

### Congrats – Your Coping Skills Have Been Upgraded!

*Gail Nelson, M.Ed., LPC, owner of Journey Counseling*

If you've ever been at an airline ticket counter and heard these words, "We'd like to upgrade your seat to First Class" you know the thrill of getting a ticket upgrade. Upgrades can happen for a variety of reasons such as when the airline wants to thank you for an inconvenience you have suffered as a passenger. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a significant inconvenience so to thank you for the inconvenience you have received an upgrade; an upgrade in your coping skills!



**Think back to a year ago. Would you be surprised to see yourself tackling the things on today's "to do" list?**

It might be hard to believe, given how some days fall apart, but you have certainly learned much in the last year about change, stress, parenting, resilience, flexibility and the importance of our relationships. Take a few minutes to celebrate your skill upgrades!

#### Our New Roles:

When we start something new, it can be uncomfortable because we like to be competent. We don't like being a beginner or a rookie, and we don't like being wrong. This has been an uncomfortable year, filled with new roles and plenty of time spent as a rookie COVID-19 pandemic participant. When I teach disaster management classes for the Red Cross, the major concept is "*this isn't going to go well* – it is a disaster." Each disaster is different, and we never fully master the skills we need to cope with a disaster until well after it has passed. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, has given us more time to refine our skills and embrace new roles.

#### Threat Manager

One of our new roles is threat manager, for ourselves, our families and our friends. We need to be constantly monitoring our environment for threats to our immune system. As we continue to improve our new coping skills, try these ideas to manage threats:

##### At Home:

The pandemic has forced us to develop new coping skills for our emotions. Since we are spending so much time together, everyone needs to develop new skills to manage low moods and the impact of close quarters on our ability to get refreshed. The number one remedy for low mood is fresh air and fun. Even in cold weather it is amazing how good it can feel to get a change of scenery. Drive to a park and run around for 10 minutes, it will do us good!

##### Our Relationships:

Another threat is how we are managing our relationships. These days I spend more time in during my counseling sessions focusing on conflict with new roles and responsibilities. Our children are watching how adults solve problems. If we are constantly bickering with each other, what are we teaching our children? A key question to ask is: **What am I doing that makes it difficult for you to give me what I want?** Often it is the tone and the way we ask for help. If when we ask for help it sounds like complaint, it will make our partner, child, or roommate defensive. Instead, listen for complaints and turn them into invitations for feedback, like saying, "**I hear that doesn't work for you – what would work better?**" You

can follow up on their feedback by having a conversation about whether you can accommodate their request/complaint.

### **Our Children**

Children enjoy hearing compliments. Could you make a list of new skills you see in your kids and give them a compliment? Are they learning to be more self-directed? Are they asking for help when they are stuck on an assignment? Do they tell you they are bored and lonely? It is a skill to identify a need and ask for help.

Try having a family meeting to reset expectations. We can remind kids that they need to be committed to their education. Another way of checking in is to host Parent/Student Conferences. Invite your child to a meeting, like the teacher does, and check in on what is going well and what could be adjusted. Highlight what is and is not working. Refresh resources, supplies and goals. Make sure they know you understand that things are difficult right now.

We've all been thrown into chaos because of the pandemic. Are you teaching your children to be adaptive because they witness your coping skills? One great strategy is to tell your children about your decisions and the factors that go into making a decision that impacts the family. Children are amazing at brainstorming ideas – let them help generate options for the latest family dilemma – to not only survive but to thrive in the current circumstances.

### **Think About New Outcomes**

As a therapist, one of the constant complaints I hear is how bored we are getting and how this pandemic makes us feel like we are in prison, locked in and stifled by the lock down. This is a reality and a burden. Yet, much of this feeling is of our own making. While anxiety about getting the virus is understandable, now is a good time to invest some creativity for the remainder of this experience.

Let yourself ponder and see what your brain comes up with for a skill upgrade. Gather your family and make a list of what you could do to manage the rest of the journey, which can give you new energy to keep going. We need to give ourselves credit for getting this far. I'd say we've all earned that ticket upgrade!

### **We Can Help**

As part of your VITAL WorkLife EAP, you have access to in-the-moment counseling, as well as virtual or face-to-face counseling. Counselors can talk to you about what you're experiencing or struggling with at home with your partner, children or in your workplace (whether you're working remotely or in place of work).

Counseling is available at any time and follows a per incident model. There is no expiration or end-of-year cut-off dates—you can truly access your resources at any time!

Contact us at **800.383.1908** or through the **VITAL WorkLife App** to access your resources today!

### **Gail Nelson, M.Ed., LPC**

Gail Nelson has been an EAP Consultant and counselor for VITAL WorkLife for over 10 years. In partnership with the Couples Institute and their tools in the developmental model of relating, Gail specializes in guiding couples through problems and issues that can be too much to handle on their own.

Gail owns her own practice, [Journey Counseling](#), in the Fargo, North Dakota area, and offers individual and couples therapy.

