

Brace for Impact: Holding on When Your Partner is an “Essential Employee”

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To call my partner a news junkie is to put it mildly. Reading headlines aloud to me is a pastime of his, trying to get me to laugh or complain along with him. I rarely need to read the news anymore—why bother when he’s my steadfast reporter?

Sometime in January, he read me a headline, “First Novel Coronavirus Case in the US.”

“Where?” I immediately asked. “Seattle,” he answered. My shoulders fell. “You know we’re going to be infected, right?” “Yeah,” he said, resigned as I was.

I had yet to start my new position as Director of Marketing for the National Benevolent Association. When I did, I knew I’d be working safely from our home in Boise, Idaho, where I could shut the door and batten down the hatches.

My partner, on the other hand, would fly straight into the midst of our burgeoning crisis. He is a commercial airline pilot, and the Seattle-Tacoma Airport is practically his second home.

Takeoff

I tried to put my internal paranoia about our eventual illnesses aside. It was easy to focus on my excitement for my new role. By mid-February, I needed to have the home office ready for me to spend at least eight hours a day in front of my computer. I spent time at Target and Office Depot, looking at cute office supplies and testing out new chairs.

Before the end of February, I would thank myself for the new chair. I spent plenty of time in it working with several members of the NBA staff—and our partners at OGMP and Week of Compassion—on the joint [Statement of Compassion and Care Concerning the Coronavirus Outbreak](#).

I knew my new role would be challenging, but I certainly did not have a global pandemic in mind when I accepted the job. Instead of spending time getting to know my new organization, I found myself devoting countless hours to creating content in response to the change in our world. Yet by mid-March, I felt settled in the new routines at work and at home. The feeling didn't last.

Turbulence

I met a friend for dinner on the night of March 13. During our meal, I got a rapid series of text messages from my partner, so I stepped outside to call him. "I'm in Seattle. I have a fever and the airline is sending me to the ER," he said. My prediction was coming true, we would get sick, and he wasn't even home. If he was positive for Coronavirus, I would be too, and that meant I'd just exposed my friend at dinner as well as the entire restaurant. I had to stop myself from screaming obscenities in the parking lot before going back inside to tell my friend we needed to quarantine.

It took four days to receive the negative COVID-19 results. My partner's fever was due to Influenza-A, a test result we got the same night he went to the ER. Even with the knowledge that he had a normal flu, it was the longest four days of our lives. We ended our personal quarantine just in time for the Idaho Governor and Boise Mayor to issue stay-at-home orders.

As soon as my partner was no longer contagious, the airline put him back on to his flight schedule. Although every state he flies to had issued social distancing orders, airlines are considered essential services and remained open. All US airports are under Federal jurisdiction and are still open as of this writing, although my partner reports his flights are nearly empty.

Put On Your Own Oxygen Mask Before Helping Others

Here we are in May and by the grace of God we've yet to be ill with Coronavirus. I've had to adopt every self-care practice and anxiety-calming technique in my toolbox to prevent chewing through my stash of antacids. One of the self-care phrases I'm fond of is adapted from flight attendant safety speeches: put on your own oxygen mask before helping others.

How do I take care of myself? How do I hold it together when every time my partner goes to work, we both are at risk of becoming ill?

I decided that 'holding it together' wasn't worth the effort. I don't have the time or capacity to keep up appearances. So, I allowed myself to feel.

I permitted myself to feel panic.

I let myself cry and I encouraged the tears.

I buried my face in a pillow and screamed.

I let myself feel every emotion out loud and in full color until there was no more.

I've learned that burying my emotions means I carry their heavy baggage everywhere. I know I'm no good to anyone else if I'm burdened with the weight of my own worries. Whenever I feel the pressure building, I find space and time to let it out with purpose and intent. Expressing my feelings unburdens my mind and spirit so I can refocus on what matters to me. Caring for myself means letting myself feel.

I don't when lockdown will end, but I do have faith we will make it to that day. I might even make it in one piece, if I remember to take care of myself first and don't deny my emotions their place in this new existence.

As the health and social services general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the National Benevolent Association partners with congregations, regions, general ministries, and a variety of Disciples-related health and social service providers to create communities of compassion and care. Founded in 1887 by six women responding to the needs of the day and on their doorsteps, for more than 130 years the NBA has continued to serve "the least of these." Learn more at www.nbacares.org.