



# “My Give-A-Damn Is Broken”

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## A Message About Mental Health

I'd appreciate if you take a few minutes to read this article as, hopefully, it presents some ideas and information that we're not getting a lot of through the media. The purpose of this article is NOT to present numbers of COVID cases, hospitalizations, deaths or even the merits of social isolation or mask usage, nor is it to discuss the wave of social unrest blanketing our country. The purpose here is to focus internally on ourselves, our minds, our families and our relationships.

By now the COVID19 pandemic has been going on for at least 6 months. When we first began hearing about the Wuhan virus or the cases of American travelers aboard the various cruise ships, most of us felt as if we'd see this thing come and go pretty fast. I think we can say by now that we're all done with it! At least from an emotional and frustration level.

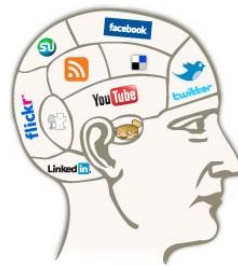
The initial reports of social unrest in late May seemed to open a long-festering wound in the American fabric that quickly turned into fully-fledged riots and civil disorder. The news out of Minneapolis, Portland, and Seattle was quickly duplicated country-wide, including here in Cincinnati.

So, let me tell you a story of a mild-mannered, extremely handsome man who is usually calm, cool, collected and normally just rolls with the punches. One day, this man was at a local restaurant and when he received what he felt was a sarcastic and inappropriate comment from a worker, he began an argument unlike he had ever done before! (His wrath rained down like hellfire from above!) He got his sandwich, but had made such a scene, that he was kicked out of the restaurant. He had snapped for something that would normally just get a sarcastic comment right back.

It was the worst sandwich I have ever had in my life!

When I reflected upon my actions and the way in which I handled myself, I began to realize there was something going on. We've all heard of “compassion fatigue”: The indifference a caregiver has to charitable appeals on behalf of those who are suffering, experienced as a result of the frequency or number of such appeals. You know... when your “give-a-damn” is broken.

I realized I was suffering from a type of “COVID19/Social Unrest Fatigue”. The amount of information, the emotional stories of social unrest, the conspiracy theories and the seemingly endless flow of misinformation was taking its toll on my “give-a-damn”.



We MUST take time out of the endless barrage of media information, social media opinions and “expert” testimonies that support every possible theory out there. Our human minds are not equipped to assimilate this amount of information at such a breakneck pace.

What are you doing to take care of your emotional and mental health? What about your family's needs, friends, neighbors? Remember that whatever is affecting you is affecting them as well. Too many times we get caught up in our own feelings about these issues, that we don't consider that our families are receiving the same amount of information and may be MORE confused because of their age or their understanding of medical issues.

Do you have a family member or friend that has tested positive? What kind of stressors does this place on family members? Social isolation and quarantine go against our human nature but may be necessary to get through this pandemic. Have you had a family member pass away? You might have a different point of view

about masks and other prevention measures than other family members. You may have even argued about your point of view with a family member...this is hard on everyone!

Our children have had their school years totally disrupted and the next school year is rapidly approaching. Will they be in class? Will they have to wear masks? What about recreation and after-school sports? Will there be a graduation? Will they have a Homecoming Dance?...you see, they have their own concerns and worries.

How many weddings and family reunions have been cancelled or postponed? Have they been rescheduled just to have them changed again because of mask requirements or family members becoming sick or ill?

What about the news, images, videos, first-hand accounts of the social unrest? How do you feel when you read an article that opposes your viewpoint or one that challenges your upbringing or culture? Do you have family that has been

**DIRECTLY** involved in the unrest as an activist, demonstrator or police officer or public servant?



Are you worried about the future safety implications if this unrest continues or funding is altered?

You see, the examples above are just a few of the actual issues and concerns that I personally have faced over the last six months. I've lost a family member to COVID. I have elderly parents who are socially isolated. I can't watch the social unrest without having particular feelings one way or the other. I've argued with my brother over the use of masks and social isolation. I'm overloaded!

