

Affectionate connections as the “mask” to protect ourselves from the fear of coronavirus

In face of the threat of coronavirus, our fear, the built-in alarm system within us is turned on to help us survive. We are scared of getting infected and we worry that our loved ones get infected and die from the virus. We enter into the frenzy of buying masks, tissue paper, & hand sanitizers to help us deal with the threat of coronavirus. Yet to deal with *the fear in our hearts*, we need more than masks, tissue paper, and hand sanitizers. We need to be emotionally connected with our loved ones. The lack of emotional connection in our lives leave us feeling lonely and insecure. John Cacioppo, a social psychologist and researcher from the University of Chicago found that loneliness is associated with elevated stress hormones in our saliva and urine and promotes inflammation in the body. *Epidemiological findings indicated that social isolated people are more susceptible to virus, from common cold to HIV, and to cardiovascular disease.* Affectionate connections is the antidote to loneliness. *When we are emotionally connected with people we love, we feel secure and trusting enough that someone is here for us, that we matter to them, and we can count on them in times of uncertainty and insecurity.* Feeling emotionally connected with our loved ones let us know deep inside, at the very gut level that we are loved, and we are not left all by ourselves to face the threat of getting infected during a coronavirus outbreak.

We can respond to the feeling of fear in ourselves and in our loved ones by responding in these ways, *“I see you are afraid, I am here, you can count on me, we will go through this together, I love you.”* Some people believe that fear is an enemy and tries to attack, suppress it, or sweep away their fears. Others think that fear is a sign of vulnerability and weakness and hides it by denying their own fears or project their own fears onto others. Yet lecturing, teasing, criticizing, condemning fear does not make it go away. On the contrary, we build a sense of shame around the fear by condemning this sense of insecurity in others and in ourselves, making it more difficult to calm the fear itself. Offering affectionate connection to our loved ones calm their fears and gives them a sense

of emotional security in the face of threat. This kind of affectionate connection brings us emotionally closer to our loved ones and contains the feeling of fear in times of uncertainty. Psychologist Jim Coan from the University of Virginia and his fellow research colleagues from the University of Wisconsin-Madison found that simply holding the hand of a loving partner calms the jittery neurons in the brain during times of stress and shock. Coan and his colleagues stated that people we love act as “emotion regulators” of our lives. *It is the quality of our relationships that enable us to feel secure and confident enough to face the threats in life.*

We need a different kind of “mask” to protect us from the fear of coronavirus. *Affectionate connections and emotional responsiveness with our loved ones serve as the mask that protects us from fear during the coronavirus outbreak.*

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