

“New Normal” or Reset?

Is this really the “new normal?”

I hear that phrase in a lot and have used it myself. Certainly, there are times when circumstances alter our lives indelibly. When that happens, we become accustomed to those changes and go about transforming how we move in the world. Getting married. Having children. Losing a loved one. Health-related concerns. These events change us. And in response to the change, we make adjustments and transition to new ways of being.

March of 2020 brought change in a big way. Our battle against a pandemic forced many of us to make drastic changes in our lives. Many resisted the change, but even the act of resisting was a change in what was previously “normal.”

Many marched and stated, “This is not my new normal!”

Then in late May, 2020, George Floyd was murdered, on camera, and we watched it online, repeatedly, and we were again changed. No matter what we thought about what happened, or what we thought should happen next, seeing that video, that circulated and was viewed countless times, we were impacted.

Clearly, there are multiple viruses plaguing our world today. They are intertwined and connected in ways most of us never considered. The COVID 19 virus quickly pulled back the veneer on the disparity between rich and poor, between whites and people of color. We started to see the carefully constructed and nurtured facades that suggested everyone in America gets equal treatment in schools, in hospitals, in everyday life crumble and fall.

We watched George Floyd die by the knee of a public servant sworn to protect and serve, who earned a salary paid for by George Floyd and other taxpayers.

And then people marched. Some people began to listen, maybe for the first time. Some people cried that their “normal” had never been normal at all and why couldn’t we see it.

Most of us were sheltering in place. We saw what happened. We couldn’t look away now. Well played, Universe.

See? These viruses walk hand in hand. In one way or another they seem to infect us either directly or by the way we are reacting to them.

I’m uncomfortable. I’m uncomfortable in a mask, but I’m willing to wear one and to social distance in order to beat back one virus. However, I’m even more uncomfortable knowing that as a white woman, no matter how uncomfortable I am, I enjoy many

comforts merely because I am white and that others do not merely because of the color of their skin.

Before May I would've told you that I was working to address racial inequities, that I have been fighting racism, that I was seeking to learn and grow and become informed. And I have been. But the impact of this other powerful virus, otherwise known as systemic racism, has shown me that it's symptoms are insidious and plentiful, and what I've done so far is not enough.

For one virus we need to put on a mask, and for the other, we must be willing to take off a mask of another kind.

I realize I have to take off the mask I wear that says, "I'm one of the good ones! I acknowledge white privilege! I support the causes, the campaigns, the slogans and the hashtags!"

I have to be willing to take off that mask and really look at myself in the mirror. It's my responsibility to do this – not for anyone else to tell me to do it, or to praise me when I do, or coach me along the way. I have to be willing to get messy and make mistakes and fumble and fall and still get up and try again. I also have to keep at it.

For one virus, a ton of money has been thrown out to researchers to develop a vaccine. For the other virus, not so much.

I fear these viruses and others will continue to walk hand in hand unless we commit to fighting one with as much effort and money as we do the other. Or will we revert back to the old normal, where inequities in healthcare were simply taken for granted?

Systemic racism is a public health issue. Period. Full stop. It impacts mental health and physical health.

I choose to believe we don't need to accept masks and social distancing as the "new normal" we will always have. I know we will be able to hug our friends, eat inside a restaurant, go to a concert and travel again. We need face masks now – absolutely. But I choose to see this time period as a RESET rather than a "new normal."

I also choose to take action to prevent a slide back to the old normal in terms of systemic racism. I AM definitely looking towards a RESET for that virus.

Maybe the greatest gift we can avail ourselves of right now is time. Time to look in the mirror. Look inward. Time to talk to each other in our homes. Time to read, listen and discuss. Time to ponder. Time to dream. Time to re-evaluate priorities. Time to prioritize equity even when it's uncomfortable.

Time to ***reset***.

This is where we can evaluate the concept of “normal.” What will we accept as normal in the future? Is it possible to weave these together and develop a better way forward such that this time means something?

I’m thinking about that. I’m giving myself over to this time with as little resistance as possible so that I can glean whatever gifts may be in store. It isn’t easy. Slowing down isn’t easy. In fact, it’s scary. But I don’t want to waste it. I want to grow from it.

How about you?



Christy Byrne Yates, M.S., NCSP, LEP
www.christyyates.com

Christy is the mother of two – now adult – children. She is an expert in navigating the challenges and opportunities in life including living in the “Sandwich Generation” (those raising children who are also caring for an aging parent), special needs education, and parenting. She incorporates meditation, mindfulness practices and Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) into her work along with other evidence-based practices to support growth, goal achievement and a pathway to living your best life now. In California she is a Licensed Educational Psychologist, a credentialed School Psychologist, and a Certified High Performance Coach, speaker and author.

