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# Mental Health Marathon

Presented by LifeSpeak Inc.

The following is the transcript of the October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020 all day Ask the Expert web chat event with LifeSpeak mental health experts. To find the session you are looking for in this transcript, please click on the icon below:

[Kids, Teens, and Mental Health with Janna Comrie](#)

[Anxiety and Depression with Dr. Deborah Ledley](#)

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Please note that this is a verbatim transcript, so all questions and answers appear exactly as they did during the event. We have not edited for typos or grammar.

## Kids, Teens, and Mental Health with Janna Comrie

Welcome everyone! We are so pleased to have Registered Psychotherapist, Janna Comrie, with us today.

We will begin taking questions promptly at 8:30 AM ET. LifeSpeak will mediate this discussion and allow or reject questions as they come in. Questions may be edited for length or for clarity. We will not accept questions that include personal attacks, unsubstantiated allegations, vulgar language or libelous statements.

Please note that Janna's answers are purely as information and should in no way replace consultation with a professional. We will do our best to pose all allowable questions today.

**JANNA COMRIE:** Good morning everyone!

I'm Janna Comrie. I've been a psychotherapist for over 15 years working with individuals and families in the Greater Toronto area. The pandemic has created a lot of challenges for children returning to school. I'm very much looking forward to hearing about some of the things you've been dealing with and hopefully providing some help tips and guidance.

**AUDREY:** I'm finding it hard to communicate with my teenager and don't know much about what's going on in their heads. I'm worried that they're not telling me if anything is bothering them or if they're preoccupied. How can I open a dialogue?

**JANNA COMRIE:** Good morning Audrey,

With teens it can be tricky because you very much have to meet them where they are at. Try starting with joining in or talking about activities they like. If you can talk about small everyday stuff, it makes it easier for them to talk about the bigger things. Open up about some of your experiences as a teen during these activities and conversations but don't make it about you. The more you're having fun with them and just talking, the more they tend to open up about things or let things slip.

**NR:** Good Morning. When a child is going through an emotional time due to anxiety, especially now with us being in a pandemic, when is a good time for him/her to see a therapist? Do we have to wait until the episodes are severe?

**JANNA COMRIE:** The best time is as soon as you identify that the anxiety is there! It gives the therapist the opportunity to teach the child the skillset they need before the anxiety gets unbearable.

**MARTHA:** My 14 year old daughter has decided I am the enemy – and is completely miserable toward me. I cannot ask her to do anything or ask a general question without attitude and rudeness and then is defensive when I call her out on her behaviour. My patience is waning... my other two teenage daughters cannot believe her attitude. Any tips to get this relationship back on track?

**JANNA COMRIE:** Often times the teen in situations like this is the "identified problem person" but we know that relationships are between two people. I would suggest that you consider seeing a family therapist to look at how both of you are contributing to the negative relationship. Be open with her that this isn't the relationship that you want with her and that you don't know how to make it better on your own but that you believe it can be better with some help.

**JESSICA:** I have a teen son who has been in his first relationship of nearly a year. His girlfriend recently broke up with him and he has become withdrawn and depressed. How can I best support him through his break up?

**JANNA COMRIE:** Hi Jessica, The first time we experience heartbreak is so difficult for anyone! A big part of supporting him is letting him talk about the good things and bad things without trying to change his mind. Validation is key here! You want to validate that his emotions are real. You also want to validate that his thoughts, even if not 100% realistic are understandable. It's normal to question if you are "good enough" and if you will "ever find someone". Encourage him to go out with friends and family. Encourage healthy habits like eating and sleeping. If you notice that it is getting really severe (not talking with anyone, difficulty eating and sleeping) encourage him to talk to a therapist. We never

know what is going to happen. The day before he met his ex-girlfriend, no one could have told him he was going to have that length of relationship with her. He needs to know it can and likely will happen again and he'll be surprised by it.

**SALLY:** My teen went week on and off between my home and her father's for almost two years. She hasn't gone to his house since end of January this year. There has been very little communication between daughter and father since Covid. My daughter is very hurt by the lack of communication and breakdown of the relationship. What can I do to help her feel better or to not carry "daddy issues" into her adult life?

**JANNA COMRIE:** Hi Sally, There are a number of factors that would influence my answer here. Has she reached out or expressed to him that she is missing the relationship? How was the relationship pre-January? You can definitely help her to articulate her feelings in a way that is clear and respectful. You can also let her know that you're there for her and that you love her no matter what. Having one person in your corner makes a huge difference. Validate her hurt without bashing her dad. Let her know that it's okay to be her and feel what she's feeling. Also let her know that sometimes parents don't fully know what their children want or need so it's okay to ask for what she wants.

**JULIE:** Good morning. My seven year old daughter has uncontrollable break downs when she gets stressed at school, or upset about something bothering her. I have a hard time getting her to settle down, she hits me, kicks me, throw things and breaks things during this time. How can I help her work through this?

**JANNA COMRIE:** Hi Julie, working through these situations with a child happens outside of the stressful moments. She needs to be taught skills to self-regulate (e.g. breathing techniques, regulation zones, visualization). The trick with these though is that they only work when they are practiced regularly, when one is relatively calm and doesn't "need" them. Once the body learns how to use the skills in calmer situations, it becomes easier to use them when anxious or angry. Practice and consistency is really everything with these! It sounds like you both would benefit from a few sessions with a therapist who could help you learn and practice

the skills. Once you have some of the skills down, you can then start working on some of the scary thoughts that are driving the anxiety responses. It's usually easier to give the child the skills before tackling the scary thoughts because sometimes just talking about the thoughts driving the behavior will lead to the triggered behavior.

**MP:** I recently found my young teen had a vape he was hiding. Wondering what you suggest the best way to deal with this would be and how to prevent further issues in the same matter.

**JANNA COMRIE:** Hi Mp, I often encourage parents not to freak out when they find things like these! Generally speaking, the best way to handle this is to talk to your teen about it. Approach it from a place of curiosity. What do you notice when you use it? Why do you like it? Do they have a favorite flavor? How many of your friends are using it? How much research have they done about it? Where did they do their research? Have they ever forgotten it at home/run out of vape juice? How did they feel when it happens? Asking questions helps them to open up and gets them talking about it. You can express your surprise and concern once you've heard them out. You can then lead them to reliable literature online and talk to them about it. Often times, teens have been mis-informed and don't even realize it! Heck, smoking was originally used as a weight loss aid! Giving them a chance to see their error often makes it easier to explain why you are not okay with it. This then opens the door and sets the stage for other conversations about substance use or addictive behaviors.

**SAM:** Exploring counseling options for my family. Is it best to have a child psychologist or psychiatrist or can we use one person to service the entire family. Also is there a difference between the type of service a psychologist or psychiatrist provides. Any guidance on how to locate is appreciated. Thanks!

**JANNA COMRIE:** Hi Sam, Here's the difference... A psychiatrist is a Medical Doctor with a specialty in Psychiatry and usually does little talk therapy. This is usually the person who diagnoses and provides medications. A Psychologist (generally) has an undergraduate, master's and PhD in Psychology. This person usually does not provide medication but

will diagnose and does talk therapy. A Psychotherapist (usually) has a undergraduate degree and a master's degree in psychology. They generally do talk therapy and will do some assessment work but will not provide a diagnosis. These distinctions do vary region to region. When looking, you want someone who has declared competency in the area you need treated (e.g. family therapy, trauma, child and adolescents, eating disorders etc.). A lot of people have multiple declared competencies. So, depending on the issue(s) you may be able to have one person treat everyone. However, if you're not doing family therapy per se, a therapist will generally not see multiple member of the same family if providing talk therapy.

**DB:** My 14 year old daughter is struggling with an eating disorder from her past family members constantly telling her she is overweight, how do I help her see that she is enough at her current weight (which is a healthy, normal weight for her body).

**JANNA COMRIE:** Hi DB, With an eating disorder, we often get fixated on food and weight. An important thing to understand here is that it's not about food or weight! It's about trusting yourself, anxiety and emotional upset. Move the conversations in a different direction. Help her to recognize what she is good at and where there are positives in her life. Validate her feelings if she is having a bad day. Learn to talk about the underlying issues (trust, anxiety and emotions) and don't get stuck on the surface issues (weight and food). By helping her connect with friends, learn to self-soothe, emotionally give herself grace and validate herself, she often use the eating disorder less to self-soothe. Contact an eating disorder clinic in your area. They often have support programs for family which will help you talk to her!

**AMY:** My husband and I are currently going through a divorce. We have two children ages 5 and 7 and we are still spending a great deal of time together as a family. The other night was the first time I saw the divorce emotionally affect one of my children. Is the amount of time we are still spending together possibly causing more bad than good?

**JANNA COMRIE:** Hi Amy, this is a tricky question! It really depends on how you are spending time together. Are you and your ex doing things that you

would have done prior to the separation? Things like holding hands, using pet names etc. can be confusing. Whenever possible, I encourage parents to show their children that mommy and daddy don't hate each other. You don't want your children afraid to have you in the same room. That said, they all need evidence - tangible things that they can see - to tell them that a change has happened. This can be individual time with each of you and occasional time with both of you. This can be losing the pet names. No longer holding hands, watching tv together etc.

