

**5 Survival Tips for Social Distancing:  
Managing the State of Being  
Physically Distant and Psychologically Dependent**



**5 Chapters**

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## **5 Survival Tips for Social Distancing: Managing the State of Being Physically Distant and Psychologically Dependent**

### **Introduction**

When the coronavirus, or Covid-19, imbedded itself into our public consciousness as being a real threat to us along with the rest of the world, and not a hoax, it still took most of us by surprise. Yes, we had all heard extensive coverage in the news about China, where it is said to have originated, cruise ships, unwittingly used to transport it to our shores, and Italy, where it was devastating an entire country. Yet, we still tried to retain a sense of normalcy about it all. At least I did.

Having suddenly lost my father to a long-term illness, although expected, my mind was still trying to cope with my own private new normal, which still didn't seem real. So, this didn't seem too real either. Until I got up and went to the gym on Monday, March 16, 2020. And found a half-empty studio. Even at 5:00 a.m., people showed up for their workouts like clockwork. Not today.

Precautions were taken. If your name wasn't toward the top of the roster, you received a call the night before that you hadn't made the cut. For the rest of us, there was no getting your favorite piece of equipment. Mine was either the treadmill or the rower, both located with my right side next to a window and my left side next to a fellow "gym rat".

I must confess that as much as I enjoy serving my clients and engaging them in meaningful conversations, when it's time to work out, I like my space and my quiet time. But this morning, everyone was positioned on every other piece of equipment to maintain the newly mandated three to six feet between bodies. Space and quiet. Cool. "Ok, maybe this new normal won't be so bad," I thought to myself.

After getting my rower location, I chatted a bit with Noelle, the young lady who checked me into the facility. Here's what she shared with me:

- She had just returned from vacation and before she left, she made sure there were no perishables in the fridge, like most of us would do. Now, she can't get the basic food items she needs at the grocery store because perishables were mostly sold out.

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- She was excited about graduating from college this year but won't have a ceremony because it was cancelled by the school in order to keep everyone safe, per new special restrictions which prohibit crowds over 250 people (at the time of this writing).
- She was bummed that one of her classmates and very good friend had an athletic meet which ended up being the last one of the season, and she missed being there for her friend's event.

Clearly, she was hurting. It was in her face and her body language. She was feeling a bit deflated. I offered to bring her some food out of my freezer, since my husband had just been shopping over the weekend, but she said she would make due until she goes to stay with her parents when the gym decides to close up shop.

With all the restrictions on touching, I asked her to put her hoodie around her head so I could hug her, and she let me. Then I asked if I could pray for her. I said, "we don't have to hold hands, but I want to pray for you." She looked a little stunned, but she said, "Ok." I didn't shout at the top of my lungs. I just thanked the Lord for his care no matter what happens. And I went on into my class.

After my workout, she looked me in the eyes and sincerely thanked me for "everything." I didn't bring her any food, or water, or toilet paper. I gave her what she needed, and that which I had to give freely: a hug and a prayer.

This e-book is about looking into the eyes of our fellow human beings, with the understanding that our ways of "being" are severely altered for this moment in time. It's also about being aware of our need for being with one another, now more than ever. And how we can be socially responsible with the great need to balance physical distancing with psychological dependency. That means offering our presence. My goal is to help us realize that the presence, and prayers, of others is EXACTY what we all need right now – and in the days ahead – and it's what we all have to give freely, without running out.

