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information for your life

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MAINTAINING COMPOSURE DURING COVID-19

The body's natural response to potential harm is to release large quantities of cortisol, epinephrine, and norepinephrine.

Spread the news.


While government leaders and health officials around the world are encouraging people to remain calm, many are finding it difficult to do so given the strong measures being taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Schools in the United States are cancelling classes, Italy has closed all stores except grocery stores and pharmacies, and citizens in Spain have been told to stay home for at least 15 days. To make matters worse, this unprecedented global response is being played out live on television and social media.

Therefore, it's not unusual to feel heightened anxiety and a sense of uncertainty given the scale of the outbreak and media coverage. The body's

natural response to potential harm is to release large quantities of cortisol, epinephrine, and norepinephrine. These "stress hormones" aid in alertness, muscle preparedness, and energy to help the body protect itself.

While it's natural to feel anxious, operating in "fight or flight" mode for an extended period of time can result in high blood pressure, difficulty sleeping, digestion issues, and poor decision-making. Therefore, it's important that individuals actively manage their stress levels in order to protect both their physical and emotional health. Not only will this help facilitate rational thinking, but it can also help optimize the body's immune system.

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MAINTAINING COMPOSURE DURING COVID-19

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Below are several ways to manage emotional health during uncertainty:

- Consider the impact of the current newsfeed, and limit exposure if needed.
- Get regular news updates from trusted official sources. Turn off instant notifications.
- Keep to a consistent routine.
- Participate in exercise and/or stretching.
- Practice relaxation techniques, like deep breathing, meditation, yoga, and mindfulness.
- Recognize when you are catastrophizing (jumping to unreasonable conclusions) and redirect your thoughts to what you know to be true.
- Ground your thoughts into the present by focusing on what you can see, hear, smell, and tactically feel.

- Some people turn to drugs, smoking, and alcohol to manage their stress. However, these are all unhealthy methods that can diminish the body's immune system.

Here are some ways to support physical health:

- Get eight to nine hours of uninterrupted sleep at night.
- Drink at least two liters of water a day.
- Increase intake of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and lean protein.
- Minimize foods high in fat and sugar.

Individuals who feel like they need professional help managing their anxiety should consider accessing their employee wellbeing resources if available and/or contact their physician.

Workplace Options. (2020, March). *Maintaining composure during COVID-19*. Raleigh, NC: Author.



Helping Seniors Navigate COVID-19

Seniors age 65 and older have witnessed a lot of historical events—man walking on the moon, the construction and destruction of the Berlin Wall, and the invention of color television. However, they haven't seen anything quite like COVID-19. The coronavirus pandemic is of particular concern to seniors because they are at a higher risk for severe illness if infected.

For this reason, senior citizens around the world have been advised to limit their risk of exposure by remaining at home and avoiding contact with potential carriers of the virus. In response, nursing homes have suspended visitations and local organizations are recruiting volunteers to deliver food and medications to seniors.

Many people are understandably concerned about their elderly family members' physical and emotional wellness. It can be especially difficult for those separated by distance and unable to provide direct support. Regardless of distance, all family members can play a significant role in helping the seniors they love navigate these uncharted waters. Below are six key questions to ask seniors to help determine any unmet needs.

1. How are your basic needs being met?

Do you know how your loved one is getting groceries, medications, and basic household items? The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends older seniors stay home as much as possible and have 30 days of groceries and prescriptions on hand. You can read more at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/what-you-can-do.html>.

Is your loved one heeding that warning or still venturing out to get supplies? Find out if any stores in their community are offering delivery or special hours for seniors to shop? If not, are there other family members, friends, neighbors, or organizations in the area who can assist?

Also, check to see if your employer offers employee wellbeing services. Sometimes these services can assist employees by researching local elder care resources on their behalf.

2. Are you following the CDC's recommendations for senior citizens?

In addition to remaining at home, seniors—like everyone—should wash their hands thoroughly and often and avoid touching their face. Frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected regularly. This is especially true if there are others living in the home. If someone in the home is ill, the sick person should stay in a room that is separate from those who are healthy. If possible, they should also use a separate bathroom.