**GUEST7:** Good morning, My teen daughter had a difficult grade 11 and 12. The focus shifted from studying to surfing the internet (watching sketches and comedies-I don't think anything sinister). Any time the subject was difficult, she would give up and stop studying and surf the net for distractions. She does not have a social circle to connect with and refuses to take the steps to make friends. We insisted that she should get a part-time job but she refuses. She barely made it to university. Now that she is in year one and taking classes on line, there are days that she will spend most of the day surfing the internet and studying is left to the last minute. We also know that when the subject gets difficult, she tries to escape it but "taking refuge" in internet. We are again asking her to get a part-time job but she refuses. She has applied to a few places and since no one responded, she gave up. I offered my support to help her find a job but now she is saying she does not have time for that. We are at a loss as to what to do. Her and I have connected with a professional but didn't go anywhere

**JANNA COMRIE:** Good morning! It sounds like she is really struggling with herself. Through the teenage years the frontal lobe of the brain goes through essentially a restructuring period. The frontal lobe is responsible for judgement, reasoning, planning and problem solving. often times, we see teens really struggle through grades 10-12. Because their ability to problem solve and their judgement tends to be off, they will often label things incorrectly (e.g. "I handed out 5-6 resumes/applications. No one responded. Therefore I'm not good enough to get hired".) This logic coupled with inexperience makes it really easy for them to draw really negative conclusions. Add to this that the age she is at is one where she is

trying to figure out who she will be as an adult. They watch their parents do things in what seems like an effortless way. They have no idea how many resumes you had to hand out (again it's their first experience with this!). They also are used to a world of instantaneous feedback (social media, texts, email...). It's really easy to see how all of this contributes to misperceptions about themselves.

The best thing that you can do is what I call level set. Let her know what to expect and not in a preachy way but from a place of love and understanding. A lot of teens that I see are similar to the way you described your daughter. When we get in there, often times they are struggling with perfectionistic ideals and feel if they can't do it "right", they're not going to try an "make a fool of themselves". Continue looking for a therapist. Sometimes it takes going to 5 or 6 before you find the right fit!

**JACK:** My teenage son has suffered from anxiety of varying degrees for many years now, however the pandemic seems to be magnifying some of these emotions and he now exhibits signs of what are commonly considered "OCD" behaviours. For years we have encouraged him to speak with a therapist but the idea of sharing his thoughts and feelings with a stranger is just another source of anxiety for him, and he has steadfastly refused. Any advice on how to help him find the courage to try therapy?

**JANNA COMRIE:** Hi Jack, Talking to a stranger about your innermost difficulties can be hard for anyone! Talk to him about talking. What is it about strangers? How does he handle it with new friends? teachers? It may be easier if you can find a therapist with a lot of experience with teens who uses video games, music, board games, etc. I often find that therapists who they can just go and hang out with and have a general conversation with are significantly less intimidating. It gives him a chance to get to know the therapist prior to opening up. You can let him know that the expectation isn't him going to share right away. It's him getting to know someone and someone just getting to know him without prying at first. Give him the option of 2 or 3 people but continue to encourage him. Another option is to see if there is an online therapy group in your area for teens. Many facilities do have these and it's a place where he can go

and listen without being forced to contribute.

**JANE:** My 6-year-old son is afraid of "monsters". He wants someone to come with him to other rooms in the house even during the day and it's not a big house. The other day he had to go the bathroom and he started crying because he was too scared to go by himself and I couldn't go with him because I was on a work call. Do you have any suggestions on how to help him?

**JANNA COMRIE:** Hi Jane, There are a number of things that you can try. Developmentally this is not an uncommon issue at his age. Sometimes usually a grounding object (e.g. a monster repelling rock or a keychain that makes a sound to scare away monsters) can be very helpful. I've had clients successfully use a prayer, spell or chant that keeps the monster away. Strategies to manage his fear (e.g. breathing, focusing on 5 things he sees) can be very helpful as well. The trick is practice, practice, practice! Introduce strategies when he is calm and make it fun. Practice daily and sometimes 2-3 times per day until he gets the hang of it. Do it with him!

**NE:** How do we help our two 4yr old cope with the loss of their friends as a result of having to limit contacts? They started school and left behind their previous daycare friends. Two of their closest friends are at the same school but different class and can't interact with one another. How do we support them in creating new friendships in their current class and ensure this critical period in time does not negatively impact them in the long term. One of them was very upset one day because he noticed that a bird (his friend) that kept visiting in our backyard was no longer coming. The kids are both very active and anything done virtually has not worked well.

**JANNA COMRIE:** I think a lot of us can relate to how they are feeling! Virtually is of course the easiest solution but isn't always the best. I've encourage a lot of the parents I see to take their kids out for socially distanced visits and walks with friends so the kids can see each other and interact safely. These have included tailgate visits where each parent brings their own snacks and drinks and they sit apart and talk visit. There have also been a number of socially distanced hikes and games parents have creatively made up so that they can remain a safe distance but see and hang out with their buddies. Be creative and talk to the parents of the other children.

Often the school will pass your phone number to the other children's parents if you ask them to!

**DMYTRO:** hello, please share your top (5) tips on building some sort of cognitive resilience for parents. or pediatric books (not those written by 'super moms' who raised one-two kids and think it applies to everyone). I have 4yo twins. it's insane with work for both parents, and kids at school, and covid school lockdown (just finished another 3 weeks). we all are realizing that happiness is in fact sleeping enough. :) normally, I would hire some help, but we can't because of covid (very few resources). looks like this is long-term and my kids just started school and see all this (masks, teachers not hugging them) as normal. so my question is less about a short-term solution or a conversation, but more a strategic one: I just want to be able to handle this tomorrow and the next week and the next year, but not just coping, but empowering my kids.

**JANNA COMRIE:** Hi Dmytro, What a great question! I don't know that I'll be able to address all of it because of time restraints but hopefully, this will at least get you going in the right direction. The pandemic has meant that we all have to adjust. A big thing to remember is that you are constantly modeling behavior for your children. While, of course it's important to talk to your children about the changes and encourage them, it's equally important to show them how to be resilient. Think outside the box! Be creative! The reality is that we can't do everything we want and we can't do things the way that we used to. Talk to them about the changes that you're making and why. Let them see you be a creative problem solver and forward thinker. Play games that encourage them to do the same. Keep your sense of humor and have fun. Schedule things until they become habit. Validate their feelings - let's face it, it does suck that we can't do a lot of what we did before. Take breaks and remember rest and relaxation isn't wasted time; it helps you to rejuvenate so you can keep going. The more you focus on taking control of what you can, acknowledging what you can, being creative and positive, the more they learn it from watching you.

**SARAH:** Hello, my son who is 15 refuses to go to school. He has been doing this for the past 2.5 years (Grade 8 - up to now in Grade 10). He refuses to get

up in the morning, I try taking away electronics (phone, playstation), grounding, nothing is working. He just hates school and does not see why he needs to go and puts no effort into going or doing any school work. I am at a loss of what to do at this point. Do I let him fail a class for him to see the natural consequence of not going to school?

**JANNA COMRIE:** Hi Sarah, It sounds like you're in a power struggle with him! I'm a big believer in natural and logical consequences for teens. There are some excellent books by Alyson Schafer on parenting that address power struggles with teens. Letting them fail a grade/grades can sometimes be effective in that they now are in class with friends, they have to re-do it, etc. That said, sometimes that can actually make things harder. I would have him speak to a therapist to see if something else is happening here. It may also be worthwhile to look at alternatives (e.g. correspondence, online learning etc.).

**MICHELLE:** My twelve year old is consistently telling me she feels sad and she doesn't know why. She expresses that she wants to talk to someone about but then when we get to an appointment that takes months to set up she says she doesn't want the appointment she is too worried about it and won't talk. This is happened 3 times now. Does she need to speak to a professional? Should I be worried that she says she feels sad but doesn't know why?

**JANNA COMRIE:** Hi Michelle, Often times they don't have the language at that age to articulate why they are sad. There is a lot going on - hormones, the pandemic, frontal lobe of the brain maturing (again it controls judgement, reasoning, planning and problem solving). Symptoms of anxiety and depression often go hand in hand (that's not to say that she has anxiety or is depressed - just to understand that she is showing symptoms related to each). There are many professionals out there that do not have huge waiting lists. I think it's important that when you book an appointment for a teen, they can't spend months anticipating it. The next time she mentions it, keep calling until you find a therapist who has experience with teens and can see her within 10 days - yes... 10 days! That way she's not building up anxiety buddies within her body, the issue hasn't passed and she's more likely to keep

the appointment.

**ANNE:** Hi there- with all of the stress of the recent months our kids have seen mom and dad argue and mom cry on a few occasions. We try to talk to the kids about everything that is going on to reassure them that all will be ok, but how damaging is it for kids to see their mom cry and overhear parents argue when the fighting isn't always "nice or fair"?