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### Coronavirus: Our Collective Defining Moment

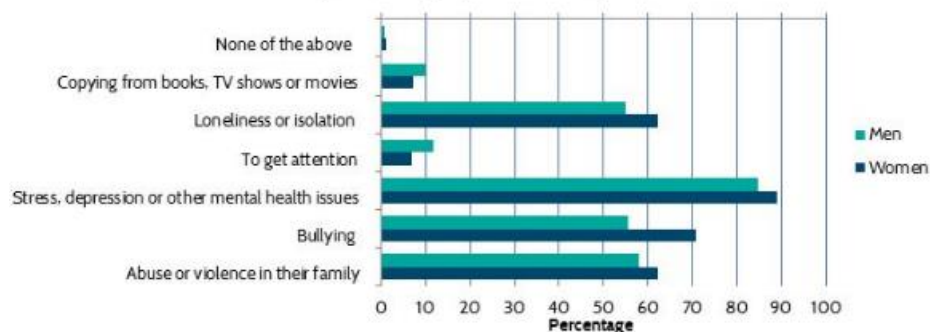
What we are experiencing and will continue to struggle with for the foreseeable future, is what can be considered a “defining moment.” We are collectively experiencing a point in our lives when we are urged to make a pivotal decision that has the potential to fundamentally change how we interact as a society. Our individual decisions about social distancing will change us as a nation. And, this moment will have a lasting impact on our perceptions and behaviors around the world.

As of this writing, we’ve made it through the first of many more weeks of “social distancing” in the form of restrictions designed for the greater good. I’ve seen a lot of memes about parents being home with their children and the fact that spankings and prayer are back in the (home) school. It’s meant to be funny, of course. We must look for light-hearted ways to make the best of a heavy situation right now.

However, I find the contrast of parents being confined at home with their “little angels,” and those who are home completely alone, as something to take note of. The statistics about the suicide rate among the depressed and lonely in recent years are heartbreaking, especially among young people.

**Figure 4. Reasons for suicide risk, subjective reports**

Monthly online survey, July 2017, final survey results



Social distancing has been evolving for some time now, especially among young people who have grown up with the internet. We just failed to recognize it for what it was. In a 2009 article entitled, “The Challenges Facing Today’s Young People” by M. F. Adams, he speaks about technology being responsible for the development of “remote intimacy” in which conversations that ordinarily take place in person are now happening through texts, instant messaging, or in community spaces such as Facebook.

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Since much of communication is read through facial expressions and body language, today's young adults may have placed themselves at a great disadvantage when communicating because they are not aware of the importance of unspoken communication detected only through facial expressions and body language that just doesn't come across through texts, instant messaging, or Facebook. These subtle communications are only noticeable in personal and even then, we often miss some messages.

Though we may be physically distant, we are yet psychologically dependent. As we are in the stores, buying gas, or wherever we find ourselves, we need to look at people and really SEE them. We need to look people in the eye with compassion and understanding. We need to look people in the eye with compassion and understanding and give them a smile. We need to look people in the eye with compassion and understanding and give them a smile and pay attention to their response to our smile. And as we feel led to do so, offer a kind word, encouragement, and perhaps even offer a short prayer.

With the requirements of social distancing as being in rooms with 10 people or less and maintaining a space of at least three to six feet between people, we are instructed to stay at home. It's referred to as self-quarantining that ensures our physical wellbeing. For some, it's imposed isolation which may hasten one's psychological undoing. And for those among us who are depressed or lonely, how much more might they be resigned to ending it all without anyone noticing for perhaps days, or even weeks?

We are social creatures designed to live in community. We understand that it "takes a village" to raise a child. And once raised, we spend time searching for our "tribe" of like-minded people, intently pursuing a shared passion that is hopefully intended to result in a common good.

Down through the ages, there have been three practices that helped us develop our shared passions and achieve a common good. They were explained in a book by S. D. Parks entitled "Big Questions, Worthy Dreams" as being the Practice of the Table, the Practice of the Hearth, and the Practice of the Commons. And they each played a critical role in thriving societies.

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The Practice of the Hearth, the Practice of the Table, and the Practice of the Commons are all part of building a supportive community. The Practice of the Hearth creates an environment that invites conversation around a fire that warms the body, mind, and soul. More importantly, much like a fireplace hearth, it does serve a purpose: making it safe to spark dialogue that could otherwise prove to start a fire that could burn out of control. The hearth invites us to explore conversations – sometimes controversial ones -- that allow us to learn from each other in a safe place without getting burned by each other.

