

# **Addressing Stress and Anxiety in the 2019 Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic**

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# 2019 Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic Situation Summary

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- CDC is responding to a pandemic of respiratory disease spreading from person-to-person caused by a novel (new) coronavirus. The disease has been named “coronavirus disease 2019” (abbreviated “COVID-19”).
- This situation poses a serious public health risk. The federal government is working closely with state, local, tribal, and territorial partners, as well as public health partners, to respond to this situation.
- COVID-19 can cause mild to severe illness ; most severe illness occurs in older adults.

# Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Recommendations

If you are a healthcare provider, use your judgment to determine if a patient has signs and symptoms compatible with COVID-19 and whether the patient should be tested. Factors to consider in addition to clinical symptoms may include:

- Does the patient have recent travel from an affected area?
- Has the patient been in close contact with someone with COVID-19 or with patients with pneumonia of unknown cause?
- Does the patient reside in an area where there has been community spread of COVID-19?

# What is Grief?

Whenever we face loss, we experience grief. Everyone grieves differently, yet there are some common responses you might expect.

# What is Grief?

- Grief is a reaction to loss.
- People may have different “styles” of grieving.
- There is no timetable to grief.
  - Over time the pain lessens, and we return to similar—sometimes better--levels of functioning.

# The Relationship Between Trauma and Grief

**Trauma** is an event.

- It can be any event that causes psychological, physical, emotional or mental harm; such as a death or abuse.
- A traumatic event could also be called a loss event. If someone dies, that's a loss. If someone was abused, that too is a loss. A loss of trust.
- The result of a traumatic event is **grief**.

# The Relationship Between Trauma and Grief

**Grief** is the normal and natural response to loss.

- It's the conflicting emotions that result in the end of, or change in, a familiar pattern or behavior.
- Grief is the feeling of wishing things would have ended different, better, or more.
- Grief is the normal and natural feelings after a **trauma**.

Source: <https://www.griefrecoverymethod.com/blog/2015/02/what-difference-between-trauma-and-grief>

# **What is Trauma-Informed Care?**

Trauma-Informed Care understands and considers the pervasive nature of trauma and promotes environments of healing and recovery rather than practices and services that may inadvertently re-traumatize.

# The Five Principles of Trauma-Informed Care

- The **Five Guiding Principles** are;
  - Safety;
  - Choice;
  - Collaboration;
  - Trustworthiness; and
  - Empowerment.
- Ensuring that the physical and emotional safety of an individual is addressed is the first **important** step to providing **Trauma-Informed Care**.

# **FIVE COMMON STAGES OF GRIEF**

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Despair
- Acceptance

# Stress and Coping

- The outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) may be stressful for people.
- Fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in adults and children.
- **Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations.** How you respond to the outbreak can depend on your background, the things that make you different from other people, and the community you live in.

# Stress and Coping

People who may respond more strongly to the stress of a crisis include:

- Older people and people with chronic diseases who are at higher risk for COVID-19
- Children and teens
- People who are helping with the response to COVID-19, like doctors and other health care providers, or first responders
- People who have mental health conditions including problems with substance use

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

# Stress and Coping

**Stress during an infectious disease outbreak can include**

- Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

# Caring For The Vulnerable

- The World Health Organization (WHO) stressed the importance of relaying clear instructions in a concise, respectful and patient way, noting that pictures may also be utilized.
- “Engage their family and other support networks” to provide information and help them practice prevention measures, including handwashing, the UN health agency said. And when in isolation, stay connected and maintain daily routines, as much as possible.”

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1059542>

# Prioritize Resident Needs

- Depression
- Trauma/PTSD/Anxiety
- Dementia/TBI
- Mental Disorders

# **Anticipating Extreme Emotion**

Changes in mood and behavior may occur in residents, staff and families in response to the social distancing and moratorium on visitation initiated to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

# Preventing Abuse and Neglect

- Being aware of how emotions can escalate during stressful events;
- Discuss abuse prevention with your team;
- Be alert to disagreements between staff, or staff and residents and ensure quick resolution of grievances; and
- Be open and honest with staff, residents and families regarding the stress everyone is feeling during this time and that there help is available for anyone feeling overwhelmed.

# What Is Moral Injury?

- In traumatic or unusually stressful circumstances, people may perpetrate, fail to prevent, or witness events that contradict deeply held moral beliefs and expectations
- When someone does something that goes against their beliefs this is often referred to as an act of commission and when they fail to do something in line with their beliefs that is often referred to as an act of omission.
- **Moral injury** is the distressing psychological, behavioral, social, and sometimes spiritual aftermath of exposure to such events
- A moral injury can occur in response to acting or witnessing behaviors that go against an individual's values and moral beliefs.

