Mental Health and Resilience during the COVID-19 Outbreak

Sources:

American Psychiatric Association: COVID-19 and Mental Health: Caring for the Public and Ourselves

Open access: https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/textbook-of-disaster-psychiatry/pandemics-health-care-emergencies/478824C480288A8935798FBF151D96FA
Psychological and behavioral responses to disasters

-A pandemic is a natural disaster and those who experience it may feel distress, experience mental health conditions, or increase risky behaviors

-The majority of people—even those with initial difficulties—will do well and return to normal

Psychological impacts of Pandemics

In the case of COVID-19, these concerns raise anxiety:

• Fear and uncertainty each day $\rightarrow$ increased risk behaviors
• Altered perception of risk, e.g. anxiety about risk, no matter the exposure
• Threat of an invisible, imperceptible, powerful agent
• Delays in detection of infection, non-specific symptoms
• Potential for isolation and quarantine
• Shortages & scarcity (protective equipment, treatment)

Behavioral Impacts of Pandemics

- Misinformation spreads rapidly
- Fear, anger, scapegoating
- Surge in healthcare demand
- Medically unexplained physical symptoms – accounts for many people seeking care

Important lessons from prior pandemics - 1

• Risk perception (vs. actual risk) governs individual and community behaviors
• Timely and accurate information enhances public trust
• Population-based prevention and treatment measures are enhanced by education
• Cultural, political and religious beliefs & practices impact adherence to recommendations
• Fear-based decision-making increases population distress and erodes trust

Important features from prior pandemics - 2

• First responders have unique psychological vulnerabilities
• Adequate resourcing of health care personnel is critical to sustaining response efforts
• Media plays a critical role in public perception of risk and safety
• Behavioral health interventions are essential in preparation & response

What to do:
Psychological care for communities-1

• Stay informed using credible sources of information
• Discuss children’s concerns using developmentally appropriate language
• Use prevention measures (e.g. hand-washing) to reduce risk
• Avoid socially isolating due to fear
  • Remember: social distancing means physical distancing with enhanced social connection!
• Take medications as prescribed (including for pre-existing conditions)

What to do:
Psychological care for communities-2

• Tell a health care provider (or other support provider) if stress or worry causes problems at home or work
• Avoid using alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs to manage difficult emotions
• Talk with friends, family & neighbors to foster support for one another

Psychological First Aid (PFA)

- Assists people to respond to distress in the aftermath of a disaster
- You don’t have to be a mental health care provider to provide PFA

Principles
- Establish safety; identify safe areas & behaviors
- Maximize ability to care for self & family & enable people to be successful in their efforts
- Teach calming skills and maintenance of natural body rhythms (sleep, rest, nutrition)
- Maximize and facilitate connectedness to family & social supports
- Foster hope and optimism while not denying risk

What to do if you’re feeling **anxious**

- Have an emergency plan ready and don’t second-guess it. You can control how you will respond
  - Make a plan for your household
    - What to do when schools are closed, if you have to work longer hours, if a family member gets ill. See CDC guidance for your [home](#)

- Talk with someone
  - Connect with friends and family via text, WhatsApp to share concerns
  - Try a therapy app if you need to talk with a therapist

- Gauge your reaction to the news and limit exposure when you need to. Set a time limit for looking at coronavirus news daily.

*Source:* McKenna Princing, UW Medicine, March 12, 2020
What to do if you’re feeling anxious - 2

• Take a mindful moment
  • Deep breathing
  • Prayer
  • Meditation

• Practice self-care and healthy habits
  • Eat well
  • Stay hydrated
  • Exercise
  • Step away from social media
  • Do something enjoyable to relax

Source: McKenna Princing, UW Medicine, March 12, 2020
What to do if you’re feeling anxious

• Keep your routines
  • Maintain your bedtime, meal times, safe outdoor activities
  • Challenge yourself to build something enjoyable into your routine during this time (e.g. read a book, listen to music, take a walk, etc.)

Source: McKenna Pricking, UW Medicine, March 12, 2020
Resources

• CDC Household **preparedness**

• Psychological First Aid
  • Training and manuals: https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/type/psych_firstaid_manual.asp
  • WHO resources: https://www.who.int/mental_health/publications/guide_field_workers/en/

• COVID-19 Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
  • IASC Interim Briefing Note
  • WHO: Social Stigma Associated with COVID-19
  • WHO: Mental Health and Psychosocial Considerations during COVID-19 Outbreak