The Practice of the Table may be called by different names in different societies. When we share food, we can share unhurried conversation where people can agree, or agree to disagree, hopefully without being disagreeable. Figuring things out is more intimate around a table. Time with others spent lingering over a cup of coffee or a meal allows for a more complete picture of an opinion or position. The Practice of the Table is an opportunity to exchange ideas in the supportive circle of an open-minded, if not like-minded, group of people who are striving for a common purpose: understanding.

The “commons” or the “crossroads at the center of the village” is a place where people used to gather for a sense of community. The Practice of the Commons not only refers to a physical place, but the “commons” also refers to “consciousness of participation” and an “anchored sense of shared community.” The concept of the commons also refers to the inter-dependence humans have with each other. That is what makes social distancing so difficult. We need each other, and physically being together is critical because so much can be detected about our thoughts and feelings through a knowing look, a gentle touch on the elbow, or a hug. All these social gestures say, “I see you, and I care.”

The most important outcome of all these communities is meaningful relationships. Interactions with other people foster trust for us to engage, explore, experience, enlighten, and encourage each other during times of opportunity and during times of uncertainty. In any meaningful relationship, trust is foundational. And experiencing each other in person is important to establishing and building trust.

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### V.U.C.A.: A Societal New Normal

It is safe to say that we are experiencing a time of great flux. Being in a state of flux means something is constantly changing. Following the Cold War, the U.S. Army War College introduced another term to describe the state of flux in the world at that time—V.U.C.A. According to Wikipedia, it was used to describe the more Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous multilateral world which resulted from the end of the Cold War.

Thanks to the coronavirus, which the president has described as a type of war, V.U.C.A. has shown-up in a variety of ways: Volatility within the stock market, Uncertainty about the future, Complexity of potential solutions to our collective well-being, Ambiguity about steps to move us forward individually, as a nation, and around the globe.

What you have been experiencing personally is not your imagination. It's what I call the VUCA Vortex—a massive swirling of Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity. Now that you know what it is, how do you know which of the V.U.C.A. aspects you are experiencing? You can start by thinking about each element of V.U.C.A. in four categories:

- 1) Looks like
- 2) Sounds like
- 3) Acts like
- 4) Feels like

Here is an example using the aspect of Volatility. It may ***look like*** someone randomly shoving groceries in the pantry or tossing toys across the kitchen table during a heated discussion. During that discussion, it could ***sound like*** raised voices or colorful language. As the discussion progresses, people may begin to ***act like*** they have conflicting priorities, even though they're supposed to be working for the same goals of survival during a time of crisis. By the end of the discussion it could ***feel like*** trust has been completely broken and everyone is hopeless of restoring it.

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That example may seem dramatic, but I was trying to paint a picture of what Volatility may look, sound, act, and feel like for some people during these times of social distancing. Folks are at home together, for hours at a time, in a situation that is already uncomfortable to begin with. And because of factors beyond our control, our current existence may not always be pleasant.

Unless we can stop, reflect, and identify the signs of what we may be experiencing – from our own experience -- we cannot begin to deal with something that every one of us will experience at one time or another, on one level or another: F.E.A.R. It's been said that F.E.A.R. is an acronym that stands for False Evidence Appearing Real.

The signs of what you identify as being evidence of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, or ambiguity help to gain clarity about the underlying issues which may be perceived or real. But you must be able to have a starting point to categorize what's going in your life. Then, you can take the necessary steps to ensure your safety.



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### **Psychological S.A.F.E.T.Y. and The Brain**

Our brains are wired to keep us safe and when it detects a threat, perceived or real, it relies on negativity bias from previous experiences to keep us safe. In other words, anything that is considered "different" automatically equates to "threat" in our brains.

The "fast brain" automatically tell us, "the last time we experienced this type of person or situation, we were not safe." The "slow brain" forces us to be open to new experiences by saying, "the last time we experienced this type of person or situation, we were not safe, but this is a different person or situation and we may have a different outcome." It takes more time and energy to intentionally disrupt the "fast brain" and give the "slow brain" a chance to take over.

