

COVENANT

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SAVE
THE
DATE

MAY 11, 2023 ANNUAL BENEFIT DINNER – TORONTO

Call 905-727-4214 or email events@southdown.on.ca to request an invitation to this special evening.

MAY 12, 2023 ONE DAY EVENT

This free event will include two talks on mental health and wellness presented by members of our clinical team, with time after each presentation for questions and answers.

Check our website at www.southdown.on.ca for new information about our upcoming events.

Embracing Uncertainty

"By the end of their life, one out of every two people will have undergone an event that can be characterized as trauma. One out of ten will remain mortified, a prisoner of their wound. The others, through struggle, will come back to life thanks to two words: bonding and meaning."

(Cyrulnik, 2005)



As we navigate through the many journeys of our lives, we all experience moments of uncertainty. The quote by French psychiatrist Boris Cyrulnik reminds us of the key importance of bonding and meaning as central aspects in overcoming trauma. When faced with uncertainty, the need for bonding and meaning might be considered no less essential to living a resilient life. While uncertainty can create distress and anxiety, it can also bring new possibilities and opportunities. Choosing to embrace uncertainty rather than denying or avoiding it, can be an effective response. In this edition of Covenant, two of our team members, Eran Talitman, Ph.D., C.Psych., and Beverly O'Grady, M.T.S., D.S.D., offer helpful suggestions for dealing with uncertainty from a psychological and a spiritual perspective.

In our ministry of healing at The Southdown Institute, we strive to foster a sense of belonging, social support, and inherent purpose in life. Individuals who enter our 14-week residential program often come at a time in their lives when they feel quite low and may be experiencing a sense of being overwhelmed, burned out, or feeling stuck in the midst of a personal crisis, which may contribute to doubts about self-worth and a sense of isolation. They are primarily from the Roman Catholic tradition, including ordained clergy, vowed men and women religious, lay pastoral ministers, seminarians, and novices, or pastoral leaders of other Christian faith traditions. As they are welcomed into the hospitable, loving, and supportive community of Southdown, our residents know they are not alone on their journeys. Here, they are accompanied by our dedicated care team and the community of residents who share in the program, all helping each other to embrace a hope-filled path toward health and a brighter future. In our outpatient program, we offer psychotherapy and spiritual direction to all individuals who seek to work with a spiritually integrated and faith positive clinician. Southdown now provides our tele-health online services across Canada.¹ If you, or someone you know, are in need of psycho-spiritual support, our wide range of programs and services are here to help.

In today's time of uncertainty and distress, may we always remind each other that we are not alone, that we all have a place of belonging with Our Lord, that we all have inherent meaning and purpose as God's beloved children, and that supportive others are available to help and accompany us.

Sincerely,

Rev. Stephan Kappler, Psy.D., C.Psych., R.Psych.
President and Chief Psychologist

¹ In consideration of jurisdictional and licensing requirements.

Dealing With Uncertainty

By Eran Talitman, Ph.D., C.Psych.



"Uncertainty is the only certainty there is, and knowing how to live with insecurity is the only security."

(John Allen Paulos)

From the moment we are born until we die, we are constantly facing uncertainty. We are uncertain if our parents will respond to our needs and accept us when we are children; we are uncertain about our school experiences; we are uncertain about our future; we are uncertain about our health; we are uncertain about our relationships; and, ultimately, we are uncertain about the timing of our death. And yet, we try our utmost to plan, to navigate, to control, to strategize, and to manipulate aspects of our life.

Facing uncertainty is part of the human condition. On the other hand, we also need some sense of control in order to function properly and appropriately. In this article, I will outline healthy ways to deal with uncertainty.

1. Acceptance: To a great extent, we need to accept that we do not have *total* control over what happens to us. We need to accept that we cannot *totally control* our biology, other people, and our health. To be resilient in the face of uncertainty, we need to focus on what we can control and to let go of what we cannot control. We can make efforts to be open and honest with people, move towards acceptance and love of others, set limits and boundaries about how we will be treated by others, take steps to improve our health, and plan for our future. For example, we can take control over some aspects of our health by exercising, eating a healthy diet, having regular contact with our personal physician, and not smoking.

When we are experiencing anxiety that is associated with uncertainty, we need to be self-compassionate by recognizing that this is not our fault, that every human experiences this, and that we are not alone with this anxiety. At times, we make attempts to avoid any feelings of anxiety related to uncertainty because we want to reduce any discomfort or emotional pain. Rather than avoidance, we need to accept and embrace that we will experience anxious feelings at times throughout our life and that this is normal. In particular, we will likely experience anxiety during periods of transition. We need to be patient and self-compassionate during such periods in our life. Research indicates we are likely to be much more empathic, encouraging, and supportive towards those we care about who are struggling than we are towards ourselves when we struggle. In this regard, we need to remind ourselves about what we might say to someone who is going through the exact same experience with the same thoughts and feelings we are experiencing. In this way, we can increase our self-compassion.

