

Chapter 11 | Effective Coping with Trauma

The psychological pain that you feel during the COVID-19 crisis with its prolonged lockdown, social distancing, isolation, and the daily news of rising death toll can be a mixed bag of dark emotions. In quick succession, you may feel anxious, depressed, and stressed out; you may feel like lashing out at someone, feel too tired to get out of bed, or drawn to junk food or liquor for some comfort. There is no easy way to protect yourself from these painful emotions and harmful behaviors but talking to someone you trust, or a mental health professional will help.

The first step of talk therapy usually involves clarifying your feelings and thoughts because if you can understand it, you can tame it and transform it. Numerous psychologists have demonstrated empirically or clinically that anger, shame, hopelessness, and meaninglessness can all be transformed to positive energies within two recent journal issues on second wave positive psychology edited by me (Wong, 2019). Furthermore, Wong & Worth's (2017) showed that frustration and desperation can lead to creativity, Westgate (2018) demonstrated that boredom may lead to more engaging activities, and Kessler (2019) documents that the crowning achievement of grieving unexpected traumatic loss is meaning.

The common denominator of the different effective ways of coping with painful emotions and thoughts is meaning-focused coping. Prior research as summarized by Folkman & Moskowitz (2016) and Wong (2017) showed that there are at least 5 to 6 different ways of transforming painful experiences into resilience and positive growth through meaning, such as reframing, finding benefits, changing priorities, and re-authoring the trauma narrative.

