



## Accepting anxiety as COVID-19 looms

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### **Queen's University researcher Tom Hollenstein on ways of coping with stress as the world deals with the coronavirus.**

With the threat of COVID-19 gripping the world, Queen's University professor Tom Hollenstein uses his research into how we manage emotions to offer insight into how we are dealing with weeks of disruption, near isolation and the threat of getting sick.

"Resisting anxiety is part of the anxiety," he says. "There are things we just don't know, and we need to accept that. We need to accept the uncertainty. We are all anxious and that's not bad or wrong. Things have changed in the world. We are getting more information faster and faster and things seem more imminent than ever before.

After Dr. Hollenstein's classes were cancelled due to the coronavirus outbreak, he decided to write something for his students to help them cope. Because that message for his students can be applied to everyone, he also published it on Medium.

"The most prominent feature of the current situation is the difficulty to predict what will happen, a loss of control," Dr. Hollenstein says in his research piece. "This is true on the best of days but may be more intense with uncertainty about the global situation we are in. The most successful approaches in these situations involve controlling what you can and trying to accept the rest."

Dr. Hollenstein also talks about trying to distract yourself to lower your anxiety which could include reading a novel, playing a game, watching a movie, doing some spring cleaning, baking or cooking – things you’ve always said you wished you’d had time for. He also says people should reexamine the situation – for example instead of asking “what does this mean for me?” you could say “what does it mean for others.”

“Reframing the situation also could work,” he says. “The entire world is grappling with their uncertainties, responses, and self- or other-imposed social distancing, just like you. We are all in this together. There are very few moments in which we can perceive the entire planet sharing the same experience. Often this comes from common threat. This may not diminish your anxiety, but it might change your sense of feeling alone or lonely over the coming weeks.”

He adds social support is also critical as the world waits for life to normalize. “We should think of this as distant socializing instead of social distancing. Providing support to others, even in a digital way, is just as effective if we are alone and anxious. New technology allows us to transcend time and space and engage each other just enough to get us through this.”

To read the full research piece Regulating Emotions in a COVID-19 World visit [Medium.com](#).

[Read the original Queen's Gazette article here](#)