2. Monitor the Tendency to Catastrophize: Many of us, when faced with uncertainty about the future, fear the worst outcome. We are fearful we will not be loved and accepted; we are fearful of losing people in our life; we are fearful we will not accomplish our tasks and projects; we are fearful we will not be fulfilled in our work; or we might be fearful that any medical condition will

automatically be lifechanging, debilitating, and even fatal. In short, we anticipate that we will be miserable in the future, which creates a high degree of anxiety in the present. In my work with clients, when I ask them the number of times in their life the worst outcome happened, the response is typically 0%. In fact, research indicates that because we anticipate the worst outcome, we are very inaccurate in predicting our future. In this regard, it will be important for us to consider the various possible outcomes, including the average outcome, the most likely outcome, and the best possible outcome.

3. Adaptation: Research also indicates that we are inaccurate in our prediction of how we will *manage* a difficult or challenging situation if it arises. We tend to be fearful that, if a particular situation occurs in the future, we will not be able to handle it, that it will devastate us, and we will not cope. We tend to underestimate our capacity to face challenging situations. In my work with clients, I ask them to reflect on how they dealt with challenging situations in the past. In this way, they can see how they have utilized resources, sought help and support from others, and adapted and coped well with a challenging situation. On the other hand, if they did not cope well with a difficult situation in the past, I encourage them to reflect on what they might need to do differently to cope better with any challenging situations in the future. In this regard, we need to consider our strengths, our resources, and the people who can support us when, and if, we need to face a challenging situation in the future.

4. Seeking Comfort in a Healthy Manner: In the face of uncertainty, we are likely to feel anxious and as a result, our brains are likely to initiate behaviours that provide distraction and comfort for us. In this regard, we are likely to be tempted to mindlessly scroll through social media for hours, have several glasses of wine, indulge in snacks, and even become overly involved in our work. On the other hand, if we have developed and practiced healthy comforting strategies on a regular basis, then we are likely to cope well with adversity in the future. In dealing with uncertainty, it is important to list ways we can find comfort in a healthy manner. This may include taking a long bath, talking to a friend, spending time in nature, eating healthy, exercising, obtaining an appropriate amount of sleep, or listening to music. These forms of self-care can provide us with comfort during the difficult times in our life.

5. Characteristics of Resilient People: Research indicates that there are people who seem to be resilient in the face of uncertainty. Such individuals generally assume things will work out well in the future. In this way, they seem to be optimistic rather than idealistic. Also, they anticipate that if something does not work out well, then it will not inevitably result in the worst outcome or be catastrophic. Such individuals believe that, if they face a challenging situation, they have the capacity and resources to deal with adversity, with the ability to seek support if needed. We can

reflect upon how we might be able to be more optimistic and to be more confident that we have the resources and support from others to handle challenging situations in the future. Simply listing our gifts, strengths, and resources can enhance our confidence that we will be able to handle a difficult and challenging situation in the future.

- 6. Social Support:** Research indicates that social support is the number one factor in being resilient. People who report having a strong social support network tend to report lower levels of depression and anxiety, lower levels of stress, and stronger immune systems. As well, people with a strong social support network tend to live longer than those who are isolated and alone. Social support provides us with the opportunity to process our experience, the opportunity to develop solutions to problems,

and provides us with the sense that we are not alone in our journey. In this way, when we meet our need for a sense of belonging through social support and we feel loved and cared for by others, then we are in a better position to deal effectively with uncertainty.

As part of the human condition, there will be wonderful sunny days as well as cloudy and stormy days that may make us feel worried, sad, tense, confused, agitated, angry, and/or anxious. Accepting the fact that we are living with this weather pattern will enable us to better cope with challenging situations in the future. Establishing a sense of belonging and social support, being fully aware of our gifts, strengths, and resources, being self-compassionate, developing healthy comforting strategies, and monitoring our tendency to catastrophize can serve as a foundation for coping with challenging situations in the future. ■

The Spirituality of Uncertainty

By Beverly O'Grady, M.T.S., D.S.D.



Is it any wonder that we fear uncertainty? There is no telling what kind of danger might arise! Fear is built into our DNA as a survival instinct, the fight or flight response. When nothing is certain, fear can be crippling, contracting, and prevent personal evolution. On a spiritual level, uncertainty can bring us to the place where we question God's presence in our life. But what if uncertainty was God's invitation? The times between leaving and arriving in new phases of our life, known as liminal space, can be periods of great creativity. What if we redefine uncertainty as an invitation to recreate ourselves into the person that God knows we can be?

