



“We Are Not Ok!!”

By Ambi Daniel

We are not ok....and that's....ok. As human beings, we don't like to be "not ok." The truth is, there is a lot we can learn in this feeling about ourselves, building resilience, and opening doors to possibilities....it can help to take some time "IN" it.

This week starts week 4 of social distancing in Oneida County, NY....Most of us can't believe it, and we are starting to realize, as the adrenaline of shifting and change starts to wane, that most of us are *not ok*. We're just not.

So, we wanted to share **11 amazing tools** that came out the (2) 4/7/20 zooms! We hope you'll join us on the next call and be a part of the discussion!

Tool 1: We don't have to ignore this time of not being ok. Sometimes it's important to take a moment to be "in it," explore what it feels like to be uncomfortable, give acknowledgement, homage, and practice acceptance to our present state of being. We are genuinely grieving for a life that has changed so fast, things that are comfortable, and the loss of presence of people we love.



“This is not ok. I am not ok. I need hugs.... Tree!”

We can practice by:

- Taking a few minutes to journal about it. One of the tips that was shared in the meeting was to make it a time limited emotion dump, maybe 5 minutes. Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (**REBT**) tells us that when something happens, we have conscious and unconscious thoughts, those thoughts lead to how we feel, our feelings lead to how we react. If we spend too much time in negative thoughts, we will likely feel negative things, and react negatively. After spending time in it, we practice shifting the thoughts to something like gratitude or an activity that feels good. If we change the thoughts, we change the feelings we change the reactions
- Instead of journaling, you can do this with someone in a **zoom** meeting or a friend on the phone!
- Put on **music** that first mirrors your mood, then pick a song to shift it.
- Learn more about the **stages of grief**, find your way to explore grieving.
- **Embrace the opportunity** to be in that moment and use it. Through this chaos has already come amazing realizations, lessons, and innovation.



Tool 2: Inventory of signs. It's not always easy to realize when we are not ok, until we blow up. There are always signs, some of them are physical, some are feelings, some are thought patterns. If we can find the early signs, we can kick up our wellness practice a notch.



"Body ✓ Mind ✓ Heart ✓ Check!!"

We can practice by:

- **Taking note of physical changes**, is there a “tingling” sensation, a change in appetite (Yes, I had more peanut butter cups for breakfast), a change in any body function; digestion, sleep, energy, etc.
- **Take note of changes in feeling**. Are you more anxious than usual, more angry or reactive, or sadder?
- **Take note of your internal thoughts**. Is your internal dialogue more negative, pessimistic, less patient, are you having any thoughts of suicide or hurting others? Consider the actual words you are thinking or saying to yourself. And asking, do I need help processing this?



Tool 3: Accept our limitations and practicing Grace for ourselves and others. Many of us are trying to keep up with the same level of work, parenting, housekeeping, exercise, etc. The reality is, we are in a state of change, and that takes more energy. It's ok to not be functioning at the same level.



“Today I will love me for what I was able to do and what I was able to put aside.”

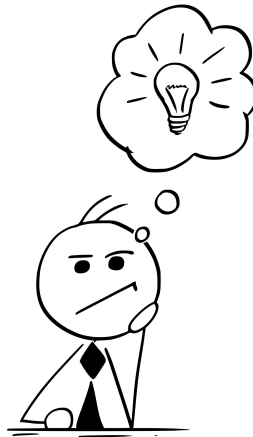
We can practice by:

- **Self-talk:** Find your radical acceptance statements that give you pause.
 - “I am going to get done what I’m going to get done and that’s how it’s going to be.”
 - “I just can’t do anymore today. Tomorrow is another day.”
 - “Take a walk, woman, you need a break.” (that’s mine :P)
 - “You’re not hungry, you need to go do something to feel good....”

- **Share** what having grace while cranky means. “I need 15 minutes without interruption.”
- **Decrease or increase stimulation based on your needs.** It was really powerful for me to learn that some kids who are autistic find stimulating their systems by standing in a box of Lego blocks, allows them to focus and be productive. Sometimes our nervous system gets stuck and may need a nudge to get out of fight or flight mode or even, rest and digest.



Tool 4: Ask ourselves and each other the tough questions. Some times our brain needs a kick in the pants. Thought provoking and moving questions can help us with making better plans to move forward.



“Alright, Brain, let’s do this!”

We can practice by asking:

- What am I **afraid** of?
- How do I **define support**? What do I need from others?
- How do I **get out of my own way**?



Tool 5: “Hey me, get out of my way!” I realized this week that so much of what I want to do, the only reason I’m not doing it. It’s because....I’m in my own way, I just have to make a plan and do it. It’s easy to get stuck in discomfort or even the things that feel

good.....and most of us know the things we want to or need to do. Our brain works so hard to keep us from being even more uncomfortable by expending the energy to MOVE! We know that we'll feel better if we do....at the same time, it's just so hard to start. Our brains are, unfortunately, masters at excuses and denial. That said, so much of the time, when we are not doing what we need to do, it's often because we've created imaginary barriers. Many of us could relate to this. So how do we get out of our own way?