**JANNA COMRIE:** Hi Anne, Great question! It really depends on the level of arguing and how it is handled after the fact. It is perfectly okay for children to see parents argue, get upset and even cry. It shows them how to disagree. Ideally, you want to be modeling fair disagreements. Now if they are unfair, your children need to be in earshot for a make up (it doesn't have to be the actual conversation that resolves the issue but they need to see a conversation that resolves it). In that conversation, they need to see that you both own your part of the issue, that unfair statements are discussed and retracted and HOW you come about finding a solution. The how is huge! Again, they learn from watching us and you're teaching them how to disagree and resolve it.

**MICHELLE:** My teenage daughter (18) suffers from an anxiety disorder. I know firsthand that the struggle is real. My question is: How do I get her to start trying to come up with solutions on her own and take ownership? I feel she has a tendency to fall into the victim mentality a lot which is unhealthy. She has seen a counsellor for years and has learned all the tools, but seems to jump right to being unable to help herself when a situation arises. Is tough love the answer?

**JANNA COMRIE:** Hi Michelle, tough love is generally not the answer. Knowing the tools isn't enough! Practicing the tools when not needed is essential. I see a lot of people who have been taught the tools and have seen therapists for years. Unfortunately, they haven't been to how or when to apply different tools given different circumstances. For example, it's very unlikely one can think their way out of a panic attack. So, a cognitive strategy in the moment often isn't effective. But, a physical engaging strategy (e.g. something that gets the heart rate up, relaxation breathing, stretching, brisk walking) will often help immensely. Perhaps it's time

for a different therapist who can help her implement the strategies better and address what's getting in her way of implementing them consistently. What you can do is encourage good health habits - eating well, exercise, good sleep, social interactions, good self care. We know that when we improve health habits anxiety lessens making it easier to tackle those pesky long standing behaviors.

**JANNA COMRIE:** Today you all asked some really great questions and there were a bunch more that I couldn't get to. I hope that reading through people's questions and my answer that you found a little bit of what you were hoping to get out of today's session. Thank you all!

**LIFESPEAK:** *Thank you, Janna, for sharing your time with us today. We are sorry that we did not have time to take all of the excellent questions that came in. Thanks to all of you for participating!*

*Please join us for our next Ask the Expert web chat starting at 11 am (ET), Anxiety & Depression with Dr. Deborah Ledley.*

## Anxiety and Depression with Dr. Deborah Ledley

Welcome everyone! We are so pleased to have Psychologist and Author, Dr. Deborah Ledley, with us today.

We will begin taking questions promptly at 11:00 AM ET. LifeSpeak will mediate this discussion and will allow or reject questions as they come in. Questions may be edited for length or for clarity. We will not accept questions that include personal attacks, unsubstantiated allegations, vulgar language or libelous statements.

Please note that Deborah's answers are purely as information and should in no way replace consultation with a professional. We will do our best to pose all allowable questions today.

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** Hello! I am looking forward to answering your questions on anxiety and depression today.

**DOT:** My daughter has days that she gets so worked up she feels like she is going to vomit. Just the other day she left for school and then called because she was feeling sick before she made it to the school and for me to pick her up. I tried to explain that I think it is just worry about the test she had that day. By the time I got to her she was feeling a bit better because someone who knew her walked by and said hi and then walked with her. I fear/know that she has isolated herself from her peers so much that the idea of interacting /test etc. cause her extreme worry that make her feel sick. She recognized that day that maybe she wasn't sick but she doesn't know how to stop that feeling. How do we help her stop getting to that point?

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** Sounds like your daughter is really struggling with anxiety and would benefit from a cognitive behavioral approach - either through a self help book or with a therapist. The goal would be to show her that although she FEELS like she is going to throw up when she worries, her body is sending her a false alarm signal. It sounds like once she is in the situation, she does okay and does not throw up. We want to help her see this and find ways to stay in the situation to gather more and more data like this. She can enlist a friend to keep her brain busy with another topic, do some breathing, think some pleasant thoughts, etc. We would NOT want you to come to school to get her. The more she sees that her anxiety does not lead to bad outcomes, the less she will worry and feel those physical symptoms of anxiety.

**BEN:** How does one navigate loneliness as a young adult

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** This is such a problem

right now with COVID - young adults are suffering in particular since they tend to live alone and might go weeks without seeing other people. Here are a few thoughts. One is to garner the use of technology as much as possible - FaceTime with friends, have a zoom game night, form a book club or poker group or whatever else that interests you and meet on a specific night each week. Second, leave the house every day and go for a walk! Fresh air is so good for mood and people can feel less lonely even just by saying hello to some neighbors or fellow city dwellers as they walk. Finally, can you build a bubble for yourself of a few friends who you can socialize with in person? This would mean agreeing to the same COVID rules and then being able to have meals together, watch a movie together, etc. which would really ease loneliness.

**GZ:** How do you identify depression?

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** The hallmark of depression is (a) feeling sad or down for two weeks or more, most of the day nearly every day and/or (b) losing interest in things you have previously enjoyed - again for two weeks or more, most of the day nearly every day. With depression, we also see changes in appetite, sleep, decision making, and thoughts about oneself and the world. The key is that there is a change from previous functioning AND that the change lasts for a prolonged time. We all feel down or blue from time to time - that is normal. But, if it lasts for those two weeks or more and really colors our days, we would be concerned.

**CHUCK:** How can I control overthinking and replace my negative self talk?

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** It sounds like you would find cognitive behavioral therapy really useful. There are so many great self help books that would address what



you mention - check out [newharbinger.com](http://newharbinger.com) for some great ones. The key is to be able to take a step back and look at the evidence for your thoughts. Question them - what's happened in the past? Do I know for sure?

And then, answer these questions. These answers can serve as a way to "boss back" your negative self talk.

For example, if you are turning in a report at work and you think, "The boss is going to hate this. I'm going to get fired"

Ask yourself, "What usually happens?" "What's the evidence?"

You might answer, "I always get this way when I turn stuff in. The boss hasn't fired me yet. He might have some things for me to change but it doesn't mean he hates my work."

In the future when the same event occurs again, you can say, "Haven't been fired yet" (using a bit of humor!!!) or "Being asked to edit doesn't equal failure"

**DURHAM:** Can anxiety due to COVID cause your body to result in a tingling sensation all over your body?

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** That is an interesting question. One symptom of panic attacks is a numbness or tingling sensation. To meet diagnostic criteria for panic disorder, I would expect to see other symptoms go along with that, like shortness of breath, dizziness, fear of dying, etc. Also, these symptoms should come and go depending on whether you are feeling panicky or calm. If that is the only symptom you are experiencing, or if the tingling is unremitting, it would be reasonable to check in with your doctor.

**TIRED:** My employers tell me they want me to have a healthy work life balance, but it doesn't feel like that in reality What can I do to address stress and being tired while taking care of my child and household I feel overwhelmed all the time?

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** SAME! I think we are all in the same boat right now. This is a tough time so give yourself some compassion. Here are a few thoughts. One is to find a way to fit outdoor exercise into your day - even a brief walk is good for mental health and for sleep. Second, watch what you are saying to yourself. Are you setting unreasonable standards right now? If

you are expecting to perform as well at work AND keep your house as beautiful AND be as good a parent as you were pre-COVID, that is just not fair. Recognize that nothing is going to be perfect right now and that's okay! Finally, make sure you are sleeping enough. At times like these, it is tempting to work late or clean the bathrooms once everyone has gone to bed. Don't do it! Sleep is so important and make sure you are getting your 8+ hours per day.

**BEV:** I have just starting having panic attacks during the work day. what types of things can I do when these attacks start to calm down

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** Panic attacks are very uncomfortable - but they are not dangerous. They seem to demand that we DO something in response to them. But, there is nothing we need to do. The best approach is to go about your business as best you can. I like to think of turning the dial down on a radio. We can't turn the panic attack off, but we can turn the volume down and choose to focus on something else. It might be hard to do a demanding work task when you don't feel well, but try to do something else like looking at your favorite websites or apps; text a friend; or turn on some pleasant music. Panic attacks tend to peak in about ten minutes and then your body starts going back to normal. So, the key is to kind of surf through this time and once you are feeling a bit better, resume your work. Do take a look as well at your caffeine use, if you are getting enough exercise and fresh air, and if you are eating/drinking regularly through the work day. Too much coffee can mimic the feeling of panic, as can food deprivation.

**CAY:** What is a good way to start a conversation with a new doctor about changing or adding additional medication for my depression

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** While your doctor is the expert in medication, YOU are the expert in your symptoms and experiences. Make some notes before your visit about your current medication and what symptoms you would still like relief from. Coming in with notes will help if you get nervous in the doctor's office. If your doctor is not receptive to hearing about your experiences, I would find another doctor.

**CHRISTIAN:** Any suggestions about how to reply to someone who refuses to seek professional help to help

them mitigate their anxiety?

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** This is a tricky one - I have so many follow up questions! Some people are very resistant to seeking help for psychological issues. It is such a shame since we have very good treatments for anxiety - both therapy and medication. Yet, we know from research that if someone is not ready to change and we push, the person actually becomes more resistant. You could say to this person, I am here to help you find help when you are ready - I won't keep bringing it up since I see that it bothers you but I am ready when you are.

