

Mental Health Considerations During Covid-19 Outbreak

(adapted from WHO March 6, 2020)

General population:

1. COVID-19 has and is likely to affect people from many countries, in many geographical locations. Don't attach it to any ethnicity or nationality. Be empathetic to those who got affected, in and from any country, those with the disease have not done anything wrong.
2. Don't - refer to people with the disease as "COVID-19 cases", "victims" "COVID-19 families" or the "diseased". They are "people who have COVID-19", "people who are being treated for COVID-19", "people who are recovering from COVID-19" and after recovering from COVID19 their life will go on with their jobs, families and loved ones.
3. Avoid watching, reading or listening to news that cause you to feel anxious or distressed; seek information mainly to take practical steps to prepare your plans and protect yourself and loved ones. Seek information updates at specific times during the day once or twice. The sudden and near-constant stream of news reports about an outbreak can cause anyone to feel worried. Get the facts. Gather information at regular intervals, from WHO website and local health authorities platforms, in order to help you distinguish facts from rumors.
4. Protect yourself and be supportive to others. Assisting others in their time of need can benefit the person receiving support as well as the helper.
5. Find opportunities to amplify the voices, positive stories and positive images of local people who have experienced the new coronavirus (COVID-19) and have recovered or who have supported a loved one through recovery and are willing to share their experience.
6. Honor caretakers and healthcare workers supporting people affected with COVID-19 in your community. Acknowledge the role they play to save lives and keep your loved ones safe.

Health care workers:

1. For health workers, feeling stressed is an experience that you and many of your health worker colleagues are likely going through; in fact, it is quite normal to be feeling this way in the current situation. Stress and the feelings associated with it are by no means a reflection that you cannot do your job or that you are weak. Managing your stress and psychosocial wellbeing during this time is as important as managing your physical health.
2. Take care of your basic needs and employ helpful coping strategies- ensure rest and respite during work or between shifts, eat sufficient and healthy food, engage in physical activity, and stay in contact with family and friends. Avoid using unhelpful coping strategies such as tobacco, alcohol or other drugs. In the long term, these can worsen your mental and physical wellbeing. This is a unique and unprecedented scenario for many workers, particularly if they have not been involved in similar responses. Even so, using the strategies that you have used in the past to manage times of stress can

benefit you now. The strategies to benefit feelings of stress are the same, even if the scenario is different.

3. Some workers may unfortunately experience avoidance by their family or community due to stigma or fear. This can make an already challenging situation far more difficult. If possible, staying connected with your loved ones including through digital methods is one way to maintain contact. Turn to your colleagues, your manager or other trusted persons for social support- your colleagues may be having similar experiences to you.

4. Use understandable ways to share messages with people with intellectual, cognitive and psychosocial disabilities. Forms of communication that do not rely solely on written information should be utilized.

For caretakers of children:

1. Help children find positive ways to express disturbing feelings such as fear and sadness. Every child has his/her own way to express emotions. Sometimes engaging in a creative activity, such as playing, and drawing can facilitate this process. Children feel relieved if they can express and communicate their disturbing feelings in a safe and supportive environment.

2. Keep children close to their parents and family, if considered safe for the child, and avoid separating children and their caregivers as much as possible. If a child needs to be separated from his/her primary caregiver, ensure that appropriate alternative care is and that a social worker, or equivalent, will regularly follow up on the child. Further, ensure that during periods of separation, regular contact with parents and caregivers is maintained, such as twice-daily scheduled phone or video calls or other age-appropriate communication (e.g., social media depending on the age of the child).

3. Maintain familiar routines in daily life as much as possible, especially if children are confined to home. Provide engaging age appropriate activities for children. As much as possible, encourage children to continue to play and socialize with others, even if only within the family when advised to restrict social contact.

4. During times of stress and crisis, it is common for children to seek more attachment and be more demanding on parents. Discuss the COVID-19 with your Children in honest and age appropriate information. If your children have concerns, addressing those together may ease their anxiety. Children will observe adults' behaviors and emotions for cues on how to manage their own emotions during difficult times.

For caretakers of older adults and those with developmental disability:

1. Older adults, especially in isolation and those with cognitive decline/dementia, may become more anxious, angry, stressed, agitated, and withdrawn during the outbreak/while in quarantine. Provide practical and emotional support through informal networks (families) and health professionals.
2. Share simple facts about what is going on and give clear information about how to reduce risk of infection in words older people with/without cognitive impairment can understand. Repeat the information whenever necessary. Instructions need to be communicated in a clear, concise, respectful and patient way. It may also be helpful for information to be displayed in writing or

pictures. Engage their family and other support networks in providing information and helping them practice prevention measures (e.g. hand washing, etc.) where appropriate.

People in isolation:

1. Stay connected and maintain your social networks. Even in situations of isolations, try as much as possible to keep your personal daily routines. If health authorities have recommended limiting your physical social contact to contain the outbreak, you can stay connected via e-mail, social media, video conference and telephone.
2. During times of stress, pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in healthy activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Exercise regularly, keep regular sleep routines and eat healthy food. Keep things in perspective. Public health agencies and experts in all countries are working on the outbreak to ensure the availability of the best care to those affected.
3. A near-constant stream of news reports about an outbreak can cause anyone to feel anxious or distressed. Seek information updates and practical guidance at specific times during the day from health professionals and WHO website and avoid listening to or following rumors that make you feel uncomfortable. Stay informed: Find the latest information from WHO on where COVID