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Helping Seniors Navigate COVID-19

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3. Do you know the symptoms of COVID-19?

The most common coronavirus symptoms are fever, dry cough, and tiredness. Some people may also develop nasal congestion or a runny nose, body aches, sore throat, or diarrhea. Seniors should contact their physician if they are experiencing any of those conditions. They should seek immediate medical attention if they have shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chest pain, confusion, difficulty walking, or blue coloration of the lips or face. You can read more from the CDC about COVID-19 symptoms at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>. If your loved one has an upcoming routine doctor's appointment or medical procedure scheduled, find out if it can be postponed.

4. Are you feeling anxious?

If your loved one is anxious, they are not alone. Many people are feeling uneasy due to the uncertainty of COVID-19. It is important for all adults to find healthy ways to manage anxiety, as it can compromise the immune system and cause a host of other health issues.

Encourage your loved one to manage their anxiety by participating in positive activities that bring them joy within their home or yard. This could include reading, writing letters, or practicing putts in the backyard. If they have access to the internet, museums, universities, and musicians around the world are offering complimentary online access to classes, tours, and performances.

Keeping to their normal routine, minus those activities that would require them to leave their house, can also be helpful. You would be surprised how something as simple as cooking or washing the car can bring a sense of normalcy to an otherwise chaotic day.

In addition, the CDC is recommending that seniors "take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media." A constant stream of news coverage can heighten anxiety. Seniors should confirm they are getting their news updates from reputable sources.

5. Are you connecting with others?

Loneliness, already an issue for many seniors, can be exacerbated by the social isolation created by COVID-19. Friends and family members can help by scheduling regular phone calls. With today's technology, seniors may also be able to participate in video calls, as long as both parties have access to the right equipment and an internet connection. Popular ones to consider include Amazon Alexa, Facebook Messenger, Google Duo, IMO, Skype, Viber, and WhatsApp. It's best to select one with which you are comfortable so that you can offer coaching and encouragement.

6. Are you protecting yourself from scammers?

Unfortunately, there are people who will view this pandemic as an opportunity to scam others and often start by targeting seniors. Remind your loved one to be vigilant. Seniors should not purchase products that claim to protect against or cure the coronavirus. Nor should they give out any personal or financial information to anyone over the phone, even if they say they are government representatives. Also, seniors should avoid donating to charitable organizations that they don't already know and trust.

Fisher, M. (2020, April 6). *Helping seniors navigate COVID-19* (A. Gaddis, Ed.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.



Cross-Cultural Communication

Do you have a friend, coworker, or neighbor from another country? There are millions of people living in the United States who were born abroad and chose to make a new life here. There are also plenty of people who were born here, but are part of a culture that differs from mainstream American culture. It's no wonder that Americans take pride in being a society in which people from all nations and cultures can live.

But, too often, people only consider their own side of interactions between cultures. Instead of the old expression that described American society as a "melting pot," it's more accurate today to compare it to a "salad bowl," in which different people are mixed together, but maintain their unique cultural identities. Members of all cultures need to take care to understand and accommodate each other. The worst thing you can do when speaking with someone from another culture is to base your actions on assumptions. The best advice for cross-cultural communication can be boiled down to one rule: Don't assume anything!

Instead, learn how to ask around a sensitive topic and watch for your conversation partner's reaction. Often you can find the information you're looking for without making the person feel that you're expecting a stereotype.

The other essential component of cross-cultural communication is to expect some misunderstandings. A few mistakes are bound to occur. Don't feel awkward—from the other person's perspective, you're the one who's from a different culture. Chances are the same questions and hesitations that are going through your mind are going through the other person's as well.

Cross-Cultural Communication Tips

Keep the conversation moving.

