



KARYN SHANKS MD

*Heart, Hope, Healing*

# Stay Curious

BY KARYN SHANKS MD | MAY 20, 2020



Stay curious.

Lately I've been studying my ass off, scouring the scientific literature to learn as much as I can about COVID-19—the virus associated with it, how it's behaving, who is affected and why, what effective strategies can be used now and in the future, and what we're learning to protect us going forward.

I love how the global impact and novelty of this situation is driving a hunger to understand throughout every discipline worldwide.

Clinicians are sharing their experiences as quickly as they can to help others around the world. Scientists are collaborating to devise better ways to care for the sick. Experts and thinkers from diverse fields are sharing their observations and wisdom.

There's a collective need to understand and help.

But it's an avalanche. New information about the COVID-19 pandemic is hitting the journals, news outlets, and online forums by the second.

I feel overwhelmed.

And it's not just about the enormity of information to take in and consider.

## It's not knowing.

I want to know what to do. I want to help you know what to do. I want to soothe, and calm, and provide strong leadership about what we should be doing to stay safe, to be well, to live our best lives.

But we're faced with a unique and complex challenge. One that has brought an unprecedented amount of destruction and confusion.

At any given moment we know far less than we *do* know.

And yet, if we read the news—people all over the world speak and act like they know what's going on. Like they know “the truth” about what we should do and how we should behave. The “shoulds,” “should nots,” directives, criticisms, and conspiracy theories abound—from every political and ideological persuasion.

## Why do we do this?

Why do we become the most “certain” when we know the very least?

Because uncertainty triggers our survival-oriented brains to create stories that keep us alive. To size up what's happening quickly and move us out of harm's way.

And there can be great value to our brain's bias toward fearful scenarios. We need to know if the rustling in the grass next to us is a tiger or if the wilting leaves are the first sign of a failed crop.

Or if a viral pandemic is coming to our house.

So, I'm not dissing our brains or our stories.

But, we're grownups. Once we've leaped out of harm's way, it's important to take stock. To carefully pay attention and learn. We don't need to make something up to feel safe.

If we're completely honest with ourselves, we'd admit to being uncertain every moment of our lives. About most everything.

# Experiment: tell the truth.

What if, just for a moment, we told ourselves the truth?

The *real* truth. The best truth we can offer ourselves at this time.

*We don't know.*

And what if we worked with not knowing as being perfectly okay?

As the mother of curiosity, intelligence, and creative solutions?

What if not knowing was the only way to open our minds and unleash our genius?

What if the “facts” and the “truth” were just observations and hypotheses, leaving the door open for deeper understanding. Or, God help us, being wrong?

Isn't it true that when we know something for sure we stop looking? We lose the curiosity that leads to better, deeper ways to think about our questions?

So, let's work with this just for a moment. Let's be curious.

## We do not know.

Sit with this truth: *We do not know.*

We know our questions. But we don't know all the answers.

And this not knowing, uncomfortable as it can be, is the gateway to our knowing. Unless we lock it down with a story.

Try it: *I do not know.*

Say it. Breathe into it. Be with the truth of it.

*Acknowledge your stories.* Say “thanks” as they pass by (they're innocent creations of your survival-oriented brain).

*Be curious.* Be curious about your questions. Be curious about your discomfort. Be curious about your stories.

*Let yourself feel.* And, hang on, this part's hard! Feel. Breathe.

*I do not know.*

# Try these ways to release the discomfort of not knowing.

When the discomfort gets intense, use these strategies to support and soothe, while protecting your inner truth of uncertainty:

- Breathe into your feelings.
- Honor your feelings and how your brain wants to protect you.
- Soften—soften your body, soften your fear, soften your stories.
- Tell a new story: *I am safe. I am protected. I am curious.*
- Release the intensity of your feelings through music, movement, laughter, and play.
- Walk in nature and let her inspire and soothe you.
- Connect, love, hug.
- Express your feelings through writing.

## Protect yourself from the uncurious.

What do we do about those experts who claim to know the truth and exactly what we should do with it?

Be highly wary. Question them all.

You'll recognize them when you hear them. They come at us with stories about "how it is," "the truth," "the way things are." They say things like "should" and "should not" and "you must." Their stories are fixed and unwavering, their authority absolute.

No matter who is telling the stories, no matter how expert and knowledgeable, not one of them has *all* the facts. And the experts who earn our trust make that clear to us—they are transparent about what they don't know.

So, question everything. The locked down story slams the brakes on learning and inquiry and the possibility of a better story.

I'm not saying become an anarchist revolutionary for the sake of it. We make choices. We're discerning. We commit. And we make sacrifices for the greater good when it's important to do so.

But don't get fixed. Don't stop asking questions.

Stay curious.

Have you been feeling overwhelmed too? I'd love to hear from you!

Love,

Karyn

## Resources to Support Your Curiosity

Karyn Shanks MD. [Empower Your Healing Story](#). 2019.

Karyn Shanks MD. [Unbroken](#). 2020.

Karyn Shanks MD. [Why your doctor is always right \(but would be better not to be\)](#). 2018.

### KARYN SHANKS MD

Karyn Shanks, MD, is a physician who lives and practices in Iowa City. Her work is inspired by the science of Functional Medicine, body-mind principles, and wisdom gleaned from the transformational journeys of thousands of clients over her twenty-five-year career. Her work honors each individual and the power of their stories, their inner wisdom, and innate healing potential. She believes that the bones of healing are in what we do for ourselves. She is the author of *Liftoff*, a manual of energy recovery and healing through essential self-care practices.

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