

Mental Health

Tips

Coping in an Outbreak

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Series of Tips

- General Tips to Cope with Stress and Increase Resilience
- Acute Stress Reaction and When to Seek Help
- Support among Peers
- Help Resources Available

01

Coping with Stress & Increasing Your Resilience



Coping with Stress

Focus on What's Important and Accept that Uncertainty is Happening

- *Stay Present.* With the constant changes and uncertainty, it is important to focus on the "now", rather than the "future".
- Conserve your physical and emotional energy for things that matter in the present

Be Patient with Yourself

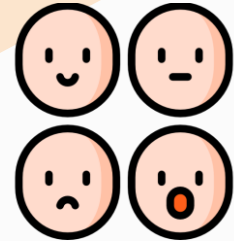
- If you have negative reactions, it is not a sign of weakness.
- Feeling "not yourself" is a normal reaction in an abnormal situation.
- Accept support from others, be it practical help or a listening ear.
- Remember, you are not alone in this situation

Find Ways to Process Your Feelings

- Look out for your informal support network that you can talk to.
- Consider starting a journal to jot down your thoughts
- Or simply take a walk to work off some frustration

Lessen Your Stress Response

- Identify negative thoughts generating additional stress for you e.g. jumping to conclusions (assuming the worst) or mind reading (assuming we know what someone else is thinking)
- Practise coping strategies such as mindfulness to stay present.





Mindfulness

1. To begin, sit down in a chair and adopt a relaxed and alert posture. Ask yourself "What am I experiencing right now?". Allow yourself to acknowledge your thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations without trying to change them or answer the thoughts back. Spend 30s to 1 min to do so
2. Now, bringing your focus of awareness to your breath, focus on the sensations of your breath as it moves back and forth in your belly. Bring your awareness to the back and forth movements of the sensations in your belly, letting all thoughts go. Spend about 30s to 1 min to do so
3. Next, expanding your awareness to sensing your whole body, be aware of sensations throughout your body. If there are any strong feelings around, tell yourself "whatever it is, it is ok, just let me feel it". Allow yourself to breathe with these feelings. If any troublesome thoughts come to mind, just acknowledge and let go by focusing back on sensing your breath. Continue for another minute.

Additional Tips

Unhelpful Thinking Styles



- Mental Filter**
 - Focusing only on negative parts of situation and forgetting that there are positive parts too
- Catastrophising**
 - When we "blow things out of proportion" and view the situation as terrible, dreadful, even though the reality is that the problem itself is quite small.
- Black & White Thinking**
 - Seeing only one extreme e.g. you are either wrong or right
- Overgeneralization**
 - We take one instance that has happened and impose it on all situations e.g. "You always..." or "Everyone..."
- Magnification and Minimisation**
 - You magnify the positive attributes of other people and minimise your own positive attributes

Increasing Resilience



Try to Be Flexible

Change your perspective that since situation has changed, finding something positive about the situation could help you carry on better



Keep Giving

Even in tough times, resilient people find a way to care for others because sometimes being selfless is the best way to discover your strength



Celebrate Small Successes

Take joy in the small wins!



Create Your Own Meaning

Resilient people develop a personal “why” and it helps them to have a clear sense of purpose and view any setbacks from a broader perspective



Practice Being OK with Discomfort

It is normal to feel unsure of oneself during a situation you do not have control over. Accept your emotions first & calm inner voices of fear. Then appraise the situation from a balanced perspective



02

Acute Stress Response

And when should you seek help

Acute Stress Reactions

Physical

- Sleep disturbances
- Difficulty concentrating
- Disruption to usual eating habits
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Change in bowel habits
- Increased heart rate
- Increased rate of breathing
- Muscle tension

*Flight, fight or freeze response is normal body adaptive response to crisis

Psychological

- Isolation
- Frustration
- Fear
- Anger/ Irritability
- Feeling shocked or lost
- Sadness
- Self-doubt
- Feeling numb
- Re-experiencing the event

*Feelings of sadness may be experienced, and may not always indicate a clinical state of depression

These are normal reactions during an abnormal situation. Symptoms may exist during the crisis and 2-3 weeks post crisis

Abnormal Stress Reactions – When Help is Needed

Distress

e.g. acute stress reactions (normal)

Dysfunction

e.g. PTSD (pathological)

Stress is a spectrum. While it is normal for us to be facing more stress than usual during this period, we need to note that the symptoms will subside together with crisis. However if we start to exhibit symptoms that significantly impair functioning, we may require professional help

Abnormal Behavior

- Inability to function normally (unable to perform ADLs)
- Unable to discuss incident even after 1 week post event
- Jumpy and easily startled even after 1 week post event
- Prolonged symptoms (e.g. lasting more than 1 month post incident)
- Presentation of psychiatric symptoms (e.g. hallucinations, enduring low mood)
- Suicidal thoughts

Should you exhibit any of these symptoms, please seek help as soon as possible



03

Providing Peer
Support

Providing Peer Support (Psychological First Aid)



Here are some quick tips for you to provide emotional support to your colleagues during this situation

Meeting Basic Needs

- Provide basic immediate necessities to your colleague
- e.g. provision of drinks, a quiet place to sit, some food

Liaison

- Helping the affected colleague make connections with social environment
- e.g. making phone calls to family, arranging for transport

Ventilation

- Allowing your colleague to express their feelings, to cry or to talk about their experience as well as their emotions
- Use open-ended questions and active listening techniques to encourage him/her to talk

Information

- Provide information to educate affected on possible effects of acute stress reactions, including symptoms, sleep disruptions
- Accurate information also helps your colleague feel more reassured about their recovery

Stress Management

- Encourage self help strategies that your colleague has used which usually helps him/her to cope
- e.g. mindfulness, exercising, talking to friends, journaling
- Remember, different things work for different persons