If you are very close, you could also ask the person what they fear about seeking treatment. Rather than saying you **MUST** do this, you can take the tact of trying to understand why they are not. Understanding the roadblocks might help you see what the next steps are. For example, if the person has an image of therapy from the movies (a person lying on a couch free-associating!) you might be able to send them some information on what the most cutting-edge psychological treatments are like. Again, you can't force a person but you can help address their concerns.

**CAT:** What tips would be helpful for managing anxiety while talking with a customer that is also anxious? I find it is more difficult to deescalated if I'm also escalated.

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** This is a great question and I have so many questions I'd love to ask you! How do you know the customer is also anxious? I did research back in grad school that showed that socially anxious people are overly attuned to symptoms like blushing, shaking, and sweating in others. Furthermore, socially anxious people tend to assume that these symptoms mean the other person is anxious to the exclusion of other possible interpretations - for example, someone could be sweating because they are hot or because they just went to the gym! Because you are anxious, you might be assuming that others feel the same.

The problem with this is that it takes a lot of attention. If you are working with a customer, you have all your work stuff to think about - but you are also thinking - "Is he anxious" "What does he think of me?" "Is this deal going to go well?" and all of this takes attention away from the work at hand. It can actually lead to poorer performance.

The key is to shift your focus outward. Rather than focusing on all those thoughts in your head, focus on the situation and the back and forth of the conversation as it pertains to the work goals. Hope this helps a bit!

**DS:** How do I over come the constant hurt that I have experience through childhood, without afflicting it on my children?

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** Again, I have so many questions I would want to ask to understand more about your question. We all come to parenthood with our own childhood experiences - some good and some bad. Sometimes, when people had really rough childhoods, they make every effort possible to make sure their children have a different experience - so I would not immediately assume that your children are suffering due to your past! My advice would be to seek the help of a therapist with expertise in trauma. This person could help you work through your own childhood wounds and think through the ways that they might impact your kids - both good and bad. You could use the find a therapist function on the [istss.org](http://istss.org) website or [abct.org](http://abct.org) website.

**NINA:** When someone is experiencing anxiety how do you recognize their triggers and how can you communicate most effectively. It seems people anxiety fight, deflect and avoid.

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** It is nice that you care enough to ask this question! The only way to really understand each person's unique anxiety triggers is to ask them. You can say, "What tends to bring on anxiety for you?" or "What situations really stress you out?" So often, a trigger is not something you - as an observer - can see. It can be a thought, a physical feeling, even a mental image.

A nice follow up to this sort of question would be, "When you are feeling anxious, what can I do to help?" As you noted, anxiety can lead to varied responses - anger, avoidance, retreating into silence, etc. It can be very unclear what a person wants at those times - do they want a hug, do they want to be alone, do they want help confronting a feared situation?? Again, the only way to know is to ask.

If anxiety is causing a lot of conflict in an important relationship in your life, a therapist can help you with

these conversations. Most good cognitive-behavioral therapists will involve family members in education and treatment.

**C:** I'm normally very calm and never anxious about things in life, but I recently experienced my first anxiety episode after my boyfriend and I first said "I love you", and I cried on and off for 3-4 days in a row. I had small episodes of anxiety a few times since then where I feel physically off and shake a little, and I cry for nothing. I have never had a serious relationship before so everything is new to me now. We're also 27-28 years old and talking about the future etc. Is it normal that I had anxiety and reacted that way? Or is this a sign that something is wrong?

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** This is a really good question and without a much more detailed conversation, I don't know what to make of your experience. It is important to know that stressors can be both good or bad events in our lives. Getting married is super stressful, as is losing a job! Our body's fear system isn't that fine-tuned (it is a very ancient part of our make up) and just knows it has been handed a STRESSOR and we feel those same feelings regardless of if the stress is good or bad.

With that being said, I think your experience is worth further discussion - with a good friend or with a therapist who is skilled at relationships. What goes through your head before the tears begin? Or before the physical feelings begin? Have someone help you look at these thoughts to help you distinguish jitters about a new situation versus misgivings that you might be pushing away.

**DEE:** I'm very anxious about returning to the office. I don't feel safe as my co-workers don't seem to be very concerned about safety. I'm not over 60, but I'm getting close and while I'm relatively healthy, I do have some minor lung and nasal issues that make me worry. How do I express my concerns to my manager without being considered "needy". Seems I'm always the one who is bringing these kind of issues to our meetings.

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** I hate to say this but as I was read this question (without seeing a name yet), I just sensed you were a woman. Why do we always worry about being needy? I'd like to reframe your concerns.

We are in the midst of a global pandemic. This is not about anxiety. This is about science. Let's take away all the emotion here and focus on observable, measurable behavior.

Your concern is that your co-workers don't seem to be concerned about safety - which I assume means that they are not strict about mask-wearing and social distancing.

You are close to 60 and have some pre-existing conditions.

Putting this together, you ask to continue working from home.

The worst that could happen is that your request is denied. But, at least try - with authority and no emotion! I doubt you will be the only one.

**KALI:** Currently being treated for anxiety, depression, and ADD. For someone who has depression, are meds going to be a lifetime thing?

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** This really depends. Some people go on medication to treat a single episode of depression. Many psychiatrists recommend staying on the medication for a year once you have reached a target dose. At that point, you could speak to your psychiatrist about safely weaning off the medication if you so choose. Other people have more chronic depression and can benefit from being on medication over the longer term. The medications that are currently used for depression are considered to be safe for long term use.

It is important to remember that psychological treatments are first-line treatments in most cases of depression and anxiety. Medication is a very good adjunct when therapy is not working as well as hoped, or in very severe cases.

**EMILY:** Do you have any advice/tips on managing mental health in the transition from college to the professional workplace/adulthood? I have found that the early-mid 20's seems to be a "no-man's land" when it comes to knowing how to navigate issues such as anxiety, being down on yourself when comparing to other peers or adults who are farther in life, or even just general burnout. It seems like it is so widespread and

common within the age range.

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** I love working with people at this stage of life. I agree with you, Emily, that there is so much going on between relationships, career issues, individuation from family, etc. Although this is an excellent time to seek the help of a really good cognitive-behavioral therapist, I appreciate that many people at this stage can't afford therapy and might not have good health insurance with low-level jobs. There are many great self-help books available that can be useful (check out [newharbinger.com](http://newharbinger.com) for some really good ones). Another super option is training clinics at your local university. Look to see if your psychology department has a training clinic affiliated with it that offers low cost or even free treatment. Often, trainees are supervised by world-class professors - even though the therapist is just starting out (like you!), you might get better treatment than with many clinicians in the community.

**JONATHAN:** How do handle anxiety related to things you can't control but that have a direct impact on your mental health? More specifically an incredibly slow human resources system.

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** Anxiety is all about uncertainty and a feeling of being out of control. Humans like to feel like there is a cause-effect relationship to what we do and when this doesn't happen, we definitely feel anxious. COVID is a great example of this - so much is out of our control and it feels awful! My question for you is - what CAN you control? Give this some thought. It sounds like you have gone to HR and they are too slow to help you. Can you go to someone higher up to address your concerns? What CAN you do to address your mental health when you wait? Maybe these things in your control seem small - like maybe you can go for a walk outside every day, or get an extra half hour of sleep a night, or set up a weekly call with a friend who really understands you. But grabbing this bit of control will help you cope with the bigger things that are outside your control.

**KL:** What are some good methods of curbing social anxiety? Specifically within the work place. I get extremely nervous/anxious whenever I have to introduce myself or whenever I'm in the spotlight.

Happens often in groups of strangers or before speaking to groups. I know the feelings are irrational, but my body seems to do what it wants (nervous voice, shaking, sweating, not being able to focus clearly, etc.) I feel like I should be passed the age of this still happening.

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** I have some many words of wisdom I'd love to share if we had more time!!! A few things to bear in mind -

-Social anxiety is very common. It affects about 13% of the population.

-Yes, our bodies do do what they want - some people have more physical symptoms of anxiety than others. The harder you try to stop the symptoms, the more strongly they will come.

-People with social anxiety greatly overestimate how noticeable their anxiety is to others. Although you notice your shaking and sweating, what you see in your mind's eye, is WAY worse than how others see you.

The key to getting over social anxiety is to shift your focus of attention from yourself (how do I look, how am i coming across, etc) to the situation at hand. Try to think of the conversation like a tennis match and focus on the ball (the lines of conversation) going back and forth. Put your focus on things in the room (nice blue walls) or aspects of the other person (she has brown hair) instead of yourself. By shifting this focus, you will be more present and your performance will actually improve. You aren't trying to STOP your anxiety, you are just trying to be in the situation instead of up in your head stuck in a negative loop about yourself.

You can actually practice this skill by going for a walk - try walking around the block focused on yourself, your thoughts, your physical state. Then, do another block focused outward - what to you see, hear, smell, feel? It is hard to get out of our heads but this exercise is a great place to start.

**MARIA:** I struggle with Anxiety and want to help my partner understand me better. Sometimes he gets frustrated with me being flustered over something, etc. I think if my partner better understood how Anxiety works in general, this could help us. Do you have any

recommendations on books or even something for us to watch that could help? Thanks!