STUFF in our life gets in the way of our slow brain: Stress, Time constraints, Uncertainty, Fear, and Fatigue. STUFF triggers biases by weakening our prefrontal cortex (the slow brain) and strengthening our amygdala (the fast brain). When confronted with STUFF, our brain automatically defaults to the amygdala and makes decisions for us that we are completely unconscious about.

It is natural to be concerned with our physical safety. Especially in light of the coronavirus. However, we need to raise our collective awareness about our psychological safety as well. Threats to our psychological safety have lasting impacts that have been proven to cause pain equal to, or even more than, physical hurts.

When addressing our psychological safety, it is important that we invite participation in dialogue with others, investigate perceptions of others, and integrate perspectives of others. These three simple actions will arrest the "fast brain" and give the "slow brain" a chance to realize that we may be safer than we first realized. To begin, we need to do three things:

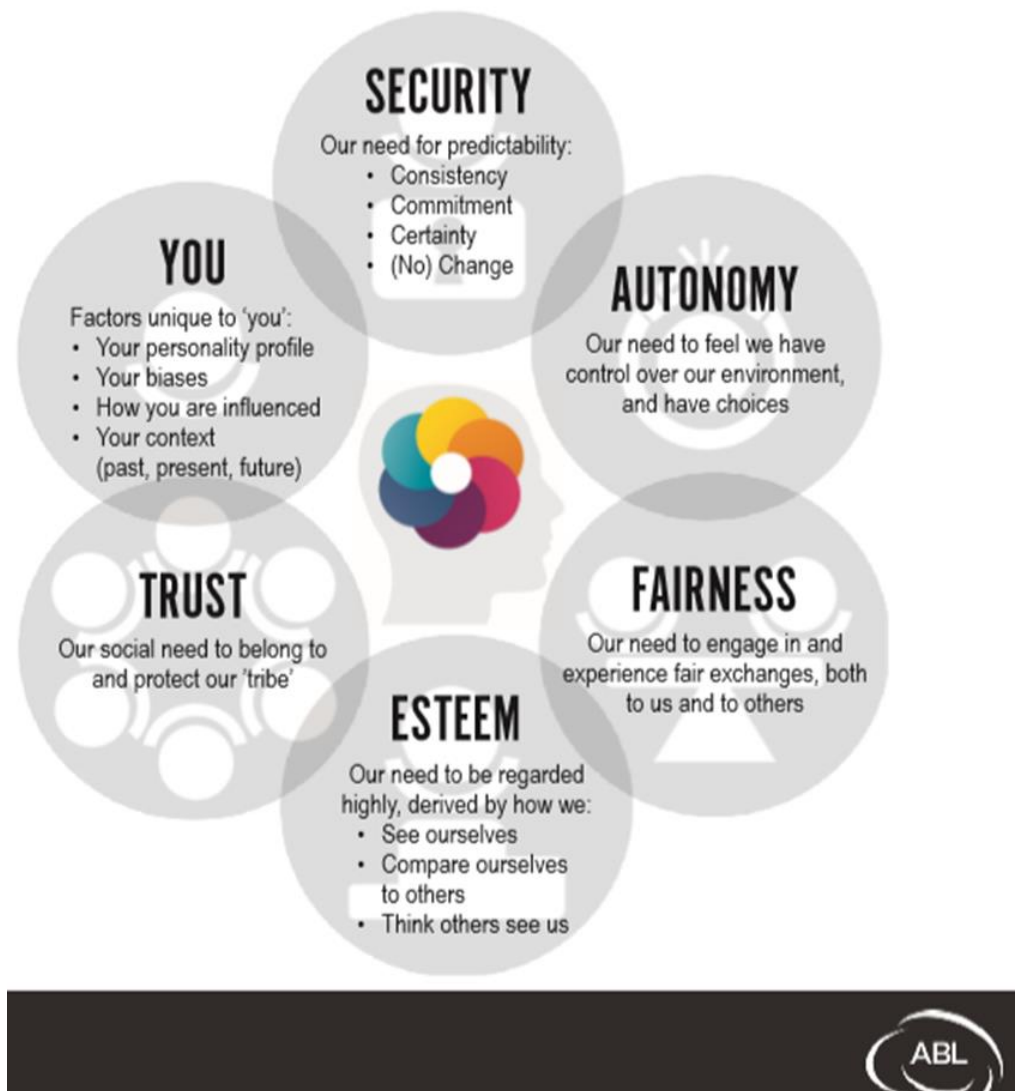
- 1) Learn about the aspects of psychological safety
- 2) Understand what you need to feel safe
- 3) Recognize what others may need to feel safe

