



Notes from the President

Dear ISSBD Friends and Colleagues,

I write looking forward to our biennial meeting in Rhodes, Greece next June. It is so uplifting to plan an in-person meeting! More generally, I know that we are all looking for something to celebrate, for encouraging news in many different areas of our lives. There seems to be some relief from the pandemic. Fortunately, even with new surges, fewer people are dying and most symptoms are mild. Countries are starting to open up. At the same time, no one needs to be reminded that we are living in unprecedented and very difficult times. No one has gone untouched by the trials and tribulations of the last few years.

In these difficult times, we have all noticed that people are weary. My question is: What can we, as developmental behavioral scientists, do to get through these difficult times?

Professionally, I try to be as optimistic, but also as realistic, as possible. A day does not go by without something really annoying happening professionally. A paper gets rejected; a grant is not funded; someone misses a meeting; a colleague makes an unpleasant or critical remark. Under normal circumstances, these would all be pretty upsetting events. But now I tell myself, in the larger scheme of things, how important is this little inconvenience or setback? People are dealing with much bigger issues. We all are. So, I tell myself to take a deep breath and move on.

But, of course, this is not only happening on the professional front. It is also a phenomenon occurring ever so much more frequently on the personal front. Life is certainly more challenging. Some people have lost close relatives to the pandemic. Some families have several adults working remotely. Trials and tribulations of working remotely include not having space needed or having to share space with partners or small children. Some cannot work remotely, or have close family who cannot, and must face the risk of in-person employment, thus placing themselves and vulnerable relatives at risk. Usually, but not always, these are service occupations from low wage grocery workers to health care professionals. Many leisure activities are also no longer readily available, e.g., sporting events, dining out. But also, more serious limitations are being experienced, e.g., children being schooled remotely, inability to see or provide care for loved ones, uncontrollable schedules due to covid diagnosis of self or family. In Africa the pandemic has not been so deadly as in some other parts of the world but the lockdown has created dire economic circumstances for many.

I could go on, but I think we all get the point. The question I ask, and we all should ask ourselves: as developmental behavioral scientists, is there anything we can do professionally or personally to help others through these difficult times? I suggest there is.

As with so many things, we should think globally but act locally.

At the professional level, we can find ways to help individuals who are in crisis – both minor and major. Is there a deadline not met? Instead of being overly critical with the person who did not meet the deadline, is there a way to both understand the reason for the missed deadline and find another way to get it met? How can goals be set and shared as a group. How can each difficult goal be reconfigured to lighten the burden on any specific person or group? If that is not possible, is there any way to remove the stigma of a goal/deadline not met? It may be something as simple as deciding that goal is no longer critical, assigning the deadline to someone else, or just doing it yourself.

The situation is not different personally. Here we, hopefully, know the individuals or situations more intimately. Is it possible, therefore, to anticipate and intervene to forestall a crisis? If we know money is short this month for a loved one, how about bringing over groceries or inviting someone to dinner. Transportation can be tough because gas prices are high or there is no available means of transportation; offer to give someone a ride because you are ‘going that way’ or lend them a bike/scooter to get them where they need to go. If you know a parent of small children is overwhelmed, offer to take her children to the park, out for a treat, or just stay with them while the parent gets a much-needed break to go to the doctor, grocery shopping, or just take a walk.

While I know my examples tend to be very Western-centric, I do believe the point I am making transcends cultures. Many groups have strong norms of helping those in need. Others need a little bit of a push. I think we, as developmental behavioral scientists, can provide that push.

One thing the pandemic has taught us is that we are all connected. At first, people from certain countries were targeted as the ‘source’ of the disease, then old people were targeted as the most vulnerable, then certain ethnic or racial groups, but eventually it became clear that we are all vulnerable. Yes, perhaps some more than others, but in the end there are many connecting dots. So far, I have mentioned only the pandemic, but I am sure you have noted that we have lots of other crises, of refugees and immigrants, climate change, war and conflict zones. The United Nations has taken a global approach by identifying Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which serve to identify areas that are needed to increase the health and well-being of all. Clearly, we must take these SDGs to heart. The current crises we are experiencing have actually resulted in a reversal of some of the most significant gains. For example, for the first time in decades life expectancy has *DECREASED* in many parts of the world, including the US.

As developmental behavioral scientists we need to be creative about how this can be done for ourselves, the people around us, and the situations in which we live. I do not make these suggestions lightly or from a point of naiveté. These are tough times; changing the way we address them will be even tougher. Nevertheless, I believe we have the best chance of



meeting these challenges because we, at least, attempt to understand human behavior and to do so in a developmental context.

I celebrate our profession and what we have done to improve the health and well-being of all. I challenge you to think about what you do, what the world needs and how you can contribute to it, in a new and different way. I believe we can and will make important contributions to successfully meeting the many challenges we face as individuals, societies and as a global village. The best part is the more we give, the more we receive. This is not a one-size fits all endeavor. What is needed in your world and what you can contribute will

differ depending on your circumstances. But every bit helps. Even better, and as I am sure you have all noticed, it makes us feel good when we help others.

We missed getting together in 2020. We are now looking forward to our first biennial meeting in four years in beautiful Rhodes, Greece. The world has changed a lot and we have a lot to talk about. I know not everyone can make it but for those of you who can I very much look forward to greeting you there and to enjoying the important opportunities for growth, development and fellowship.

Toni Antonucci, President of ISSBD