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** This is a great idea. I always think it is helpful to explain to less anxious people that some people's brains and bodies are just hard-wired to experience the world in a more anxious way. We came into the world this way! It doesn't mean that our biology is destiny - but it does mean that people who are wired this way need to understand their brains and bodies and how they react in certain situations.

For example - you could say - when we go on a plane, you are excited about the adventure; I am scared of crashing and feel anxiety coursing through my body. This doesn't mean I won't go on a plane - but I do know this is how I am going to feel and I might need to use some strategies to manage my anxiety during the tricky parts of the trip.

A great book for you to read together might be *Freeing Yourself from Anxiety* by my colleague and friend Tamar Chansky. Tamar explains concepts in a very approachable and readable way without placing any blame.

**OVERWHELMED:** Hi, In the past few weeks I have gone through a lot and am feeling very overwhelmed. I keep crying all of the time. I am trying to be positive and tell myself it will get better but am really struggling. Is this a sign of depression? Any tips on how to calm my mind and get to a more positive mental state?

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** It is impossible for me to diagnose depression without meeting you, but it certainly sounds like you are struggling. So are MANY people around the world right now. Depression rates are skyrocketing with COVID. Many of the strategies we would use to cope with feeling sad or overwhelmed are not available right now - like being with loved ones, going to the gym, or doing things that bring pleasure like seeing a concert or going for a nice dinner.

Here are a few tips for dealing with these lows during COVID. Make yourself a daily schedule. The temptation is to stay in bed in your jammies with Netflix all day. DON'T DO IT! Make a wake-up time, get up, get dressed, and get moving. In each day,

schedule the following -

- some exercise, preferably outside

- some social interaction (COVID safe of course)

- some things that bring you a sense of pleasure - read a good book, log on to watch a concert, or talk about something that interests you, hang with your dog, do a craft, etc.

- some things that bring you a sense of mastery (the feeling of having completed something) - clean one room in your house, cross one item off your work to-do list, take one step in learning a new skill, etc.

This approach is called behavioral activation and is actually a very effective stand-alone treatment for mild depression. If you find that you cannot stick to your schedule or are unable to do activities of daily living like showering, eating meals, etc., do see your doctor.

**THERAPY:** What are some recommended ways to go about finding a therapist? I have seen therapists in the past, but I have never felt like I have connected with them as one should when sharing stories and deep thoughts.

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** Great question. I am a believer in word of mouth. Many of my referrals come from current and former patients. If someone you know and trust likes working with a therapist, you might like that same person. Similarly, ask your family doctor. We correspond with doctors all the time about shared patients and doctors will have opinions on therapists who are kind and respectful AND technically skilled at what they do.

One caveat I will mention is that therapy is by nature a rather one-sided relationship. The patient shares stories and deep thoughts, as you said - but the therapist does not. Some therapists are totally blank slates and others are comfortable with a bit more self-disclosure. The reason we don't disclose a lot is that therapy is YOUR time. I would be very concerned to hear about a therapist who spent tons of time talking about their own experiences during your sessions! With this being said, a therapist should absolutely be warm, empathic, and easy to talk to!

**DB:** Can isolation be a tool for self-care, or is it indicative of depression or anxiety and therefore concerning if that is the go-to option for weekend de-stressing?

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** With any behavior, we always want to ask, what is the function of the behavior? If being alone functions to help a person with self-care (this calls to mind introverts who tend to re-fuel by being alone), then I don't see a problem. If being alone functions as a means of escape from things that make people uncomfortable or that they do not have the energy to do, I would be concerned with anxiety and depression. As with all things in life, balance is important. A whole weekend in total isolation seems extreme to me. And, a whole weekend of non-stop social activity sounds totally exhausting to me. If this were my patient, I would want to work on finding a balance between some alone time to refuel for the week ahead and some social time to maintain connections and do enriching things outside in the world.

**NALA:** I've been dating guy for 3 months. Not knowing if he is dating other people is making me very anxious. However, I don't want to ask him because I don't want to come across as crazy girl. 3 months seems kind of early to be asking for exclusivity but the thought of him seeing anyone else is driving me insane. What can I do to relieve the anxiety this is causing? I can't concentrate and seem to be constantly thinking about this.

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** Let's be careful of labeling - why are you calling yourself a "crazy girl". Your concerns sound reasonable to me. I would feel the same way, as would many other people.

Your question is all about values. It sounds like you value honesty, openness, and commitment in a relationship. That sounds very sensible. Maybe even more so at the present moment in our world. I think your anxiety might be about fear that your values do not match with your partner's values. Maybe good to find that out now?

If he thinks you are "crazy" to be asking or he wants an open relationship, it sounds like he might not be the one for you.

Or, it might be that he is wondering the same about you and he will be relieved to have this conversation out in the open.

Although the first possibility is more painful, both outcomes seem favorable in the long run and will help with your constant thoughts since you will have the answers you need to make good choices that are in line with your values.

**HENRY:** is anxiety/depression hereditary? will it be passed on to my children?

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** Anxiety and depression are moderately hereditary. We inherit the tendency to experience the world in an anxious or depressive sort of way. But, our biology is not destiny. So many other factors are involved - other biological factors, environmental factors, etc. It is so important to remember also that we have effective treatments for anxiety and mood disorders in kids now - so if your kids do have these experiences, they can learn tools at a very early age that will make their lives easier, calmer, and happier!

**MOTIVATION:** How do i motivate myself again? I have found since the pandemic started that I can't be motivated to do anything, while everyone else is cleaning their homes and working out, I just don't have the energy or motivation to do either. I am also aware that this is my depression kicking in but I need to overcome this as my physical well being is suffering.

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** If you were my patient, I'd want to know how you know that "everyone else" is cleaning and working out??? Might it be that you are noticing the people who do seem energetic but missing out on the scores of people who are feeling the same way as you? There is no doubt that this pandemic is leading to increased depression - which is associated with lack of motivation and energy. You are not alone! I mentioned in another answer the concept of behavioral activation, making a schedule for yourself each day that includes social interaction, exercise, fun activities, and activities that give you a sense that you accomplished something. This technique would work great for you too.

The key, however, is to set manageable goals. If you

set yourself the goal of cleaning your home, you won't do it. Select one room a day. Same for working out - don't set the goal of running five miles if you haven't done anything in weeks. Walk to the end of your block and back (if you want to go longer once you are out there, great). If you have a huge to-do list at work, choose one task a day (break down big tasks into smaller tasks) and try to cross off one per day.

**DR. DEBORAH LEDLEY:** Thanks for the wonderful questions today!

**LIFESPEAK:** *Thank you, Deborah, for sharing your time with us today. We are sorry that we did not have time to take all of the excellent questions that came in. Thanks to all of you for participating! Please join us for our next Ask the Expert web chat at 1:30 pm (ET) today, Mental Health in the Workplace with Dr. Camille Preston.*

## Mental Health in the Workplace with Dr. Camille Preston

Welcome everyone! We are so pleased to have Business Psychologist and Leadership Expert, Dr. Camille Preston, with us today.

We will begin taking questions promptly at 1:30 PM ET. LifeSpeak will mediate this discussion and will allow or reject questions as they come in. Questions may be edited for length or clarity. We will not accept questions that include personal attacks, unsubstantiated allegations, vulgar language or libelous statements.

Please note that Camille's answers are purely as information and should in no way replace consultation with a professional. We will do our best to pose all allowable questions today.

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** Looking forward to collaborating!

**LILY:** How do I communicate effectively to my supervisor that I have anxiety over receiving additional work and feel the amount of work is not manageable. When I try to talk to her, I cannot get my point across and then I have to hold back my tears so she cannot hear and end up ending the conversation short.

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** This is very real, and there is a lot more pressure working remotely. The way to approach this is to break it down. First, find a time to meet with your supervisor. Second, send an agenda in advance--this is where you're articulating your needs. The third part is having the actual meeting. Ideally, before you go into the meeting write your follow-up meeting. This may sound unusual, but this will help you clarify what you want to achieve in the meeting.

**OVERWHELMED:** Ever since my team started working from home, the pace of work has accelerated, and I often feel that I'm running to catch up. Just sitting down at my desk in the morning causes my stomach to start twisting painfully. I also have terrible insomnia. I'm so anxious in the mornings that I have a very hard time being able to get out of bed and face the day. On top of that, I live with several medical conditions, and have been dealing with painful inflammation for months now. I find myself constantly worrying about other people, and what they think of me. Even though I always try my best, I am constantly worrying about whether I did enough, and whether I'm a disappointment to family and friends and colleagues. I'm very close to burning out completely. What can I do?

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** The transition to remote work has been very stressful for many people. Many of the boundaries we had previously are gone. We've also lost many of the interpersonal connections we had pre-pandemic. You're not alone here. The first thing is to collate - write down what's on your brain. Second, eliminate - think about what brings you joy and what doesn't! Third, automate - think about what you can put on automatic pilot. Finally, break down larger projects into manageable chunks. Also, see this resource: [https://aimleadership.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CMF\\_creating\\_more\\_time-1.pdf](https://aimleadership.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CMF_creating_more_time-1.pdf)

**A:** Hello Dr. Preston, how are you? I was wondering about your opinion. I have very nice relationship with my manager, but I suspect they are a little too close to friendship now. As you can guess, it starts influencing my (and I guess her) work, though my emotional state concerns me even more than work, which is ok: I feel I now have to discuss matters that I am reluctant to discuss, or I don't wanna go that deeply in topics. I feel I have established a wrong trend to too much directness. What would you recommend to get the relationship back to collaborative, nice, but not too close/emotional?

