

By: Rev. Mark Breese

Pastor Mark is the Agency Minister and the Director of Ministry & Community partnerships at Community Missions.

Fence vs. Tree

Our fence has been broken by a tree. About 10 years ago the last owner of the house next to us planted a tree. It is a great tree. It's a variety of Willow and it sprayed out large sub-trunks. Its base is now almost two feet across—in just 10 years! It's beautiful.

Unfortunately it was planted too close to the fence between our yards. As it grew, eventually its sprawling sub-trunks battered the fence, and then as the main trunk expanded its roots began to lift the fence and push against it. Over that time I waited and kept hoping the tree would not break the fence. But, eventually, the pressure of the roots and the trunk lifted and then snapped off the nearest fence post at the ground and the fence sections broke apart.



There is something similar that we all need to be looking out for when it comes to our mental wellness these days. There is a lot going on in the world that is pretty stressful *and* it has been going on for some time—and it looks like it will continue for a while more.

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People are facing anxiety because of the pandemic. There are the economic struggles the pandemic has created for many, many people. There is the whole notion of physical and social distancing that have ended up separating us from people we love and care for. There have been natural disasters like fires and hurricanes. For some, even the current election season and the polarized political disputes is a cause of stress and anxiety. And even if we are not directly affected by some of these stresses, we still hear about them all the time. That constant hum gets added on top of our own day to day stresses. If we are not careful, all these various stresses may build up and destabilize our mental wellness, amplify our anxiety, and even create more serious problems for us.

Although we can't totally control many of these external stresses on us, we do have options. The first among them is *to not ignore how we are feeling. Doing that will just let things to get out of hand emotionally and mentally.* Like with my fence, I thought that the tree might be planted too close to it. While the tree was still small I ought to have helped my neighbor dig it up and move it a foot or two away from the fence. A small action early on would have prevented my current issue. Now, because I did not act back then, I have two bigger and harder jobs on my hands: a broken fence and a big tree that can't be moved and may have to come down.

Just so, the one very simple action we all can take to help prevent the building up of the pressure from all these many anxiety producing issues we all are facing is to not wait to address how they are affecting us. Ignoring the pressure, letting it build up and just hoping it will end is not likely to work. Acknowledging the pressure and talking about it is key. Talk about it with a family member or friend you trust. Contact a clergy member at a place of worship. Talk to your teacher at school or a guidance counselor. Reach out to your Human Resources department at work. Or contact your doctor or a mental health professional for help early on. Delay will only make the effects worse and more difficult to deal with later. It will place more and more stress on you and on those around you.

There are free resources available by phone and online as well. New York has a free, confidential helpline as part of the FEMA response to COVID-19. Call 1-844-863-9314 or visit nyprojecthope.org. You can also find help at the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html. A quick search on Google will turn up many more options.

Don't wait and let the pressure and anxiety build. To be sure, broken fences can be fixed. But it is far easier to move the tree out of the way when it is still small, and avoid the problem in the first place.

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