Coping Skills for COVID-19: Resiliency While Socially Distant

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The idea of slowing a virus' spread so that fewer people need to seek treatment at any given time is known as "flattening the curve."
Defining Terms

**Social Distancing** is a way to keep people from interacting closely or frequently enough to spread an infectious disease. Schools and other gathering places such as movie theaters close, and sports events and religious services are cancelled.

**Quarantine** separates and restricts the movement of people who have been exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick. It lasts long enough to ensure the person has not contracted an infectious disease.

**Isolation** prevents the spread of an infectious disease by separating people who are sick from those who are not. It lasts as long as the disease is contagious.

Fear and Anxiety

FEAR is the emotional response to real or perceived imminent threat, whereas ANXIETY is anticipation of future threat (DSM-5)
## Common Psychological Reactions

### Fear and anxiety
- Feeling anxious or worried about yourself or your family members contracting COVID-19 or spreading it to others
- Concerns about obtaining food and personal supplies

### Depression and boredom
- Feelings of sadness or low mood
- Extended periods of time spent at home can also cause feelings of boredom and loneliness

### Anger, frustration or irritability
- Loss of agency and personal freedom associated with isolation and quarantine
- Anger or resentment toward those who have issued quarantine or isolation orders or if you feel you were exposed to the virus because of another person’s negligence
- Uncertainty or frustration about how long you will need to remain in this situation, and uncertainty about the future
Social Distance ≠ Social Isolation
Strategies for Resiliency While Socially Distant
Be informed, not flooded (Stimulus Control)

• Thought (and worry) triggers
  • External (e.g., news, emails, IM, text, calls, video Mtgs, etc.)
  • Internal (e.g., thoughts that lead to more worry)

• Pick two reliable informational sources to check only 1-2x per day
  • https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/
  • https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019

• When possible, set boundaries with friends, family, and important others about the amount of time daily spent discussing the pandemic

• Limit social media time, as Coronavirus posts are frequent
Activate Your Brain Through Meaningful Activity (Behavioral Activation)

- Depression and anxiety tend to worsen when one does not engage in enriching activities
- Flex your adaptation skills by establishing a routine with values-based activities
- Create a **concrete, structured** schedule that you follow throughout the day
- **Exercise daily**
- Practice good **sleep hygiene**
Take Your Dog On A Walk
Be Social From A Distance

- Set up regular days & times for online social “dates” with friends
- Play photo scavenger hunt or charades (via Zoom, Skype, or Facetime)
- Host a Netflix Party
- Host an online karaoke party
- Play social games on your phone
- Join-host an online book or journal club
- Engage in virtual team building activities
Go Outside

Social distancing does not require you to become a shut-in

Be in Nature:

- Set specific times where you’ll walk, keeping 6 ft of distance from others
- Breathe and be mindful of your surroundings
- As you walk, do a grounding exercise: what 5 things do you see? Hear? Smell? Touch? Taste?
- Go on a run (keeping 6 ft distance from others)
- Open a window and get some fresh air
Eat Mindfully and Deliberately

Changes in routine and stress often lead to anxious, mindless eating.

Eating regularly as part of your schedule.

Challenge yourself to make a meal from scratch.

Eat slowly, and turn off all screens.
• Museum Virtual Tours or Museum Collections Online
• Live Virtual Concerts (all genres)
• Free Classes from Ivy League Schools
• Learn a language (Duolingo)
• Broadway Direct Guide to Online-Streaming Broadway Shows
• Go on a Home Safari (Cincinnati Zoo) or to the Zoo Live cams (San Diego Zoo)
Re-Tool Your Thinking (Cognitive Restructuring)
What is a cognitive distortion?

- A biased way of thinking about oneself and the world around us
- Irrational thoughts and beliefs that can lead to problems like anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, and relationship conflicts
- Non-objective thinking
- A mental short cut that occurs with everyone
Common Cognitive Distortions

- All or nothing thinking
- Over-generalizing
- Negative filtering
- Disqualifying the positive
- Magnification (Catastrophizing)
All-or-Nothing Thinking

Definition:
Seeing things in black-and-white categories

Example:
• If I cannot workout for an hour, three times per week, what’s the point of working out.