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### *The Aspects of Psychological S.A.F.E.T.Y.*

In the book, Psychological Safety, by Dan Radecki, Ph.D. and Leonie Hull, six aspects of psychological safety are shown in the simple graphic below. It is designed to help co-workers understand how to manage the hidden drivers of our individual behavior to ensure team success.

As you can see, S.A.F.E.T.Y. is a great acronym that makes it easy to remember what we all need to feel safe, on one level or another. For more detailed information, visit [www.academy-bbl.com](http://www.academy-bbl.com).



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In one sense, the brain is not as complicated as we think. Its overriding function is to identify threats and keep us safe. Period. Long ago, when dinosaurs roamed the earth, our greatest threat was to eat or to be eaten. Most people today would say that our greatest threat is constant change. To say that social distancing brought about by the coronavirus has resulted in constant change is an understatement.

To one degree or another, we all need a level of Security, Autonomy, Fairness, Esteem, and Trust, all based in our own view of the world. As you read the short descriptions of each aspect, think of which one you need the most of during times of constant change.

**Security:** Security is the brain's need for predictability. It is all about the C's in the environment. The brain likes Consistency, Commitment, Clarity, Certainty and dislikes Change: these all go a long way to making the brain feel that its environment is safe.

**Autonomy:** Autonomy is the feeling of control over one's environment (whether the control is real or not.) A sensation of having choices within any given situation is rewarding to the brain. Let's face it, few of us like to be told what to do! Lack of control, powerlessness or helplessness has a major impact on our health and blood pressure.

**Fairness:** We want exchanges that occur within our environment to be fair - to us and to others. Fair exchanges are intrinsically rewarding, independent of other factors. When something is seen as unfair, the brain deals with it using the same networks as those involved with disgust.

**Esteem:** This domain covers the topics of how we view ourselves, how we compare ourselves with others, and our opinions of how we think others view us. Research indicates that having a positive view of ourselves adds to our health and general well-being.

**Trust:** This realm addresses our social needs. We thrive in tribes; initially, however, we treat each new person as a stranger or threat. They are part of our 'out-group.' As we establish commonalities, they become part of our 'in-group', and we now use a different brain network to interact with them.

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**You:** The impact of this domain can be so strong that it can outweigh any or all of the previous five. Some of the aspects that can impact this domain are your personality, your biases, patterns, habits and triggers, your past experiences, your future plans, your current situation, and your current outlook.

This last element, ***You***, is the most important one of all. Because only you can determine what you need to feel psychologically safe. And now that you have learned about the six aspects of psychological safety, let's examine an simple scenario.

### ***Understand What You Need to Feel Safe***

Niki is married, a mother of three, and a junior executive. Let's say Niki has a high need for Security, Fairness, and Autonomy. Security reveals that she needs consistency in her life, Fairness means fair exchanges for herself and others are extremely important to her, and Autonomy indicates that she needs the ability to come and go at a moment's notice. Suddenly, the coronavirus hits.

