

Taming the Fury

4/10/2020

Hi, all. Lisa here. Sarah and I are going to be coming to you twice a week for a little while with posts to help you get through these unusual and often frustrating times. Today we're going to talk about how to manage the frustration (irritation, anger, fury) you might be feeling with all the changes and new ways of doing things.

How many times over the last few weeks have you heard, said, or thought any of the following?

- This isn't working!!/Why won't this work?!!/This should be working!!
- I can't get online!
- I can't do this!
- I don't have...!
- Why do I have to do this?!
- I quit!
- I give up!
- AAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!

Yep, these are the cries being heard around the country as we all try to live our lives online. It would be great if we were all able to make the transition smoothly. But, *sigh*, that's not real life. In real life, the internet is spotty, everyone is in each other's space, your kids don't want to do their work, you're having trouble getting organized and keeping to a schedule, and you have to figure out how to work from home and meet all of the ongoing demands in the other areas of your life. Any one of these things alone could be a source of frustration. With everything happening all at once, some things are bound to go wrong and frustration is a natural response when it does.

Unfortunately, *staying* frustrated isn't going to help you get anything done. Figuring out ways to manage your frustration is especially important right now when there are so many changes and so much uncertainty.

A good place to start is with your overall mindset. In your regular life, you had a routine, you could predict most roadblocks and you could set things up to avoid them. There were fewer unexpected frustrations, so it was easier to keep frustration manageable. It's a lot harder to go with the flow with so many things changing so quickly. But there are some key mindset shifts that are important.

1. *Flexibility*: Life is different for everyone right now. There are a lot of competing demands all day long. Maintaining a flexible attitude will allow you to more easily make shifts when things need to change or when they do not go as planned.
2. *Anticipation*: You might not be able to anticipate all the things that might go wrong or throw off your schedule, but you can be pretty sure that something might not go the way you expect. Instead of giving in to the frustration, anticipate that things might not work the way you need them to. For instance, when you're helping your kids log on to participate in their lessons, anticipate that the technology might not work smoothly. Remind yourself that even within your neighborhood or school district, thousands of people are using the internet and using the same platforms at the same time. This is not to say that you should become a giant pessimist and automatically assume nothing will work. But when you are able to accept that things are not always going to go smoothly, you will become less frustrated when problems come up. Hint, hint: This kind of anticipation also helps you become more flexible.
3. *Accepting what you actually control*: If you're noticing nothing else, it's probably become incredibly apparent that you have less control over things than you thought you did. Right now, outside circumstances are dictating how we live, learn, work, and communicate. We have very little choice in the matter. As a woman who has been the one in charge of so many things, this realization may leave you reeling a bit. Here's the thing. Your level of control is the same as it was before. You've always only really been in control of yourself. While you've been able to select your situations (your job, partner/spouse, where you live, etc.), you're not actually in control of any those things. Instead, you've adapted your skills to the situations you've selected. You've done a great job of guiding and encouraging others and arranging schedules and situations to help things run as smoothly as possible. But the truth is that you didn't actually have control over those situations and you definitely didn't have control over the people around you, you just felt like you did. In this new reality, it will be helpful to

recognize that while you can't control the overall situation, you can still use your skills to organize, motivate, and encourage your family members, your (virtual) co-workers, and others to accomplish the things that need to be done.

Speaking of getting things done, adjusting your mindset is just the first step. You also need strategies to help you manage your frustration when things don't go as planned. Remember, you're going to feel frustrated or even angry, and that's okay as long as you don't get stuck there. There are some simple things you can do to help yourself when emotions are getting out of control.

1. *Deep breathing:* Yes, I know this one seems almost too simple. Sometimes simple is best. It's not possible for our bodies to be both agitated and calm at the same time. If you can calm your body down, you have a better chance to calm your mind and your emotions. So, when you can't get on the internet or your kids have gotten into one too many arguments and you've had enough, take a few deep breaths before you act. Now, I mean true deep breaths. Breathe in through your nose and fill up your lungs, sending air into your diaphragm. Hold it for a second or two and then breathe out through your mouth, like you're blowing bubbles. It often helps to close your eyes while you do this.
2. *Take a break:* Yes, you have a schedule to keep and a mile-long to do list. But, if things aren't working and you (and maybe everyone else around you) are feeling frustrated, it may be a great time to take a break. Breaks don't have to be long. Sometimes, a few minutes is all you need. Something as brief as a bathroom break or a few minutes of stretching or physical activity can do wonders for your mood. When you return to the task, you're calmer and can approach things in a more productive way.
3. *Re-evaluate:* Sometimes our frustration is telling us that something doesn't or can't be done. On Tuesday, Sarah talked about adjusting your expectations. If something just isn't working despite your best efforts, it's a great time to decide if it's critical to get it done. If not, just move on to the next thing. If it does need to get done, like a deadline for work or an important school assignment, see suggestions 1 and 2. Once you've calmed yourself, see if the task can be accomplished another way or at a different time.

4. *Ask for help:* If you've been reading our blog for a while, you know asking for help is something we talk about a lot. *You are amazing, but you can't do everything.* Talk to your partner about dividing up responsibilities. Talk to your kids about helping out a little (or a lot) more. Delegate what you can to your co-workers. Ask your community for help when you need it. It's okay to lean on your supports. We all need that during this time more than ever.
5. *Self-care:* Right now, self-care may feel like it's low on your list. We've already done a whole blog about this, so I will spare you my entire self-care lecture for today (if you want some easy self-care ideas, see our blog post "Take Care of You" from 2/11/2020). I will just remind you that if you don't take care of you, you can't take care of anyone else. Self-care is especially important in times of higher stress. Even doing small things to care for yourself makes a big difference for your physical and mental health. When you take care of yourself, you're better able to implement the suggestions for managing your frustration.

So, that's all for today. I hope you'll use some of these tips in your day-to-day life. Remember, frustration is normal. You can also anticipate and manage it so that you can still do what you need to do and be the amazing woman you've always been.