ETHOS
VETERINARY HEALTH

Focus on What You Can Control

Christina Malloy, LCSW
Social Worker, Massachusetts Veterinary Referral Hospital

In a time of such confusion and uncertainty, it may feel like we no longer have the same amount of control we're used to. While there may be many factors that we don't have control over right now, it is important to focus on the things we *can* control. When you feel like you're getting lost in thoughts of what could happen or tangled up in questions that don't have answers yet, try to shift your thoughts to focus on what you *can* control. For example, we might not be able to control how COVID-19 spreads in our communities, but we can control how we handle our own response to limit the risk of exposure.

How do we control overwhelmingly negative thoughts? Many of us spend time worrying about the future but you may find these negative thoughts are popping into your head more than usual. Considering everything that is going on this is a normal response! We may not be able to control when those thoughts show up, but we CAN control how we react to them.

Recognize the Thought

Is this thought accurate? Is it irrational? According to *Psychology Today* these are four common thought distortions we experience:

- *Black and white thinking*. Seeing everything as one way or another, without any in between.
- *Personalization.* Assuming you are to blame for anything that goes wrong.
- *Filter thinking.* Choosing to see only the negative side of a situation.
- *Catastrophizing.* Seeing only the worst possible outcomes of a situation.

Challenge the Negative Thought

Whenever you have a distorted thought, stop and evaluate whether it is accurate. Think about how you would respond if a friend spoke about themself that way. You would probably offer a good rebuttal to their negative view. Apply the same logic to your own thoughts. Ask yourself if you are assuming the worst will happen and then think about other possible outcomes or reasons that something turned out differently than you hoped (psychologytoday.com).

Mindset Shift During a Pandemic

I'm stuck at home	I get to be SAFE in my home and spend time with my family
I will get sick	I will self-isolate and wash my hands, this will significantly DECREASE my chances of getting sick
I will run out of items at home during self-isolation	I have prepared for this and I will use my items wisely. I have everything I NEED for now
Everything is shutting down, I'm panicking	The most IMPORTANT places, such as medical centers, pharmacies and grocery stores, remain open
There is too much uncertainty right now	While I can't control the situation around me, I CAN control my actions. Doing breathwork, calling loved ones, getting enough sleep and proper nutrition, and doing activities I love at home will all help during this time

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Some questions you can ask yourself are:

- *Is there substantial evidence for my thought?*

- *Is there evidence contrary to my thought?*

- *Am I attempting to interpret this situation/outcome without all of the evidence?*

- *If I look at the situation positively, how is it different?*

Practice Gratitude

Gratitude has a huge effect on our happiness and positivity. This is a great time to start a gratitude journal. Write down 1-3 things every day that you are grateful for – eventually focusing on the positive instead of the negative can change how you process information and the world around you. If you're interested in learning more about positive psychology watch Shawn Achor's TED Talk

Additional support:
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA)
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Online support groups:
TheTribe
Turn2Me