# What Is Moral Injury?

- In order for moral injury to occur, the individual must feel like a transgression occurred and that they or someone else crossed a line with respect to their moral beliefs.
- Moral injury also typically has an impact on an individual's spirituality.
  - For example, an individual with moral injury may have difficulty understanding how one's beliefs and relationship with a Higher Power can be true given the horrific event the person experienced, leading to uncertainty about previously held spiritual beliefs.

# What Is Moral Injury?

Guilt, shame, disgust and anger are some of the hallmark reactions of moral injury:

- Guilt involves feeling distress and remorse regarding the morally injurious event (e.g., "I did something bad.").
- Shame is when the belief about the event generalizes to the whole self (e.g., "I am bad because of what I did.")
- Disgust may occur as a response to memories of an act of perpetration, and anger may occur in response to a loss or feeling betrayed
- Another hallmark reaction to moral injury is an inability to self-forgive, and consequently engaging in self-sabotaging behaviors (e.g., feeling like you don't deserve to succeed at work or relationships).

# Potential Sources of Moral Injury in Health Care Workers

- Faced with unfamiliar and potentially highly distressing work experiences where they have to make difficult decisions that may contradict deeply held beliefs.
- Having to prioritize one important set of values (such as caring for patients with contagious diseases) over another (such as keeping family members safe from infection).
- When health care workers are called to work in extremely difficult circumstances, such as in the context of disasters, humanitarian crises, combat deployments or pandemics.

# Potential Sources of Moral Injury in Health Care Workers

- Witnessing a great deal more suffering and death than what is normally expected may create moral distress.
- Health care workers may be faced with situations where they need to decide who to treat first, which patients receive limited resources and how to best use limited time when multiple patients need help.
- Health care workers may find themselves in situations where they do not have the right tools or training to save the person in front of them.

# Potential Sources of Moral Injury During Pandemics

- When they must choose between caring for infectious patients and keeping their families safe, especially if they have elderly or at-risk family members or children in their lives.
- When they are present for end of life scenarios that are counter to their beliefs about how people should die, such as patients dying without loved ones present.
- May feel guilt and shame because they felt numb in the face of suffering and death.
- May witness what they perceive to be unjustifiable or unfair acts or policies that they feel powerless to confront.

# Potential Impacts of Moral Injury

Morally injurious experiences, and the resulting guilt, shame or anger, may contribute to stress reactions such as:

- Changes in sleep;
- Significant and persistent negative changes in behavior or habits;
- Mistakes;
- Isolation;
- Compulsive behavior (e.g., overworking, overeating); and
- A weakened sense of empathy or compassion.

# Potential Impacts of Moral Injury

Situations that cause moral injury are sometimes traumatic events that can also lead to symptoms of PTSD in addition to moral injury. These may include:

- Intrusive memories;
- Avoidance of people or places;
- Changes in mood or ways of seeing the world; and
- Trouble concentrating.

## **What Self-Care Strategies Can Reduce the Potential for Moral Injury?**

Self-Care for moral injury should include seeking out others to assist in making difficult choices when possible, and for support about circumstances that cause moral distress.

# ADDRESSING STRESS

- Create outlets for residents and staff to express stressful emotions;
- Develop support groups and discussion programs to provide outlets for emotion;
- Design a process and a place for residents or staff to have a timeout – a quiet space.

# Behavioral Health Interventions

- Be flexible. If a staff member needs a break or a shoulder to cry on, work it out.
  - Time-outs
  - Break-Swaps
  - Conflict Resolution Process
- Not addressing staff emotion often leads to negative events.
  - Social Medial Support Networks
  - Teleconferencing

# Behavioral Health Interventions

Surprise and delight everyone periodically throughout this difficult time.

- Plan physical activity for residents and staff - make it fun and help stimulate some endorphins;
- Have daily trivia contests;
- Send a special snack to every unit for residents and staff;
- Treat the staff to a special lunch or breakfast or late-night snack.

Any and all distraction will be a healthy approach to the behavioral health needs of all concerned.

# Supportive Interventions For Yourself and Those You Care For

- Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.
- Take care of your body. Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, and avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Make time to unwind. Try to do some other activities you enjoy.
- Connect with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.



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