

DIGNITY has been working with trauma affected people for almost 40 years at our clinic in Denmark and through our development partners around the world. On that basis and recognizing the immediate needs of people in Myanmar effected by recent events we share here some pieces of advice that we hope might help anyone affected.

In any situation of acute crisis (whether it follows a confrontation, a loss, or any other stress-inducing event), you may well experience feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, and panic. This is a perfectly natural human reaction to an intolerable situation.

Situations of extreme stress or fear can mean you may have trouble sleeping or feel out of control. The human mind sometimes reacts to past experiences, in the present. Clinical experience teaches that it is possible to use your senses to ground yourself in the present moment and ease the immediate pain.

The following exercises might help:

- Plant your feet steady on the ground and wiggle your toes. Shift the weight from toes to heel. Rotate your shoulders back and forth. Make a fist with your hands and open them. Repeat a couple of times. Pay attention to the sensations of the movement. Carry something with you in your pocket with a soothing texture like a smooth stone, a soft toy etc. Touch it and notice the texture in your hand.
- Breath in deep and slowly while you count to 5, hold your breath, count to 5, breath out slowly count to 5.
- Notice the smells in the air and name them.
- Carry something in your pocket that has a comforting smell, e.g a small bag of jasmine flowers or herbs, and smell it to bring yourself back to the present moment.
- Open your eyes wide and notice your surroundings, count everything you see that is blue, green, red etc.
- Drink some cold water or soda or some warm tea. Or have a chewing gum or hard candy and focus your attention on the taste.
- During these exercises: if your thoughts pull you back to the crisis or worries, pay attention to them, and gently redirect your attention back to the present.

Remember, if you feel like you are losing your mind or have violent thoughts of harming yourself or others:

- You are not defined by your thoughts or emotions. You are the one that monitors and defines them.
- It is normal to be overwhelmed by the world and react with your emotions.

If you have experienced such feelings, you can use these techniques to calm your mind and work through the emotions:

- Imagine your thoughts and feelings as clouds in the sky. They can be soothing on a hot summer day, but they can also overshadow and make the world dark grey, cold and uncomfortable. If you try to fight them or try to run from them, you will be exhausted and drained. But if you remember that the clouds do not define you or the world forever, they are simply a condition for today/this moment they will pass. And behind them, there is sunshine. When you remind yourself of that, you will be able to monitor them instead of letting them overwhelm you. You may not be able to control the weather, but you are able to handle it and you will get through them by acknowledging them, naming them, and monitoring them – watch them pass. In other words; ‘Name it to tame it’.
- Don’t give up. Keep going. If you are having a day that feels hopeless, get up, make a routine each day, and stick to it. You may not be able to control the societal situation, but you can try to control your daily routine even in the smallest way, which is a way to stay sane in an out of control situation.
- Talk about it. Put words to your thoughts and feelings of pain. Let yourself cry, be angry, hurt and scared. Let the clouds be dark. But remember the sunshine behind them, and that they will eventually pass.
- Write about it. You can keep a journal about the events that you are experiencing, but try to focus on the feelings that you have about those events, and use the writing as a way to relieve tension of intense feelings such as fear or anger. You can also rip up the journal or burn the pages as a way of ‘letting go’ of those emotions.