Now, she's home with the kids because the schools are shut down, and her husband is there as well. Even though things are going smoothly, she seems to more short-tempered than usual. She's crazy about her family, but 24/7 is a lot of "quality time" all at once. Something's not right with her, but she can't put her finger on the problem. Everyone is stressed out and on edge. It's probably just nerves.

Most of us would chalk up what Niki is experiencing as being stressed out and on edge. But it's more than just nerves. Her sense of Security has been impacted because her consistent routine of going to work or dropping off the kids has changed. Her sense of Fairness has been impacted because she finds herself having to adjust to a temporary "new normal" that she had nothing to do with orchestrating. Her sense of Autonomy has been impacted because she can't just run out and get things done to make the situation better for everyone.

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Here's the good news-- Niki has recently become aware of her psychological S.A.F.E.T.Y. needs. To meet her Security need, she has developed a family schedule for consistency during the week. To meet her Fairness need, she accepts that this situation is happening all around her and that there is no one to blame. To meet her Autonomy need, she has an agreement with her husband to take turns leaving the house to get essentials.

### ***Recognize What Others Need to Feel Safe***

After having a good understanding of the six aspects of psychological safety for herself, Niki is noticing some things about her husband Wesley's behavior. A couple of issues are beginning to make sense. She recognizes that Wesley may have a high need for Esteem.

During this time of uncertainty, Wesley wants to be seen as a source of strength. But he is spending an unusual amount of time on the internet away from everyone. At first, Niki thought he just wanted to avoid the increased commotion in the house. While she completely relates to that line of reasoning, she felt they needed to talk.

After a good heart-to-heart to understand what Wesley needs now, Niki knows that he's been spending a lot of time on the internet reading up about the impacts from the virus and a potential timeline of its duration. He's not trying to avoid being with the family. He's trying to be well informed so that he can make educated decisions about how best to protect his family.

Often, when people don't feel psychologically safe, they behave in ways that are out of character and they do so without realizing it. When you know your own psychological safety needs, you may be able to sense the needs of others and have a conversation about what you observe so you can brainstorm ideas to help restore their sense of safety.

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### Summary & Conclusion

In this new normal of social distancing, it's crucial that we are managing the state of being physically distant with being psychologically dependent. We need each other now more than ever. So, what's up with the rush to buy toilet paper? Are people really afraid they'll run out? No. In most cases, people are trying to regain a sense of control because their mind is struggling to figure out how to deal with an unknown threat to their survival.

We've been instructed to practice "social distancing" by avoiding places with more than 10 people in a room. How our mind processes our surroundings is just as important as the restrictions we place on ourselves in our surroundings. How we manage our psychological S.A.F.E.T.Y. is something we need to be just as aware of as how we manage our physical safety.

Remember that, as complex as our brains are, they are designed to keep us safe. Period. Anything that is different is seen as a threat, because it's different. Like the coronavirus. So, our brain defaults to what feels normal in an unusual situation. That's what's called operating by the "fast brain" or being on autopilot. If we're not careful, our natural instincts to keep us safe while we're on autopilot may cause us to do things without clear thought, like buying tons of toilet paper. Buying toilet paper is within our control and it feels normal.

When we think clearly and choose how we react to things, such as whether or not we really need to buy toilet paper during an unknown situation such as the coronavirus, that's what's called operating by the "slow brain". It actually takes more energy to slow down and intentionally operate by the "slow brain" because the task of thinking actually processes more information than the "fast brain".

For example, operating by the "fast brain" looks like people buying toilet paper just because everyone else is. Operating by the "slow brain" looks like thinking about how much toilet paper we already have and being realistic about how much more we really need, then buying according to the *real* need vs. the *false sense* of need.

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Now, let's review the six aspects of psychological S.A.F.E.T.Y. specifically in light of the coronavirus:

**S=Security** -- how much has the interruption in your routine impacted your state of mind and sense of security?

**A=Autonomy** -- if you are the type of person who is accustomed to coming and going as you please, how confined are these restrictions making you feel?

