

THE
E B R I G H T
COLLABORATIVE

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Dear Ebright Community,

This is such a challenging message to have to write. What should we do about COVID-19? What is a justified response? What does overreacting, underreacting, or responding just right look like? Since we are experts in DBT, not the spread of infectious diseases, we have the same limitations in checking the facts as most of the world. We know we must radically accept that we are living with a global pandemic of a novel virus. But because COVID-19 is so new, we must also radically accept there are many aspects of this virus that remain inherently uncertain to us all. At the time of this writing, prevalence rates and death rates remain unknown, and the fallout from a tanking economy have yet to be determined.

Luckily, we have some DBT skills to guide us in tough times. Distress tolerance skills will be imperative as we get through, and we recommend a heavy reliance on TIP, Distraction, Self Soothe, IMPROVE, and Radical Acceptance. Additionally, we are relying on the four ways to solve a problem to have a comprehensive array of responses at our fingertips.

The first of the four ways to solve a problem is to actually solve the problem. In this instance, that means doing what we can to reduce the odds that we contract or transmit COVID-19. We begin checking the facts by [following the CDC closely for updates](#). We recommend you do the same, as new information is emerging daily. Social distancing, washing hands, and disinfecting surfaces are recommended to slow the spread of this disease. So we are employing all of our behavioral strategies to adjust our habits and we support any efforts to do the same (e.g. reinforce each other with a head nod when you see people washing their hands).

Additionally, we will be **conducting all group and individual services online for the next two weeks**. While we respect that some in our community may consider this an overreaction, in consultation with experts and scientists, the Ebright team believes this is the socially responsible thing to do. Harvard, Penn, UDel, the NBA, retail chains, and more are switching to online communication or shutting down entirely. Social distancing will slow the spread of COVID-19 so that hospitals are not overwhelmed by those of us most vulnerable to its impact, and testing our online capabilities to increase preparedness seems like a wise move at this time. We care about the world around us at Ebright, and we could not support DBT if we did not



believe in the wisdom of scientists. To live according to these Ebright values, **all individual and group sessions will be conducted online and we will re-assess this decision in two weeks.**

We recognize that such a decision may impact the Ebright community in painful ways. Luckily, solving the problem is only the first of four options, and balancing these measures with additional strategies can lessen our suffering. The second way to solve a problem is to change how we think and feel about the problem. Too much fear will weaken immunity so we must explore ways to tend to our emotional wellbeing at this time as well. Using lots of PLEASE skills can fortify both emotional wellbeing and immune systems. Fear is justified if only enough to read the CDC Website, begin making adjustments to a world that will rapidly value social distancing, pay extra attention to cleanliness, and get to the doctor if you experience any of the symptoms of COVID-19 identified by the CDC. If your fear is so high that you can't hear the word "Coronavirus" without flinching, this would be a good time for some exposure to the word. Practice opposite action to shame if you experience symptoms by telling someone about them. If boredom is increasing urges for target behaviors, what a great time to master boredom by experiencing it and/or problem solving it. A silver lining of this COVID-19 pandemic is that I am genuinely excited to explore this area of the four-ways to solve a problem with the Ebright community in the upcoming weeks.

And yet there are still more options. A third way to respond to a problem is to accept the problem and our emotions about it. Many aspects of this pandemic are out of our control, and fighting reality will only deepen our suffering. Current best evidence says that many, if not most people across the globe will get COVID-19 before this is all said and done. While most people who contract COVID-19 will be fine, the medical system is underprepared if too many of the most vulnerable among us require treatment at the same time. Additionally, justified or not, a fear response has been unleashed en masse, and there will likely be far-reaching economic impact. Radical acceptance would have us live as if all of these things are true, allowing us to honor the way we naturally feel about these facts. Uncertainty can be the most stressful of situations, and we are all dealing with a lot of it right now.

The Ebright team believes piloting online sessions for the next two weeks responds to these truths with wisdom. It allows us to respect scientists who call for social distancing while piloting our capabilities if this pandemic worsens. We may learn quickly that online services are unnecessary or not feasible. Or we may love them and want to continue (I actually kind of like the idea of everyone learning and practicing skills directly in the home environments where they will be used the most). Either way, we're about to find out together! Of the four ways to solve a problem, the only one we will be avoiding is doing nothing. Doing nothing is the path to staying miserable. Stay safe out there and let's continue building lives worth living!

Best,
Matt