Many years ago, I was on retreat, struggling to make sense of an unfolding of personal and familial suffering. As I walked through a grove of trees in their brilliant fall colours, I was stunned to see one perfect red leaf suspended in the air. It was neither on the tree nor on the ground. I felt for a moment that time was frozen. It was a revelatory metaphor for what I was experiencing in my life. Looking closer, I discovered a fine filament of a spider's web holding the leaf in this in-between place. That gossamer thread sparkled with light and offered me an illustration of my invisible and concrete connection to God. There were challenges ahead that I did not want to walk through but God provided a transition that offered me incredible growth, rather than an experience of "crash and burn."

In times of uncertainty, do we bring our encapsulated expectations to God in our prayer? Or do we ask God to guide us through our challenges with an openness for surprise? Do we have the habit of leaning toward the worst-case scenario in our imagination? As my driving instructor used to say, "Where your eyes go, the car will follow!" We can look toward a horizon of the unknown and live into the adventure and unexpected outcome that God offers us in these transitional circumstances. I constantly remind myself that God's imagination is much bigger than mine. There are a lot of moving parts—circumstances will unfold in unusual ways that may bring me blessings unobtainable in other ways. When we release God from the box we have placed God in, we begin to co-create the potential for miracles.

In periods of uncertainty, we can change our perspective by asking the right questions. There is great power in rewording, "Why is this happening to me?" into, "Why is this happening for me?" We might ask, "What lessons are being offered for my growth?" It is not easy to face challenges with interested curiosity, but this shift can revolutionize how we step into our future. Each challenge and step into the unknown provide us with a circumstance of untapped potential. By allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us with gentle nudges and intuitive next steps, we begin to dance with God's creative energy.

There will be tumultuous times in our lives when we must surrender our control of difficult circumstances. The uncertainty of the outcome may cause us to rise in rebellion or sink into apathy. We ache with the desire to push through the tough, destabilizing challenges, hoping to break through the threshold of pain into calmer waters. Are we being asked to experience a depletion of our strength or is this an invitation by God into trust? Nobody wants to answer this invitation—not without resistance. Giving up our autonomy and freedom can be a bitter experience. Accepting help from others does not come easily to those in the "helping" professions. We mistakenly try to manage alone when our inner well is dry. Will pride keep us from surrender? Can we allow others to assist in our care?

"Trust in God" is a statement of faith. No matter how bad things become, God continues to hold us close with care and compassion. Uncertainty offers us an opportunity to grow our soul. Can we find greater compassion for ourselves and others? Can we appreciate how much we have been stretched to create a newness within our hearts? The clay vase must be fired in the kiln to be strengthened. It will be fired and glazed many times before completing its transformation. Like the vase, we become a stunningly intricate version of ourselves. This transformation cannot be accomplished without uncertainty. We trust that God is supporting our transformation into something more beautiful than we can imagine. Our scars offer us character and depth. And surely there will be an intriguing story behind the scars, the story that tells of our leaving and arriving, of stepping into uncertainty and materializing into a world beyond our imagination. For, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him." ■

ANNUAL APPEAL 2022

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Thank you and may God's blessings be yours in abundance.

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Covenant is produced and published by The Southdown Institute. Its purpose is to inform and educate the readership about clinical issues that surface in our work and to invite integration of the emotional and spiritual aspects of our lives.

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Welcome Sister Marie-Josée Akom, SSCM



In September 2022, we welcomed Sr. Marie-Josée Akom, SSCM to our clinical team as a psychotherapist intern for one year. Sr. Marie-Josée holds a MA in Counselling and Spirituality from St. Paul University, Ottawa. She developed her interest in psychotherapy while involved in vocation ministry for her Congregation. She is a member of the Servants of the Holy Heart of Mary (Montreal).

Meet Our Clinical Interns

Each year Southdown provides practicum opportunities for university students who are enrolled in psychology, counselling, and nursing programs. We are delighted to introduce our current clinical interns:



Lisa McLeish, Registered Nurse Intern, is in her final year in the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program at Nipissing University (distance education). Lisa noted that she appreciates the supervision and mentoring that she has received in her work with the clients, and Southdown's holistic approach to client care, including the essential element of spirituality.



Shervin Zeinali, Psychology Practicum Student/Intern, is in his final year of the Master's Program at Adler Graduate Professional School - Toronto. Shervin noted that he appreciates Southdown's team approach to client care, and the support, supervision, and opportunities he has experienced in his practicum.

In Memory Father John Allan Loftus, SJ

The Southdown community was saddened by news of the passing of Father John Allan Loftus, SJ on October 24, 2022. Father Loftus, a psychologist and educator, served as Executive Director at Southdown from 1986 until 1993. During his tenure at Southdown, Father Loftus provided assistance to the Canadian bishops in addressing the sexual abuse crisis, wrote, with other members of the clinical team, various published monographs on a variety of topics such as aspects of healing, spirituality, sexuality and other issues, and initiated two educational conferences for leadership. We offer our sympathy to the Jesuit Community and Father Loftus's family.



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