**F=Fairness** -- all of this may seem incredibly unfair to people who can't afford to stay home from work and potentially lose irreplaceable income

**E=Esteem** -- how much of your self-esteem is dependent on your ability to provide security for yourself, your family, and those around you to a certain extent?

**T=Trust** -- how trustworthy, or reliable, do you feel the information is that you are receiving from various sources since you need good information to protect your family-tribe? And if your confidence is shaken, how can you "fact check" and be sure of what you see and hear?

**Y= You** -- to what extent do any of the aspects above impact your ability to think clearly and avoid buying into the "group think" that leads to unnecessary impulse buying of items you may not REALLY need, like toilet paper.

The point is, if we are not feeling safe psychologically, "social distancing" is quite possibly creating just as much harm as it is trying to create a sense of protection. With so much uncertainty around an unknown variable like the coronavirus, we are left to our own thoughts instead of having the ability to reach out to others and stabilize our sense of well-being. Right now, we don't have the luxury of participating in the social rituals described in the practices of The Hearth, The Table, or The Commons.

I encourage you to think seriously about the aspects of psychological S.A.F.E.T.Y outlined above, consider which one you need the most right now, and decide how you can increase your sense of well-being in that particular area.

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For example, if your sense of Security has been impacted because your routine of going to work or dropping off the kids has changed, what else can you do to develop new routines and create a sense of "normal" for the time being? This allows you to take back some control over at least one thing that is currently out of your control and it will help to restore some of your Security needs.

There is so much more to psychological S.A.F.E.T.Y. and we have just scratched the surface. My goal with this e-book was to reveal how extremely helpful it can be to raise your awareness about it right now. There is even a formal assessment you can take that will identify your personal S.A.F.E.T.Y. needs and how you can better manage yourself in times of crisis. In the meantime, I've provided a Work-It-Out worksheet to help you reflect on what you are feeling and why.



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## **Call to Action**

**To complete your own Psychological S.A.F.E.T.Y. Assessment, and sign-up  
for an introductory three-call coaching package, send an email:**

**[anita@doctoranita.com](mailto:anita@doctoranita.com)**

**If your company would benefit from a workshop to explain psychological  
safety, how it shows up in the workplace, and best practices for managing  
team performance, send an email:**

**[anita@doctoranita.com](mailto:anita@doctoranita.com)**

And now, the moment you've been waiting for. On the next page, you'll find the

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1	Be clear about the six aspects of psychological S.A.F.E.T.Y.
2	Determine which one aspect of psychological S.A.F.E.T.Y. you need the most now.
3	Recognize how having that <i>unmet</i> psychological S.A.F.E.T.Y. need impacts you.
4	Reflect on your current situation with the Work-It-Out Worksheet.
5	Decide what you will do to regain your psychological S.A.F.E.T.Y. identified above.

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## **WORK-IT-OUT WORKSHEET**



**Follow the outline on the next page to help guide your thinking process. Then, in the spaces provided, write down your responses to the thought starters. If you need more room, grab some note paper.**

**The most important part of this Work-It-Out Worksheet is the last section. That is where you will record the answers you find from within, based on your experiences, to help identify what you need.**

**Own your reflection.**

**Own your solution.**

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**Review** which of the psychological S.A.F.E.T.Y. aspects you need most right now

**Environmental factors** may not be within your control...let it go

**Flux going on around you** or with others may influence how you feel

**Leverage what you do really well** to find solutions

**Expectations may be out of alignment...** be realistic about your situation

**Context around your situation** includes what is going on in the background

**Timing of your strain** may be seasonal, temporary, or a new normal... which is it?

What's going on? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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<b><u>Review</u></b>	
<b><u>Environmental impacts</u></b>	
<b><u>Flux going on around you</u></b>	
<b><u>Leverage your skills and strengths</u></b>	
<b><u>Expectations may be out of alignment</u></b>	
<b><u>Context around your situation</u></b>	
<b><u>Timing of your strain</u></b>	

How can you increase your psychological safety? \_\_\_\_\_  
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