

Note: Carolyn Hax is an advice columnist for the *Washington Post*

The entry below is from her post of June 28, 2019, <https://live.washingtonpost.com/carolyn-hax-live-201906.html>

Q: Everything is on fire

Hi Carolyn, I'm a millennial feeling overwhelmingly hopeless lately. Between the children suffering in concentration camps, impending climate disaster, and a government that is utterly ineffective and in the control of a handful of people who make me feel terrorized on a daily basis, life is feeling meaningless to me. I am afraid to have children. I am worried that nothing we do matters anymore. I am upset that everyone is buried too deeply in their online worlds to be able to tune into how urgent these problems are. I am not seeing the point in anything and to "think positive" and try to feel better seems impossible without going into denial and pretending things are okay when they're not. What can I do?

A: Carolyn Hax

Sigh. What we do always matters, to us if nothing or no one else, though interconnectedness amplifies our actions in ways that I think we fail to appreciate. Every person whose life you touch, even if you just graze it one day in passing, is affected by your choices. So instead of living in a macro place of hopelessness, please make a conscious effort to hold yourself in a micro place of purpose.

This is not denial. This is living life on what has been the normal human scale since there were humans. Living in the "online worlds" is so recent as to be a nanosecond's worth of history. And, with all due respect, I think the "online worlds" phenomenon is as guilty of your stress over urgent problems as it is of providing others with a place to hide from those problems. Your exposure to climate and immigration and federal governance and other issues is disproportionately high--at a spike, I'd say--relative to even a couple of decades ago when 24-hour news was in its infancy and people still had to go into the room that had the TV to get blasted by more information than they could usefully process. We've gotten to the point of immediate and constant access to information without proportionate access--not even close--to ways to do something about it.

So. First thing I suggest is unplugging. Not permanently, just for a period of time until you feel less overwhelmed and anxious. Be local, be present, be productive, be generous with your time and effort toward your immediate environment. And when you do go back to paying attention, schedule daily limits and breaks.

With all your newly freed up time, have a nice long date with Steven Pinker, <https://stevenpinker.com/publications/enlightenment-now-case-reason-science-humanism-and-progress> Mix some data-supported optimism into your information diet. He is excellent and persuasive on the gap between what we perceive to be wrong and what actually is, and therefore the gap between what we perceive to be helpful and what actually is.

Then, if and when you're ready, and when your news-binge disorder feels reasonably and sustainably under control, pick one or two ways you can work toward the general good that will allow you to see the impact of your efforts.

Also, I say it last but it should come first, please check in with your primary care physician. It's not unusual for external anxieties to be internalized into clinical ones.