If you've been keeping tabs, NONE of these have mentioned **WORK!!!** This is all being experienced in my personal life. Work brings a totally different dynamic into the fray, but hopefully you get the point.

I suspect that my stories may not be that far off from your own stories. I also suspect many of you may be overloaded as well. This is **NORMAL** and totally **EXPECTED** when taking all of this into account. Professional therapists and clinicians are being seen in

record numbers to help alleviate these anxieties and issues facing our country.

### **What does "This Normal" Stuff Look Like?**

Keep in mind that we all experience and process events differently. Some "minor" things to you may be something "major" to me. We need to acknowledge this fact and **NEVER** downplay or minimize someone's experiences or feelings. When a judgmental environment exists, people shut down and don't reach out for help when they need it.

Anxieties can take many forms. They could be demonstrated by poor sleep, overeating/anorexia, short temper, anger/rage, sleep, fatigue, lethargy, etc. The take-away here is that there is no **ONE SINGLE** way to exhibit anxieties. It is imperative that we embrace the idea of seeing a professional if we think things are "just not right".

Relationships and friendships can suffer when these anxieties and fears are left to rot away our foundations. If you notice a family member or a friend that appears to be experiencing signs and symptoms consistent with anxieties or overload, step up, be a friend and ask them. Offer to be their advocate in finding help. Be a sympathetic ear for them and then help them to research and find professional help.

### **So, what can you do?**

1. Restrict or limit your exposure to social media or mainstream media – especially if it is in direct opposition to your own beliefs and feelings.
  - a. This doesn't mean you shouldn't be informed. You need to pick your media/information outlets and stick with them, while trying to ignore those that are simply trying to get a rise out of people.
  - b. Follow reputable sources that impart scientific fact and information rather than just opinions. Be critical about the information you read
2. Exercise / Rest. Some people find exercise beneficial for multiple reasons. Some people find rest and relaxation just as beneficial. Find what works for you and make time to **DO IT**.

3. Eat/Drink/Sleep/Shower. Remember Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Remember to fulfill your bottom layer foundation of personal needs. You can't "fix" yourself if your foundation isn't rock solid.

4. Take time for yourself and your family. One of the great benefits of these uncertain times is the incredible amount of time parents can spend with their children.

Reestablish that family time and bonds through board games, card games, puzzles, storytelling.



(Notice I didn't say anything about the internet)

5. Limit your screen time. Not just the news but all screen time. The light from your screens can alter your sleep patterns. (Most smart phones have a setting to reduce the glare and adverse effects of the screen lights)

6. Lean on your family, friends and religious leaders. Following social distancing measures and prevention measures as well.

7. Consult with your physician or mental health expert if you are feeling overwhelmed or anxious about the day's events. There is nothing wrong with asking for help.

8. Look inside your own organization. Your brothers and sisters are right here. Look for your organization's own Peer Supporters. They are here for you and laser-focused on helping you find the right resources to get you through these trying times.

I put this into a format that "hopefully" made you want to read it. I know I can be long winded at times, but these kinds of issues discussed here can sometimes remain just under the surface until they explode. Then it's too late.

We all have a job to do. From the first responders, to our staff in public works, the wrench turners, the grass cutters, the cleaners and our Administration. We all need each other to be at our best in order for each of us to do our jobs. This **INCLUDES** taking care of our families. We have to make sure we are providing for our families as well, not just the meat and potatoes, the paychecks and a roof over their heads. They need to feel safe and secure and protected. To do this, they have to be mentally fit. They need us to mentally fit.

Hopefully the "few" words here have helped a little and maybe made you think a little about how you are *really* doing.

While we all have some specific concerns about the future, when they're all broken down, they really are quite similar to everyone else's: Safety, Security, Stability and Love!