Consequences of these thoughts
GO
BIG
OR
GO
HOME
A Dynamic Tension – the beauty of life’s work

Dynamic tension exists between a culture of productivity, multiple professional & personal roles, and the need for self-care.
Other Common Cognitive Distortions

- **Overgeneralizing**: Seeing a pattern based upon a single event or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw

- **Magnification (catastrophizing)**: Blowing things out of proportion
Other Common Cognitive Distortions

- **Negative filtering:** Only paying attention to certain types of evidence

- **Disqualifying the positive:** Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done for some reason or another
Temporal Distancing and Perspective Taking

Five years from now... (Temporal Distancing)
- “We’ve been through disasters before and have recovered”
- Believing in your resiliency and the resiliency of other humans

Perspective taking...
- “While I feel sad and scared, at least I have a home to ‘shelter in place,’ have technology to connect with others, am currently in good health, etc”
- Think about the perspective of someone who may be less fortunate or privileged than you
Shift Thinking to Internal Locus of Control

“What if?” → “What can I do right now?”
Use thought stopping and re-focusing techniques.

Shift your focus to what you have control over.
Practice Self-Compassion
What is compassion...

To have compassion for others, you must notice they are suffering

Feeling moved by other’s suffering (word literally means “suffer with”)

Feel warmth, caring and desire to help the suffering person

Offer understand and kindness to others when they fail or make mistakes (rather than judging them harshly)

When you feel compassion for another (not just pity), you realize suffering failure and imperfection is part of shared human experience
What is self-compassion?

ACTING THE SAME WAY TOWARDS YOURSELF

THREE ELEMENTS OF SELF-COMPASSION
Self-kindness vs. Self-judgment

Being warm and understanding towards ourselves when we suffer, fail or feel inadequate

Rather than ignoring our pain or self-criticism

Recognize that being imperfect, failing, and experiencing life difficulties is inevitable – so self-compassionate people can be gentle with themselves when confronted with painful experiences rather than getting angry when life falls short of ideals
Common Humanity vs. Isolation

Irrational but pervasive sense of isolation (as if “I” were the only person suffering or making mistakes)

All humans suffer

Being human means being mortal, vulnerable, and imperfect

Suffering and inadequacy are part of shared human experience (not just something that happens to “me”)

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Mindfulness vs. Over-Identification

Balanced approach to (negative) feelings and emotions so they are not suppressed nor exaggerated

Hold thoughts / emotions with openness and clarity – in mindful awareness

We cannot ignore our pain and feel compassion for it at the same time

Mindfulness helps us not “over-identify” with thoughts and feelings
• Cognitive Fusion:
  • Becoming entangled with our thoughts.
  • In a state of fusion a thought can seem like:
    • The absolute truth
    • A command you must obey or rule you have to follow
    • Part of your identity
• Cognitive Defusion:
  • Observing our thoughts and seeing them for what they are – just products of our busy minds
  • In a state of defusion, you recognize that a thought:
    • May or may not be true
    • Is not a command you have to obey
    • Is not a threat to you
    • Is not something happening in the physical world
    • Is not part of your identity
Cognitive Defusion

How do I defuse?

- Label your experience accurately, for what it really is

Examples:

- I’m having the thought that I am going to fail vs. I am going to fail
- I’m having the thought that I shouldn’t have to ask for help vs. I shouldn’t have to ask for help
- I’m having anxious thoughts vs. I am anxious

Engaging in cognitive defusion helps you to be more active
Practice Gratitude

• Research shows that giving thanks can make you happier

• Practice strategies
  • Write a thank-you note
  • Thank someone mentally
  • Keep a gratitude journal
  • Count your blessings (identify 3-5 things daily)

• Examples
Coping Resources Online

- KUMC Coping with COVID-19
- American Psychological Association Help Center
- CDC’s Stress and Coping Guide During the Pandemic
- 7 Science-Based Strategies to Cope with Coronavirus Anxiety
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