Thank you for joining!

The forum will start at 11:00 am.
• Dr. Basu: Introduction to the forum.

• Group resources are public access.

• Email Shaili Jha (sjha@hsph.harvard.edu) for access to the Google drive.

• The slides and resources from today will also be available.

• You have permission to use the information as helpful.

• Session are being recorded.
Managing Stress: Grounding Strategies for Dealing with the COVID-19 Pandemic

Kristina Korte, PhD   Amantia Ametaj, PhD

Introduction & Moderation: Archana Basu, PhD
Overview

• COVID-19 and Stress

• How to identify stress

• Immediate coping strategies

• Long-term coping strategies

• Q & A
COVID-19 has produced a lot of uncertainty…
Uncertainty leads to unanswered questions...

- How long will this last?
- What if I can’t work?
- Am I prepared?
- What if I get sick?
- Work at home & take care of kids?!
- How to stay safe?
Uncertainty can lead to STRESS…
The good news…

• It’s normal to feel stressed!

• Fear, anxiety, worry, are common when uncertainty is present.
Stress / anxiety can be protective…
Stress / anxiety can be protective...

- Needed for survival of the species (e.g., fight / flight)

- At lower levels it helps us...
  - Identify and respond to threat in the environment
  - Plan for the future
But at high levels, chronic stress/anxiety can be problematic...
Stress Reactions

• Everyone responds differently to stress.

• To cope with stress, we need to know when we are stressed.
Signs of Stress

• Stress affects our:
  
  • (1) Thinking
  • (2) Emotions
  • (3) Body
  • (4) Behaviors
Signs of Stress

- Stress affects our:
  - (1) Thinking
  - (2) Emotions
  - (3) Body
  - (4) Behaviors

- Trouble concentrating
- Easily distracted
- Trouble remembering things
Stress Reactions

• Stress affects our:

  • (1) Thinking
  • (2) Emotions
  • (3) Body
  • (4) Behaviors

  • Feeling irritable
  • Anxious
  • Sadness
  • Frustrated
  • Anger
Stress Reactions

- Stress affects our:
  - (1) Thinking
  - (2) Emotions
  - (3) Body
  - (4) Behaviors

- Body tension
- Decrease in energy
- Agitation
- Headaches
- Sleeping problems
Stress Reactions

• Stress affects our:
  • (1) Thinking
  • (2) Emotions
  • (3) Body
  • (4) Behaviors
  • Isolating self
  • Not doing things
  • Getting into arguments
  • Reckless behaviors
Flexible Coping Diagram

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2018.02.007
Understanding Our Emotions in the moment
Physical Sensations:
What you are feeling in your body

Thoughts:
What you are thinking, your interpretations

Behaviors:
What you are doing, what you feel like doing, your actions (internal and external)

Adapted from Barlow et al., (2018) Unified Protocol
Thoughts:
Administration may reel back public health measure too early. It will be a disaster. Oh no, things will be bad. My dad might end up in the hospital.

Emotions/Physical Sensations:
- Anxiety, shortness of breath, pit in my stomach
- Fear, Muscles tensing

Behaviors:
- Listen to the news longer than planned to gain certainty
- Worry: think repeatedly “will they, won’t they?”

Adapted from Barlow et al., (2018) Unified Protocol
This is going to be a very difficult time for us all.

I will do my part like everyone else to cope and get through this crisis.

Sadness, heaviness in chest and limbs

Hopefulness, lightness in stomach

Turn off TV and sit with my emotions

Urge to help others in ways that I can – sew masks

Adapted from Barlow et al., (2018) Unified Protocol
Physical Sensations:
What you are feeling in your body

Thoughts:
What you are thinking, your interpretations

Behaviors:
What you are doing, what you feel like doing, your actions (internal and external)

Adapted from Barlow et al., (2018) Unified Protocol
Emotion Management

Goal:

Accept our emotions and our experiences
Step 1:

Evaluate if our emotions make sense at the intensity at which we are experiencing them
Step 2:

Assess if we are attempting to suppress, numb, or avoid our emotions
Notice that attempts to control our emotions amplify them.
Some ways we try to control our emotions

• Avoidance
• Worry
• Co-rumination
• Stress eating
• Alcohol and substance use
• Lashing out/aggressive verbal behavior
• Procrastination
• Self-isolation
• Impulsive high risk behaviors
Remember that strong emotions are tolerable and will fade
Grounding Exercises

• What are they?
  • Exercises to bring yourself back in the present moment and bring awareness to your body

• When are they helpful?
  • If you are having difficulty experiencing your emotions
Grounding exercises

• Examples:
  • Body scan mindfulness exercises
  • Breathing exercises (diaphragmatic breathing)
  • Moderate cardio exercises
  • Walk in nature while mindful of scenery
Emotions feel too strong to experience

Emotions feel tolerable
Physical Sensations:

What you are feeling in your body

Thoughts:

What you are thinking, your interpretations

Behaviors:

What you are doing, what you feel like doing, your actions (internal and external)

Adapted from Barlow et al., (2018) Unified Protocol
Daily Coping Strategies

→ Basic self care / social rhythms

→ Relaxation strategies
Daily Coping Strategies

→ Basic self care / social rhythms

→ Relaxation strategies
Social rhythms involve...

- Eating patterns
- Sleeping habits
- Exercise / activity level
Social Rhythms

• Provide daily stability
• Help regulate our moods
• Strong foundation for dealing with stressors
Social Rhythms

• Eat regular meals

• Maintain daily routines and your schedule

• Shower and get dressed everyday

• Good sleep hygiene

• Engage in physical activity
Tips for staying active while following social distancing
Daily Coping Strategies

→ Basic self care / social rhythms

→ Relaxation strategies
Relaxation Based Approaches

• Anxiety results in bodily tension.

• Overtime, we have troubling knowing when our body is tense vs. relaxed

• Goal of relaxation exercises:
  • Know when body is relaxed vs. tense
  • Use skills, regularly, to reduce tension
  • Overtime, reduce overall level of anxiety & feel calmer
Relaxation Based Approaches

• Diaphragmatic breathing (or “belly breathing”)

• Progressive muscle relaxation (tensing / relaxing muscles)

• Mindfulness meditation

• Just like exercise!
  • Regular use is important
  • More you do it, the more effective
Relaxation Based Approaches

• Soothing actions can also be helpful to reduce stress!
  • Live streaming yoga classes
  • Exercise
  • Going on walks
  • Reading
  • Listening to music
  • Taking hot shower / bath
  • Anything that relaxes you!
Relaxation exercise
Progressive Muscle Relaxation

1. Sit in a comfortable position

2. Close your eyes.

3. Take a few deep breaths.

4. Follow the instructions to tense and release different parts of your body.

Craske & Barlow, 2007
Discussion