what people do by “changing them” or “helping them change” generally leads to no good. It’s a better strategy to accept that people are mostly going to stay who they are by the time they reach adulthood. It’s not your job to “fix” them and commit to better understanding and working with the motivations that they have. If someone shows you who they really are, believe them.

You may have noticed a theme of acceptance and commitment in all of the above... Worrying and trying to obsessively control things you can’t control doesn’t work. It’s a waste of time and energy. It doesn’t prevent bad things from happening and it leads to more stress and more anxiety.

In general, the better strategy is to accept the things you can’t control and commit to focusing on, and working with, what you can control. Sometimes all you can control is your attitude and your effort. Fortunately, that be can enough to get you through a very tough time.