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** As people have gone remote, work relationships have shifted. You're obviously feeling that boundaries have been or are about to be crossed. For now, my advice to pull back and focus any conversations on work. Reestablish boundaries that match your level of comfort.

**ANDY:** How can I get over the fear that being vulnerable with my superior about my mental health will affect my promotions? I fear they may see me as weak



or not able to handle a more difficult position if they think “she’s already got mental health issues, the new position will just add stress to her and break her”. I’m not weak, my head is just sad sometimes.

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** This is an incredibly stressful time for everyone and mental health challenges are on the rise. If you have an existing underlying issue, this situation has made it more challenging. You might begin by asking yourself, what do you want or need from your manager? What specific requests can you make to get this required support? For example, you need longer turn around times or more uninterrupted times to complete your assignments. If so, ask for this. It’s also easy to underestimate others’ challenges. You may not see it, but your supervisor may also be struggling. I believe in the power of authenticity, but not everyone has the bandwidth or sensitivity to respond. Remember, this isn’t just about you, but also about your manager and their own state of mind at the moment. Look in your network to find people to support you as well.

**MJ:** I work at a hospital, feel very overwhelmed and disrespected at my site due to my workload. When I try to communicate with my superiors, I am either too angry to say anything or I am told that have to just deal with it. I am worried that if I speak up too much I will hurt my relationships with my colleagues.

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** Thank you for your service. Healthcare providers have carried so much weight over the past six to seven months. I would encourage you to start to write things down. This will help you get things out of your body. Overtime, you can also use this to track what is happening at work. If you want to have a conversation, this is also a great starting point. Specifically, every time you feel overwhelmed at work, articulate the situation (the context), the behavior (what happened), and the impact (how it affected you). The next and final step is to schedule a meeting with your supervisor. This is a chance to bring your data and your insights to the table and to share your solutions. When you do this, acknowledge that this is also a difficult time for your supervisor and everyone. It will help open up the conversation.

**DS:** How do I tell a Supervisor that I feel unappreciative with the services that I do for the company, without

wanting to quit.

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** It’s very difficult when you feel under-appreciated at work. The first step is to have a conversation with your supervisor. Focus on what you need and what they need so you can both be at your best. The second step might be to focus on your long term objectives. One success strategy is to shift your motivational factors. What is motivating you to do your best now? What could be motivating you? Here’s a resource to help you explore how to link your motivation to your core values: <https://aimleadership.com/resources/motivation/>

**MARTINE:** The majority of feedback I receive in the workplace about my performance is positive, and I find it really tough to receive any negative feedback. I take it very personally and it affects me emotionally. How can I look at critical feedback as more of an opportunity, instead of a personal attack?

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** Kudos on your self-awareness. When you get negative feedback, feel it and try it on. Be curious. Ask yourself, is it all critical or only partially critical? Can you run with any aspect of the feedback? Remember, you don’t need to take it all! You can pick and choose and run with the feedback that makes sense to you.

**ZACK:** In terms of your expertise of ‘digging into identify and resolve underlying causes preventing success’. How can one dig deep themselves? What started off as doing well and being healthy in a new position has turned into feeling empty and listless and letting habits slide. How can I find the root of this (unhappiness?) and treat it to put myself back on the path to success? What do I do since I seem to have no fire inside?

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** As a culture, we over-index on financials. But at this moment, more people are asking critical questions about what else matters. This is really a question about values. My suggestion is to start journaling. Ask yourself, every day, where am I happiest, where I am most joyful, and what do I really value? Also, think about who in your life seems to be the most motivated and engaged in their work. Sometimes just being around these inspired individuals can help

you get out of your own funk. Really, this all boils down to aligning your work with your core values. Here is an interactive resource to support your exploration: [https://aimleadership.com/resources/value\\_alignment/](https://aimleadership.com/resources/value_alignment/)

**AMBER:** Some of my team members expressed concerns that their homes were beginning to feel like prisons since they started working from home. Is there anything I can do to help them?

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** Great question - it's real and it's really hard to manage. Everyone on your team is working in a different situation. Team members are also mourning the loss of what they once had and didn't fully appreciate including their in-person work relationships at work. As a manager, the more you can understand, the better job you'll do supporting your team. But it's not just one level that needs attention--it's physical, emotional, cognitive, and relational. One thing some innovative companies are doing is providing a stipend to help employees re-imagine their home spaces to work more effectively. It's a small step but may go a long way in helping employees get through the winter ahead.

**KIRSTY:** There is a lot of discussion about remote work and productivity. There is also another related topic which is how the pandemic is affecting the ability to work remotely. There is a lot of pressure and it is tough not to overtax people; we are facing an election in the next year - performance at this time is critical. How do you navigate the need to perform with the impacts of reduced productivity due to working from home when there is a pandemic? I feel like a reduction in productivity was more accepted at the start of the pandemic but now it is less tolerable.

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** Early on in the pandemic, people were more accepting of decreased productivity. Now, there are growing demands again. Also, we're all working hard but not at our best - this is causing tensions. Consider exploring the five stages of flow to help increase your impact and performance under the current working situation: <https://aimleadership.com/resources/5-stages/>

**NATURAL LEADER?:** I'm a natural leader and have been all my life (based on people speaking into my life, education and group involvement). Yet I also struggle

with being interested in really pursuing upper level leadership because I can also have the tendency to be a workaholic and allow the work-life balance to get out of whack. Any ideas on how to remain open to advancement while not coming across as someone who just wants to stay put. I don't want my leaders to give up on developing me for future growth, but really have to actively try to maintain a level of balance. Any ideas or good books/resources will help.

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** As leaders move up in organizations, they need to learn to get things done through others, but this means they need to learn to do things with less time and investment. In short, they need to move up by leading through others - by delegating. It can be hard for someone who is a natural workhorse to let go and start driving change by building and empowering others to do more but it's critical.

**VD:** first thanks for offering this opportunity to us. My question is also related to the impact of having to telework for so long and not being prepared for a proper workstation and routines that have been lost for so many, but specifically for those with executive dysfunctions, which in normal scenarios will face challenges, what would you recommend to them for prioritizing tasks, time management and coping with the new reality in general?

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** Over invest in structure and systems. More likely than not, remote work is going to be here for a while so invest in creating a work environment that truly meets your needs. Also, this resource is another great place to start creating more time: [https://aimleadership.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CMF\\_creating\\_more\\_time-1.pdf](https://aimleadership.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CMF_creating_more_time-1.pdf)

**HP:** How do you deal with a narcissist / bully at work?

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** It's great you have your eyes wide open and can see what is happening. If this person is interested and capable of change, then focus on what is in your control. But you might not be able to influence someone who is truly a narcissist. Accept this and control what you can control. If there is someone in your organization who may be better positioned to step in and help control this person, reach out to them for help.

**CLARA:** Hi Dr. Preston, I am a nurse that oversees clinical operations for nearly 20 surgery centers and work with many providers. Their stress becomes my stress so I have to stay centered and be available to them all the time. I meditate and take exercise breaks, but oftentimes still feel frustrated with the problems they bring to me. Do you have any helpful mantras or advice about sustaining empathy?

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** This is a great question, and Clara, thank you for your work. Having never met you, I assume you started doing this work out of a deep desire to care for people. As we move up into more senior roles, we can become detached from the people we once set out to serve. Sometimes, when we get overrun with demands, including administrative ones, and forget about the people we are serving. The more we link our motivations for working to core values, the more likely we are to sustain our energy and focus over time. It sounds like you're already being proactive but also set aside time to focus on your values - why you started doing this work in the first place.

**CHLOE:** I have been constantly distracted by kids and house related stuff. I have to constantly check on my kids to make sure they attend online classes and take breaks on time. Their lunch breaks are different so I have to serve two lunches every day. They need to ask learning questions from time to time. My work day has always been chopped up in pieces. I feel frustrated about not being able to focus on work for a solid period of time. Any suggestions? Thanks.

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** It's hard and challenging. The first step is to contract with everyone in your life. If you have a spouse, contract with them so you have on and off times. Also, at work, can you work at different times (e.g., work early in the morning or late at night). If possible, have a contracting conversation with your boss to arrange new hours. Also, try intervals - start breaking up your day into shorter sprints. Finally, your kids need to be part of this solution. They need to build skills to participate in the management of the household. This may just be picking up their toys, but make them part of the contract, too!

**S:** I've told me superior multiple times that my workload is too much and have asked for help. Sometimes I am

given some skimp additional resources but nothing really concrete. When some works gets moved over, more just gets added to my plate, bringing me back to square one. I feel anxious and stressed all the time. I don't know how else to be heard. I don't want to let things slip, I am professional but it's taking a toll on my well being.

