

Can we get along? Resilience can help promote civil discourse

October 29 2020, by Victor Rogers

For a variety of reasons 2020 has been stressful, frightening, and just plain exhausting. Because of the coronavirus pandemic, some of us have lost loved ones. Many are working from home, and others are unemployed. Wildfires ravaged the west coast as hurricanes and tornadoes battered the Southeast. Protests against racism and police brutality were held around the globe.

And, of course, there is next week's election, which in some cases has pitted relatives and friends against each other.

At times it seems impossible to talk about politics and [current events](#) without ending in a shouting match and hurt feelings. Is it possible to have a civil discussion with someone who doesn't share the same views?

"A need to focus on being right often leads to missed opportunities to understand one another," said Tiffany Hughes-Troutman, licensed psychologist and director of the Center for Assessment, Referral, and Education (CARE) at Georgia Tech. "Seeking to understand another's viewpoint does not equate with agreeing with them; it promotes [psychological flexibility](#) and a [growth mindset](#)."

Psychological flexibility means recognizing and adapting to various situational demands, and being proactive instead of reactive in acknowledging and owning one's response.

"It is natural to want to assert our own beliefs, but also very healthy to

accept that someone else may hold a different opinion despite your efforts to change them," Hughes-Troutman said.

Sonia Alvarez-Robinson, executive director of Georgia Tech Strategic Consulting, agrees.

"This time of disagreement and discourse is challenging all of us," she said. "But we need to keep our focus on what unites us at Georgia Tech—our common mission to develop leaders who advance technology and improve the human condition. Regardless of the outcome of the election, our mission remains solid. No matter which candidate we support, vote for, or agree with, our students are our first priority and we need to keep that front and center."

Alvarez-Robinson said vigorous disagreement with another person can often feel like an adverse event, and if prolonged it becomes a chronic stressor.

"We often have physiological responses to being in conflict with another person—our [heart rate](#) goes up, we might have pain in our gut, we might have skin irritations, or even have trouble breathing. These are all signs of stress and distress," she said.

Stressors caused by conflict can also have a [negative impact](#) on personal and professional relationships.

"Research has shown that diversity brings richness, new ideas, insights, and growth that does not happen in a homogeneous group," said Alvarez-Robinson, who has a doctorate in human and organizational behavior. "Yet studies have also shown that diversity of values, especially when they are deeply rooted, can make productivity and group efficacy more difficult."

Alvarez-Robinson is the principal empowerment officer of Tech's Resilience Employee Resource Group. She suggests using resilience as a skill to help grow from the difficulties experienced through discourse. "Resilience can help groups manage diversity of values while also healing from hurt that is created when people become emotionally charged in their disagreements."

Alvarez-Robinson suggests employing the following coping strategies during this stressful time:

- Quiet your mind. We are bombarded with messages, information, stories, opinions, and our mind is trying to make sense of all of it. Use meditation and other mindfulness techniques to quiet the noise that can keep you from thinking clearly.
- Keep Reality in Perspective. Uncertainty can cause anxiety and fear, which can lead us to create our own worst imaginings of what will happen next. It is important to discern between fear that is imagined and danger that is real. Here we need to prepare for the worst but expect the best.
- Engage in self-care. Heightened negative emotions can make us feel beaten down and depleted in our energy. We need to rejuvenate, recharge, and restore our positive emotions by taking care of ourselves. Get out into nature, manage media consumption, set boundaries, and say kind things to ourselves.
- Put worries in their place. There is a lot to worry about, but worrying can only be productive if we put it into its place. List the things that you are worried about and put them into one of three buckets: what I can't control (then you have to release it), what I can partially control (then figure out what you will do about it), and what I totally control (then make a plan to take action to resolve it).

Hughes-Troutman added, "It is essential to acknowledge our feelings and aim for a balanced and healthy perspective to prevent stress levels from escalating."

Provided by Georgia Institute of Technology

Citation: Can we get along? Resilience can help promote civil discourse (2020, October 29) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-10-resilience-civil-discourse.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.