



Dear Mount Sinai community:

The last few weeks have challenged us as never before. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it may feel as if the more answers we receive, the more questions we have. As daily activities and events that we relied on are cancelled, we are left to deal with the discomfort that results from not knowing exactly what lies ahead. For some people, it may come naturally to deal with the unknown. But, for others, not knowing and feeling uncertain is an uncomfortable state. For some of us, being able to schedule ahead, plan, and have satisfying answers allows us to avoid anxiety of the unknown. Being able to tolerate the unknown is a coping skill that we do not always have a chance to develop.

Please read on for some tips on how to build our own tolerance for this ambiguity:

1. It is OK to sit with some of the anxiety or discomfort that the unknown induces in us—that is, acknowledge it and allow yourself to feel it. It is normal to feel some anxiety when faced with uncertainty. The more we tolerate and accept the anxiety that ambiguity induces, the better we become at mastering that uncomfortable feeling.
2. Think of a time when you did not plan ahead. What was the outcome? Did things turn OK, even if it was not exactly what you hoped for? Was it as bad as you imagined it to be? Did your worst case scenario come true? If there was a negative outcome, take time to reflect on how you were able to recover from that unfortunate situation. Reflect on how you were able to overcome that situation and how resilient you truly are.
3. Plan as much as you can without having all the answers. You may not be able to plan everything in your usual manner, but you may be able to prepare more than you imagine. Planning without all necessary information will help build your problem-solving muscle.
4. Think of this as an opportunity to grow and develop this important coping skill. Your ability to manage the ambiguity of these difficult times will make you more flexible and better able to adapt to last-minute changes in the future.
5. Some say that the only thing we can expect from life is the unexpected. Being able to accept this, rather than resist it, can help us feel less caught off guard and more prepared for whatever comes our way.