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** Again, we hear you - your challenges are very real. Try to come up with systems to track projects with your boss. First, ensure you're on the same page, so you're prioritizing the right projects at the right time. Second, find an outlet - yes, your boss if probably passing things on to you but also being overwhelmed with requests from their boss. If you can delegate to someone else, do it. Third, don't forget about your wellbeing. Even a micro-break can help you focus and recharge.

**KERRY:** I am dealing with significant imposter syndrome after a recent promotion. I feel as though I am not able to perform at the level I need to. The functions of my job are now more creative, so there's not a clear right/wrong answer or standardized process of doing things, which makes me second guess myself. To combat this, I've been e-mailing my boss to get his second eyes/opinion/support on things before diving in but his responses are always "trust your gut" "you don't need to run this by me" etc. While it's nice to know he trusts me, I'd rather get support and feedback from him on my work and build my confidence that way. How can I combat these feelings of imposter syndrome and also broach this topic with my manager?

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** Stepping into a new role can be challenging, but remember, you were promoted - your boss has confidence in you. You're second-guessing yourself - the doubt isn't coming from your boss or team. One suggestion I have is: start aligning with your boss less often. Yes, align with your boss, but trust yourself as well. Another suggestion is to start turning down the volume on that voice inside you that is casting doubt on your ability while also turning up the volume on another inner voice - the one driving you forward. These are small but powerful behavioral shifts that hold the potential to change your position to your new role.

**FRIENDSHIP WOES:** After working in an office for several years you often develop close personal friendships with your co-workers. What are some strategies for continuing positive working relationships if there is a breakdown of the personal friendship(s)

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** One approach is to go back to the gratitude you originally had for the friendship. Start by working backward. Consider what you originally valued - why the friendship took off in the first place.

**O:** I am an introvert. My supervisor is very extroverted. Meetings are way too long and frequent in my workplace, leaving me feeling drained, anxious and unprepared for the day. I often feel trapped, like I can't escape. I am a front line worker with at risk youth. I need alone time to prepare myself for the day, structure my thoughts, think... I don't want to spend every minute of free time in meetings or conversations with my co workers. How do I navigate this situation?

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** I would recommend Susan Cain's book Quiet (<https://www.amazon.com/Quiet-Power-Introverts-World-Talking/dp/0307352153>). I would also recommend Morra Aarons-Mele's book Hiding In the Bathroom ([https://www.amazon.com/Hiding-Bathroom-There-When-Rather/p/006266609ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=morra+hiding+the+bathroom&qid=1602096874&s=books&sr=1-1](https://www.amazon.com/Hiding-Bathroom-There-When-Rather/p/006266609ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=morra+hiding+the+bathroom&qid=1602096874&s=books&sr=1-1)).

I would also recommend sending an email to your boss - be clear about what you need to be success. Making clear requests is critical here.

**A:** How to cope with stress of the world returning to "normal." I'm now used to the 100% remote work and essentially being holed up in my house. I have a newborn and have been super cautious. I'm afraid of when my office opens back up and my manager asks me to return to the office. Higher-ups are saying no one is being mandated if they feel unsafe. I can't help but think that's only for now and for so long. I'm scared to return, but know it can't go on forever

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** Congratulations on your newborn and your self-awareness. You're not alone and these are real concerns. Your concerns are twofold though. You're worried about returning to work and about the uncertainty - that is, the ongoing what-if

scenarios. One approach is to focus on what you can control and avoid wasting energy on what-if scenarios that have not yet presented themselves. Also, start tracking your productivity as you work at home. This will provide you with metrics to support your decision to continue working remotely if and when a call back to work happens.

**LK:** I think I'm burning out at work. What are the signs?

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** Burnout is real and on the rise. Pre-pandemic, [the cost of burnout](#) was estimated to be anywhere from \$125 to \$190 billion annually! Here's an article that expands the conversation - <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/mental-health-in-the-workplace/202008/burnout-is-real-the-rise-and-retractable>

**MANAGER:** I have an employee that I suspect is having some challenges at work due to a non-disclosed mental illness. I want to help but how can I approach the situation without making the employee uncomfortable?

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** It's great you are aware enough to see this happening. Start by considering how to create a safe space. Second, think of ways to promote transparency. Finally, consider how you can build a better workplace - what could you do to help them feel more comfortable coming forward and opening up.

**BROWN SKIN:** I am having a hard time handling my job, the added responsibilities due to Covid and the outcome that Covid has had on myself and my coworkers. I am also a single mother raising 14 year old boys, who's lives have also been drastically changed. Dealing with all the same things most of us deal with, while being a Black American. I am a Black American women and my life does matter! Constantly having to carry the spoken and unspoken affects of my skin color is down right tiring :(! Knowing that if I want change, I have to take action. Do I have the luxury of dropping everything to focus on the fact that the majority in America thinks that because of my and my families skin color, we are less than? I am the only women and black women on my immediate team. I feel like the token for sure.

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** Yes, you've been wronged. Everything you're saying is real and massively difficult to

address, and as you know, this is not your sword to carry. This is your team's burden--they need to do their own work and start to transform your team and organization. The real question is how can you take care of yourself and your family. Assess your support network in and beyond the workplace? Do you need to talk to a neutral third party--for example, a coach--once a week to help work through challenges on your team. What additional support systems can you install to help ensure your ability to continuing doing great work? Thank you for raising this conversation.

**DR. CAMILLE PRESTON:** Thank you so much for these questions! You can follow me on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/camillepreston/>

To learn more, also please join our newsletter and explore our resources: <https://aimleadership.com/contact/newsletter/>

**LIFESPEAK:** *Thank you, Camille, for sharing your time with us today. We are sorry that we did not have time to take all of the excellent questions that came in. Thanks to all of you for participating! Please join us for our next Ask the Expert webchat at 4 pm (ET), Ask Me (Almost) Anything with Dr. Marni Amsellem.*

## Mental Health: Ask Me (almost) Anything with Dr. Marni Amsellem

Welcome everyone! We are so pleased to have Ph.D., Clinical Psychologist, Dr. Marni Amsellem, with us today.

We will begin taking questions promptly at 4:00 PM ET. LifeSpeak will mediate this discussion and will allow or reject questions as they come in. Questions may be edited for length or for clarity. We will not accept questions that include personal attacks, unsubstantiated allegations, vulgar language or libelous statements.

Please note that Marni's answers are purely as information and should in no way replace consultation with a professional. We will do our best to pose all allowable questions today.

**DR. MARNI AMSELLEM:** Hello and good afternoon, everyone! I am thrilled to be here with you all today and answer your questions.

**EVA:** Good Morning, I have a toddler who is not quite at the level to communicate verbally his anxieties and worries. How can effectively and continually reassure him etc? Also, since he's home with the family unit of 3 majority of the time, how to I try to avoid too much attachment and separation anxiety?

**DR. MARNI AMSELLEM:** This can certainly be a stressful time for all, but is also a great time to cultivate calm at home. Communicating to your toddler that he is loved and cared for is one of the most important things to do at this point- for all of you! He will pick this up from your words as well as your actions. Paying attention to his cues for what his needs are is key, as is nurturing his curiosities about the world in general.

**SUE:** How does anxiety lead to depression - what are the warning signs and what are strategies one can use to keep anxiety under control?

**DR. MARNI AMSELLEM:** Important question. Anxiety and depression can often be connected. When we have negative thoughts about ourselves or something more global (such as "I'm not good enough" or "I'm going to fail"), this can lead to us feeling bad about ourselves. If you sense that this is becoming a pattern, consider this a warning sign that your mood can certainly be affected. A highly effective strategy is to address these thoughts that are much more global than the situation at hand. Many strategies exist, among them cognitive behavioral therapy techniques.

**YIKES WINTER:** Beyond S.A.D lamps, and \*trying\*

to get outside when it's nice, are there any other suggestions for working through the anxiety and depression that couple with the shorter, darker, colder days ahead? I find that as soon as the days start feeling shorter, I get an anxiety at dusk and find that I need to sleep more than normal.

**DR. MARNI AMSELLEM:** You're asking a question that is on many people's minds- so thanks for asking. You have highlighted two very important things to do to help combat seasonal blues, of course. Another important thing you can do is to notice how you are thinking about the dark days of winter right now. It sounds like you are approaching them with dread- which is understandable, but also perhaps setting the expectation that it WILL be awful. This can be how anxiety starts to creep in. I would argue that because you are addressing this proactively, you are actually setting yourself up for greater success this winter season- kudos to you! Mindset is so powerful. Bottom line- it's not easy, but if you plan for it, you are really doing something good for yourself!

**RILEY:** What resources are available for people of colour who have PTSD due to daily microaggressions resulting from racism.

**DR. MARNI AMSELLEM:** This is so important for everyone to read to build awareness of this issue, so thank you for asking this question, Riley. With increased education and awareness about the effects of systemic racism (and other biases), the likelihood of commonly experienced microaggressions will hopefully decrease. But because of your past experiences, it sounds like you are primed to be on alert to future microaggressions. This is how trauma (whether a huge event or cumulative smaller traumas) can affect our physiology; trauma can

place us on alert to danger, whether real or perceived. For specific resources related to racial microaggressions, I would search online through organizations that specialize in this, but also know that more generalized coping skills in response to overcoming the effects of trauma are useful here as well.