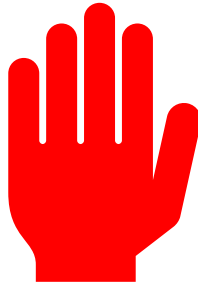
"And then I said,....'Get out of my way!"

We can practice by:

- **Writing down** what we want to do.
- Identify if it is a **realistic goal**.
- Create a plan that includes **when, where, what**.
- What possible **barriers** are there to your plan? How will you get ahead of them?
- Bring things into routine that are **"normal"** typically! If you exercises before work each day....keep it up!
- Maybe most importantly, do at least **"1 thing each day for me"**.



Tool 6: Just stop. Sometimes we just need a time out. Full. Stop. Stop working, stop parenting (safety in mind of course), stop EVERYTHING!



“Stop I say! Hold it Right There!”

We can practice by:

- Just focusing on **breathing**.
- Practicing **awareness exercises**:
 - Take a minute and **notice 5 things** in your space you didn't notice before.
 - **Close your eyes**, take a moment to think about what you feel and what you smell, what you hear.
 - Put on **music and dance** it out!



Tool 7: Ask for help. Uh oh....how many of you cringed when you read this? So many of us are just not great at asking for help. It may be that we haven't practiced doing this, it may connect to shame and guilt issues, or we are afraid of burdening others.



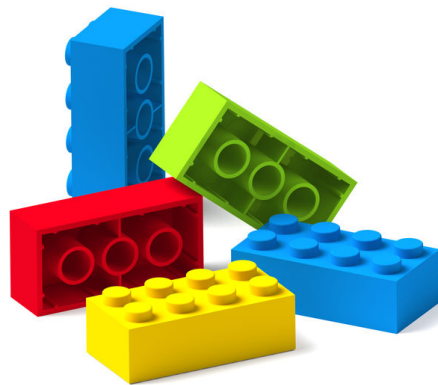
“Yes, you just go up the road, past the bend,....and ask for, HELP!”

We can practice by:

- **Naming the discomfort**, “I’m stressed with how much work I have to do.”
- Identify the **specific need** that you wish someone could do, “I need someone to follow up on this email by tomorrow or to complete this referral today.”
- **Asking**, “Why am I having such a hard time asking for help?”
- **Remembering**, humans are built to be helpers most of the time, we want to help others, asking for help gives someone the opportunity to be that helper and feel like they are making a difference, especially in helpless situations that we have little control in.



Tool 8: Tools of Redirection and Wellness. If you’re anything like me....and much of the world...we are having a hard time focusing, staying on task, being attached to our cell phones, and other automatic behaviors, and we need tools to redirect. (Yes, I just had another peanut butter cup.)



“Hey, Kid,...Let’s go build the Starship Destroyer....yes it has 35,000 pieces....yes, we’ll be at it for a while. Don’t look at me like that, I need to engage my brain! This is quality family time!”

The best tools of redirection have a couple of components:

- 1.) They engage our brain to think actively
- 2.) They involve more than one of our 5 senses...the more the better.

We can practice by:

- If trying to stay on task, **engage another sense**. Many with attention deficit traits, find this to also be helpful. It might be playing music, doodling while you are on a call, using a fidget spinner, tapping your foot, playing a metronome, swinging a Newton's Cradle.
- If trying to redirect completely, capitalize on your senses and what engages your brain to make your **list of activities**.

For example:

- **Cooking** something new, engages the brain to focus on a recipe, you'll engage your sense of smell, touch, and sight with your ingredients and cooking!
 - Playing an **instrument** or learning a new musical skill, engages the brain to create, while engaging your hearing, sight, and touch. This is said to be one of the best tools of engagement, especially for Recovery coping, because it also activates the reward center in the brain and boosts more neurotransmitter release than many activities!
 - I love sudoku and logic **puzzles**, my brain is definitely engaged when I do this. It's an active process that I write, create visual boards, and visualize orders and patterns!
- Take the time to come up with a **list of activities and tools** that could work, and keep it handy! (we'll share a list at the end)



Tool 9: Where is MY coach? I need a person! We have a wonderful community of Recovery Coaches who are actively involved in these zoom meetings, working on coaching skills as well as their own wellness. These zoom calls have become part of our own wellness practice, a time to just hang out with our “peeps,” engage in a project, and talk. One of the things we joked about yesterday, as we coached each other in our process on the call, is that we need our own coaches sometimes, we need a person who can help us manage all of this “stuff” and stay on track. This brought us to talking about check ins and accountability partners.



