Resilience in Uncertain Times: Flexible & Mindful Strategies to Cope with Coronavirus-Related Stress

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Introduction: Karestan Koenen, PhD
Moderation: Bizu Gelaye, PhD
1. Stress
2. Resilience
3. Coping
4. Specific strategies
5. Discussion
What makes something stressful?
Lack of control

Novelty

Threat

Unpredictability

COVID-19

closings

shortages

media

infection

jobs/economy

quarantine

closings

shortages

media

infection

jobs/economy

quarantine
Signs of stress?
Emotional

- Anxious
- Frustrated
- Irritable
- Sad
- Numb
- etc.
Changes in:
• Energy
• Eating
• Sleeping
• Moving
• etc.
Cognitive Trouble with:
- Thinking
- Concentration
- Memory
- etc.
• Withdrawing
• Not doing things
• Arguing
• Risk-taking
• etc.
Behavioral

Emotional

Physical

Cognitive

Behavioral
Anxiety/stress are normal… even protective.
The graph illustrates the relationship between stress and adaptive functioning. The x-axis represents stress levels (low, medium, high), while the y-axis represents adaptive functioning levels (low, high). The shaded area indicates the optimal range of stress levels associated with high adaptive functioning.
The diagram illustrates the relationship between stress and adaptive functioning. It shows a peak at medium levels of stress with high adaptive functioning. At low and high stress levels, adaptive functioning is low.
Resilience
Choi, Stein, Dunn, Koenen & Smoller (2019) *Molecular Psychiatry*
Resilience is the Norm, Not the Exception

Galatzer-Ley et al. (2018)

Bonanno et al. 2012
What Are Resilience Factors?

- Flexibility
  - Biological systems
  - Psychosocial systems
  - Social environment
  - Natural environment
  - Built environment

- Self-regulation
- Problem solving
- Agency and mastery
- Faith, hope, and meaning making
- Significant others, social networks

Masten, 2014

Faith, hope, and meaning making

Ungar & Theron, 2019
Coping
1. Crisis mindset
(i.e., These are extraordinary times)
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\textit{crisis} = \text{time of major change or disruption}
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crisis = time of major change or disruption

change of expectations

“This is NOT normal!”
1. Crisis mindset
   (i.e., These are extraordinary times)

   stabilize first, then cope
stabilizing anchors

- usual waking times
- daily rituals
- regular eating
- familiar things
- _______________
- _______________
- _______________
- _______________
stabilizing anchors

• usual waking times
• daily rituals
• regular eating
• familiar things
• _______________
• _______________
• _______________
• _______________

give yourself permission to adjust
be patient as things stabilize
there is no timeline for this
2. Stress & coping
“stress”
Which ones are changeable? unchangeable?
Changeable

Try to change the situation

- make a plan
- brainstorm solutions
- problem-solve
- learn more
- take action
- get help

Try to manage how I feel despite the situation

Unchangeable

vent  focus on moment
seek support  accept
breathe  distract

Engages thinking  
(executive function)

Promotes flexibility  
(resilience)

- **Problem-focused**
  Take steps to resolve the stressful situation

- **Emotion-focused**
  Do something to feel better despite the situation

Specific strategies
Doing something to feel better *DESPITE* ongoing problem

*Mindfulness practice
*Breathing practice
*Humor
*Reduce media exposure
*Do something fun
*Exercise
*Distraction
*Prayer
*Journaling/write/draw
Belly (Diaphragmatic) Breathing

From Pal & Chen (2014)
Belly Breathing: A Method to Maintain Homeostasis

Sympathetic: Flight or Flight

Parasympathetic: Rest and Digest
Belly (Diaphragmatic) Breathing

**STEP 1**
Sit in a Comfortable Position

**STEP 2**
Close Your Eyes

**STEP 3**
Breathe In Slowly and Count to Five

**STEP 4**
Feel Your Belly Fill with Air

**STEP 5**
Breathe Out Slowly Through Your Mouth

**STEP 6**
Repeat the Cycle Five Times

https://goalbookapp.com
Problem Focused Coping

Take steps to solve/address problem

* Set achievable goals
* Make a reasonable schedule/develop a new routine
* Reach out to friends online for support/help
* Focus on what you can change
* Stock up on needed supplies
* Educate yourself on best safety practices to stay healthy
* Practice good sleeping habits/hygiene
* Volunteer
* Find a way to serve

Pro tip: These work best when you can control the source of stress, e.g. exams, work demands
Flexibility in Coping Strategy Selection is Key

Problem Focused Strategy

Emotion Focused Strategy

Activation
Discussion