**BEN:** How do I overcome fears of stigma/stereotypes and tell co-workers about my mental illness?

**DR. MARNI AMSELLEM:** So glad you asked this, Ben. Stigma can be so powerful, and it is so unfortunate because it often holds people back in sharing with others. The fears that people have (whether real or imagined) about how others will respond have the effect of keeping mental illness 'secret'. To the extent that you feel comfortable, finding ways to educate people about what YOUR experience of symptoms or mental illness in general helps to personalize a diagnosis and helps to build understanding and compassion. You can start with a few individuals who you may feel like you trust a little more and go from there. You are pushing yourself to overcome this fear- congratulations on this!

**M:** Can depression come and go? Are low mood, lack of energy and inability to concentrate signs of depression?

**DR. MARNI AMSELLEM:** Absolutely, all of these things can be true of depression. Understanding depression (and how it affects you) can be key in figuring out your best ways of managing it. That said, if you have never been diagnosed with depression and these are your symptoms, it would be worthwhile to have a more thorough evaluation to best diagnose and manage your symptoms.

**DINK:** Therapist, coach, psychiatrist, psychologist...how do I know which one I need? What are the differences?

**DR. MARNI AMSELLEM:** It is so confusing, isn't it? While it is fantastic that there are many different types of mental health professionals, it's hard to know where to go. Hope this response helps scratch the surface. Some of the distinctions are along scope of practice. For example, only some professions (e.g. psychiatry) can prescribe medications, and even then some other disciplines may receive training and certification to prescribe (depending on the location and other considerations). But in general, a professional who is

a licensed by a regulatory board and practices therapy can call themselves a therapist. From there, the type of training/ degree one has determines what their professional title is- e.g. social worker, psychologist. The models and specialties of training differ between them, and some hold master's-level degrees, and some (like psychologists) hold doctorates. The most important thing is that if you are looking for a therapist, ideally you will want to select one who specializes in what you are looking for, and importantly also a person with whom you can find a connection. A coach may does not have a regulatory body watching over them and does not have the same rigor of training or uniformity of definition of scope of practice. That said, coaching definitely has its place. For example, a coach may be useful in helping you reach a goal

**YOTAS:** Hi Doctor, what are your suggestions to build resilience?

**DR. MARNI AMSELLEM:** So glad you asked this question! This is one everyone can benefit from. Everything we do in our lives can help us build resilience, so it is important that we try to make some intentional decisions and cultivate a healthy mindset! For example, making sure that we take time for ourselves daily, despite whatever the constraints are in our daily lives, is really important. Additionally, making sure that we engage in physical activity, that we take care of ourselves by prioritizing sleep, a balanced diet, boundaries around work time, social interactions, and nourishing our other needs and interests are all important as well!

**CONCERNED:** What is the best way to approach a family member that you can tell is using alcohol in an unhealthy way to deal with the anxiety of a divorce and a family death?

**DR. MARNI AMSELLEM:** No doubt this can be tricky. I am glad you asked, because there is often not a simple answer of how to address unhealthy coping. As you are concerned, you are wanting to reach out and help your family member. Thinking about what to do now may be useful before you approach this family member. Consider the following, in addition to the health or safety related dangers of the alcohol consumption: 1) what are your apprehensions about raising this concern? 2) Knowing the family member, what might their reaction be?

3) Knowing your family member, how open do you think they would be to seek out alternate coping methods right now? This will help you in guiding how you want to next proceed.

**LILY:** How does one care for oneself when caring for the needs of an aged parent, working a full-time job and maintaining a household as a single parent when it seems that there aren't enough hours in the day?

**DR. MARNI AMSELLEM:** This may seem like a rhetorical question, but there are absolutely things that, despite all of these responsibilities and constraints, you CAN do (and in fact, I would recommend that you DO do this daily). First of all- you are asking the question here, so you are open to new ideas- this is great. Mindset is really going to be key here. For example, a question to ask yourself can be, "where in my day today can I carve out time for ME today?" Might it be while on your commute to work (if you are working out of the home now)? Or if you are currently working from home, might you be able to reclaim some of that time that was formerly part of your commute- perhaps by putting on headphones, tuning out everything else but what you choose to listen to, or taking a walk or getting some exercise during this time during a workday? No doubt this is incredibly challenging right now, but if you are open to thinking about time differently and you allow yourself to get creative, you just might find that you can reclaim some time for YOU.

**SB:** How to let go and be more mindful? Is there any self help book that you can suggest or other things we could try?

**DR. MARNI AMSELLEM:** Great question! The more we can ground ourselves in where we are right now (vs. replaying the past or being concerned about the future), the more comfortable we may feel, being in the present. Fortunately, there are lots of fabulous resources out there, everything from meditation apps, to a huge library of self-help publications (which you can both purchase and borrow from a library) to resources to the practice of journaling (I have written about this topic and created resources at [www.writereflectgrow.com](http://www.writereflectgrow.com)), my advice is to be open to trying a variety of tools and stick with what works!

**OLDIE:** Is it worth someone older (say 75+) to go to therapy? Is there even time to fix the issues?

**DR. MARNI AMSELLEM:** It can always be worth it to address concerns and unresolved issues at any point in time. Perhaps the focus of therapy at this point in life might be different than it might have been decades ago, but life perspective is also very different as an older adult. And older adults are not immune to mental health issues, of course; rather depression and issues surrounding social isolation are often quite significant. Bottom line is, if something is on your mind or affecting you emotionally, it can always be useful to address it- whenever you are ready!

**JOSH:** I have had ADHD my whole life and have suffered from low self esteem because of it. What recommendations do you have to boost self esteem and not be so hard on myself?

**DR. MARNI AMSELLEM:** Hi there- It sounds like there are some long-established patterns of being hard on yourself, but starting to tackle some of this criticism or negative judgment can absolutely help turn things around and increase your self-esteem. It sounds like you are working hard to try to best navigate your ADHD, and because you are doing so, make sure you are kind to yourself for all that you are doing to overcome these challenges! It's not easy! What are some examples of ways you have successfully managed ADHD lately? Try to notice some of these examples and give yourself that credit!

**PAM:** Hi Dr. Amsellem, is it possible for an adult to receive a new diagnosis if they have been symptom free from their current diagnosis for 12 + Years?

**DR. MARNI AMSELLEM:** Hi there- if you are currently meeting diagnostic criteria for any diagnosis, then your diagnosis would reflect your current symptoms. If you have a diagnosis from the past but currently do not meet the diagnostic criteria/ are symptom-free, then your diagnosis would be considered not current, perhaps "in remission", or "by history" (depending on what the diagnosis in question is). The two diagnoses may be unrelated. Hope that helps.



**S.S:** I tend to over eat through anxiety and stress, which is not helping me stay healthy and creating even more stress in my life. How can I cope up with this?

**DR. MARNI AMSELLEM:** Now is a great opportunity to cultivate some additional healthy coping practices. Think about what other things that you do that also help you feel better when you are stressed, or distract you from the stress. Some examples that come to mind right now include keeping your mind (or your hands) occupied, such as a creative outlet, or channeling some of the energy into physical activity, or connecting with nature. Envision yourself choosing these outlets instead- how does this feel for you? I imagine much better, instead of even more stressed!

**NONNA:** I'm a senior exec and I've suffered from emotional swings, worsened by my cycle, since I was a teenager. The lows since the birth of my kiddo 4 years ago have gotten worse and lower. The highs aren't there at all anymore. I'm struggling with motivation and starting taking anti-depressants, which have side effects I have a hard time with. I also have health issues since the birth which have not resolved. I went back to work 5 months after a traumatic birth How do I talk to my employer about reducing my workload while I try to get on an even keel? I'm worried I'll be side-lined in my career or worse.

**DR. MARNI AMSELLEM:** I understand your concerns, and no doubt this is challenging. Kudos to you for trying to manage things effectively once you noticed that you could benefit from help. It sounds like you think a reduced workload could help make things even more manageable for you. Are you feeling like this will be supported, or are your concerns more about not advancing if you were to reduce the workload? To the extent that this feels right for you, I would recommend that you are clear in communicating your goals and what you hope to accomplish by reducing your workload.

**GRETA:** How to convince my partner who had a very difficult childhood and past to see a specialist as his past is putting a very bad impact on our present and causing mental stress to me in the process.

**DR. MARNI AMSELLEM:** This is a question that many people often have- how to get my loved one to see a therapist to work through some of their issues from

their past if the partner is not particularly open to the idea. It is hard to convince anyone of something they are not wanting to do, so thanks for asking this. Assuming you have already discussed your wishes and concerns, perhaps you can take the perspective of yourself, like you have done here, noticing the impact that these issues have on you/ the current relationship. Also important is understanding whatever his apprehension to therapy may be right now, whether it is feeling "weak" about needing therapy, the cost of care, or anything else.

**DR. MARNI AMSELLEM:** Thank you all for wrote in with questions today. Hope this was useful! All my best, Marni Amsellem, Ph.D.

**LIFESPEAK:** *Thank you, Marni , for sharing your time with us today. We are sorry that we did not have time to take all of the excellent questions that came in. Thanks to all of you for participating!*