*“Coach here! No, I’m not Christina Yang...but I’m motivating!
Wait! I can be your person!”*

We can practice by:

- Keying in on **who** has similar goals
- Sharing with that person **what** you want to accomplish and come up with a way to check in daily on it, together.
- Aside from tasks, find someone you can **check in** with once per day. Check in with things like:
 - How are you **feeling** right now?
 - What are you **grateful** for today?
 - What do you **hope** to keep doing tomorrow?
 - What would you do **differently** tomorrow?



Tool 10: Managing Resentments. Resentments come from “unmet expectations.” These might be things we expected of ourselves or of others. It’s easy to see that there are judgements and expectations that we naturally have in this less natural time that we are all wading through in different capacities. When we work to explore our resentments and use tools to keep our expectations in check, we find a better shift in our thoughts away from negativity, and maybe most powerfully, releasing ourselves from the responsibility of holding on.



"Today, I'll take a new direction, I'll let go, I'll move forward."

We can practice by:

- **Identifying the expectation.** "I expect people to follow the social distancing rules" or "I expect to have more time to clean the house!"
- Take a minute to think, "Is this a **"realistic" expectation?**"
- If it is a realistic expectation, what factors or **barriers prevent the expectation** from being met? "The person does not have enough knowledge to truly understand, they may also be in denial, or trying to find some semblance of control in a difficult situation, and may not have better coping tools to do so." "I have more time in some regards, but boy, do I have a lot less energy to do it. This lifestyle is a different kind of draining."
- Recognize that even if we understand the situation, it **does not have to mean that it's ok.** A person hurting someone, or not following through is not ok. It just means we are relieving ourselves of the responsibility of holding on to the negative feelings and reactions that come with it.
- Recognizing, that we **may not be ready** to let the resentment go. It means that holding on is still serving a purpose. Working with a counselor or therapist can be a great way to process this to get to a place where you can let go.
- Recognizing that **surviving** this time is not just about surviving the virus, it's also about surviving with our mental health and physical health too.



Tool 11: Define your Recovery Globally to Many Components of your Life. It's easy to recognize that we spend more time with our careers/jobs than any other single component of our lives. It's easy to build our life around our career instead of our career around our life. One of the things we are finding is that many have built their identify and Recovery in this same light. So here we are in April of 2020, and many are lost because what we know to do and where we derive our purpose....well, it's the proverbial eggs in one basket.....is in our work. There are different ways we experience this as well, for example, parents often experience this when their kids go off to college,

or an athlete leaves a sport. This is a major point of challenge, loss, and grieving. It tells us that it's a good thing the Easter Bunny is near by....because we need some help with organizing our baskets...while we manage the scavenger hunt of our eggs.



"What Recovery means to me is....."

We can practice by:

- **Defining what Recovery is for me.** Recovery is not just about a disease or disorder, it is a way of life that all of us are really trying to find.....it's about wellness. "Recovery for me (Ambi) is finding wellness, contentment, and purpose in multiple areas, while having tools to cope. It's finding foundations in good friendships, my career, my family, and my stability."
- **Name the Baskets.** What are all the categories that are the foundations of your life that define Recovery. Mine include, "Work, home, exercise, friends, family, nature, fun, health."
- **Think about how your baskets tie in to the 4 Pillars of Recovery;** Home, Health, Community, and Purpose. How many baskets meet components of each?
- **Define how many eggs do you want in each basket, and what do they signify?** My main eggs in each, for example, signify "Time, energy, and the priority number." Some baskets have extra time eggs, and others, energy eggs.



During our zooms we came up with some helpful activities, we hope you'll add more to the list and share it with us:

- Zen art
- Gratitude list

- The Soul Sisterhood Group on Facebook
- Online classes
- Decrease/increase stimulation
- Cooking, youtube it!
- Nature trails, find the trails you've never experienced before!
- Explore new teas
- Virtual scavenger hunt
- Virtual games
- Logic puzzles
- Diamond by number
- Cross-stitch
- Jump rope
- Pilates
- Yoga
- Dance Class
- Zoom meetings
- Draw
- Walk around your town....social distancing of course
- Snuggle your pet
- Learn a new musical instrument
- Dance it out
- Sudoku
- Crossword puzzles

Wellness and Recovery Zoom Tuesdays at 1pm <https://zoom.us/j/507054277>

Ambi is the Director of Family Support Navigation Services at Center for Family Life and Recovery, Inc. She can be reached at adaniel@cflrinc.org with questions, comments, and for help being connected to Recovery Resources in the Mohawk Valley. Even during this time of social isolation, Family Support Navigation Services are available both 1:1 and with classes. If you are outside of the Mohawk Valley, and in NYS, we'll be sure to connect you to your FSN in your local area.

