**Covid-19 got you down?**

(This is adapted from two facebook posts from Kari Bedford, and Teri Hofford, photographers and all around smart ladies)

To help reduce your anxiety and stress about everything going on in the world right now, here are some scientifically proven techniques that can be used to reduce stress in anyone, young or old, and are all free or relatively free:

* **Thank your lizard brain:** It’s really easy to let your amygdala (the part of your brain that houses emotions, also known as “lizard brain”) do all the thinking, so let’s start there. Thank your lizard brain when your emotions start to run wild. You can literally say, “Thanks, lizard brain!” It may make you laugh because it sounds ridiculous. It may make you cry with relief. But it acknowledges (mindfully and with gratitude) that your fear is trying to keep you safe. **Lizard brain does not know the difference between a scary story in the news and being actually hunted by a saber-toothed tiger — lizard brain’s job is to warn yo**u. And for some of us, when stressful situations happen, that translates to feeling like we are being chased by a saber-toothed tiger constantly. For days on end. Thanking your lizard brain is a little bit like interrupting a circuit in an electrical panel. You’re temporarily isolating and stopping the current so you can work on it without being electrocuted. Once your lizard brain has stopped it’s cycle for a bit, try some of the following techniques:
* **Get off the internet for a bit**. If you don't, you may imagine you have symptoms and talk yourself into being sick. Give your mind and body a break from the chronic stress.
* **Go outside**, if you are able. Take a walk. Stare at trees. Sit by the water. Go wherever there are less humans and there's more natural goodness. Nature has proven time and time again to reduce stress and anxiety - just by looking at it!
* **Breathe**. There are approximately 809977647467774774477743778822 free meditations online. Find one that you like and it WILL lower your blood pressure immediately. I promise.
* **Engage your senses**. All of them. Right now. Find one thing you can see, smell, hear, taste and feel. It’s a grounding exercise and you can do it anywhere, anytime.
* **Make something**: soup, music, bread, a photograph, a drawing, a quilt, a piece of furniture, cookies, a poem, a short story, a puppet show, etc. Not crafty? Make a tree house, a blanket fort, a lego fortress, a fingerpainting. Work on a puzzle. Hate puzzles? Write letters to people you love on actual paper. Hate people? I don’t know. Make a campfire next to your bunker, you introvert. Engaging in simple, creative tasks gets you off of the internet and into your body.
* **Read or listen to something** that fills your brain with substance to keep that rational pre frontal cortex (the non-lizard part of your brain) strong! Critical thinking is necessary at a time like this and negativity and stress make it harder to do.
* **Pick 2** very basic self-care things from this list and actually do them. You can do it. Start one load of laundry. Eat a vegetable. Eat a piece of fruit. Drink some water. Take a shower. Wash your face. Brush your teeth. Wash the dishes. Change your sheets. Go for a brisk ten minute walk. Drink more water. Take a nap.
* **Take care of yourself and others**. If on the internet, share some funny memes, articles, and light hearted goodness. Negativity brings more negativity (which brings more stress) AND narrows our ability to critically think.
* **Reach out.** You are not alone. We can maintain safe social distancing while nurturing the essential, intimate bonds that make us human. You might accidentally make someone else feel better in the process. Be sure to check out the list of resources from the tMHFA classes.

Feel free to add to this list - or use it to wipe your butt if you’re out of toilet paper. Whatever helps. ️