

# How To Help Yourself Now in This Time of Crisis

Many, if not most people in Puerto Rico, are reeling from the experience of living through and the aftermath of Hurricane Fiona. Since so many people are still struggling with long-term impacts from the devastation of Maria, this amplifies today's concerns. Many people would say they were anxious and upset. Some might even say they are traumatized or even re-traumatized. It's likely that no one feels able to be their maximally productive, competent self. Sure. That makes sense. Given that as a given, what are some simple, easy things you can do to feel better right now.

1. The following suggestions have been proven to help and have a scientific basis for their efficacy.
  - Cut yourself slack.
  - Do for yourself what you would tell your best friend to do.
  - Use a simple breathing exercise many times a day if you find yourself stuck in a high or low energy place or spinning in anxiety. Inhale to a count of 4, hold for 2, exhale for 6 counts. Do at least three times each time you do it.
  - Start your day by writing down three things you are grateful for. In difficult times it may take a little more work, but it is important for your well-being. For example, I am thankful for coffee, that I have a bed, that the sky is above me.
  - Reduce your exposure to news from all media sources.
  - Jump in place several times. Repeat every hour or so.
  - Make a point of re-establishing a benign relationship to water. For instance, if you drink water, note that water quenches thirst. If you wash your hands, note that water keeps your hands clean.
  - At the end of your day, identify one thing you did that was effective toward some goal. "I was kind to a co-worker"; "I made her laugh"; "I opened the jar for him."
2. All effectiveness requires a calm body. Staying calm will help you feel and focus better. Find a place where you feel safe and try to get some sleep, stretch when possible. Do any exercise even if it's only for 1 minute at a time.
3. People's styles of handling stress vary considerably. You won't change, and neither will they. Don't compare. You are you. Just take care of your style. Don't blame yourself or feel overwhelmed by what you think you should do.
4. If possible, use the buddy system. Identify one person with whom you check in daily. The job of the buddy is to listen and to support you. Period. No judgment.

**Kaethe Weingarten, Ph.D.**

*The Witness to Witness Program* | <https://www.migrantclinician.org/witness-to-witness>