Take the initiative and introduce yourself, and if the conversation lags, do your best to push it along. People can sometimes feel a little shy when immersed in a different culture because they're

afraid of doing or saying the wrong thing—or they just feel different from everyone else. Asking friendly questions is a good way to draw people out of their shells.

Don't assume you can judge a person's origin by their accent.

It's difficult to tell a person's native country by the accent. Someone may speak with what sounds like a British accent, but could actually be from South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, India, Canada, Ghana, Belize, Hong Kong, Zimbabwe, or any other of the dozens of independent nations or protectorates that were once British colonies.

Another example is Spanish, which is the most widely spoken romance language in the world. It's the official language of Spain and much of Latin America. And don't forget that more than 14 million people in the United States speak Spanish as their primary language, and many of them are American-born. Making assumptions about someone's native country just because of an accent is risky. Play it safe and give the person an opportunity to share this information with you.

Be polite when setting your conversational limits.

Topics that you might consider personal, like your income or dating life, may be suitable for conversation in someone else's culture. Rather than taking offense, try to let it slide. Questions like these are well-meaning attempts to make conversation with you or to learn more about your culture.

If a question is too personal for you, deflect it by making your answer broad and general. Instead of saying "I make \$40,000 a year," say "People in my field usually make anywhere from \$30,000 to \$60,000 a year." If you're pressed for specifics, then you can gently give an answer like, "That's a topic that I don't feel comfortable discussing," and move on to a new area.

Workplace Options. (Reviewed 2019). *Cross-cultural communication*. Raleigh, NC: Author.



Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Disasters and Traumatic Events

Each year, children and adolescents experience disasters and other traumatic events. Parents, rescue workers, and members of the larger community can help children start the process of recovery and overcome these experiences.

What is trauma?

When people think of trauma, they often focus on physical injuries. However, people also can experience psychological trauma after witnessing or experiencing distressing events.

Trauma can be caused by natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, and floods. It also can be caused by acts of violence—such as terrorist attacks and mass shootings—as well as motor vehicle and other accidents.

Reactions to trauma can be immediate or delayed. Responses may differ in severity and can include a wide range of behaviors and responses, sometimes influenced by culture.

Factors that may make people more sensitive to trauma include

- Having direct involvement in the trauma, especially as a victim
- Having severe or prolonged exposure to the event
- Having a personal history of prior trauma
- Having a family or personal history of mental illness or severe behavioral problems
- Having limited social support or a lack of caring family and friends
- Having ongoing life stressors such as moving to a new home or new school

Common Responses to Trauma Among Children

Children age 5 and younger may

- Cling to parents or caregivers.
- Cry and be tearful.
- Have tantrums and be irritable.
- Complain of physical problems such as stomachaches or headaches.
- Suddenly return to behaviors such as bed-wetting and thumb-sucking.

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Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Disasters and Traumatic Events

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- Show increased fearfulness (for example, of the dark, monsters, or being alone).
- Incorporate aspects of the traumatic event into imaginary play.

Children age 6 to 11 may

- Have problems in school.
- Isolate themselves from family and friends.
- Have nightmares, refuse to go to bed, or experience other sleep problems.
- Become irritable, angry, or disruptive.
- Be unable to concentrate.
- Complain of physical problems such as stomachaches and headaches.
- Develop unfounded fears.
- Lose interest in fun activities.

Adolescents age 12 to 17 may

- Have nightmares or other sleep problems.
- Avoid reminders of the event.
- Use or abuse drugs, alcohol, or tobacco.
- Be disruptive or disrespectful or behave destructively.
- Complain of physical problems such as stomachaches and headaches.
- Become isolated from friends and family.
- Be angry or resentful.
- Lose interest in fun activities.

In addition, children and adolescents may feel guilty for not preventing injury or deaths. They also may have thoughts of revenge.

Many of these are normal and expected early responses, which for most people will lessen with time. If they last for more than a month, contact a licensed mental health professional.

If You or Someone You Know Is in Crisis and Needs Immediate Help

Some symptoms require immediate emergency care. If you or someone you know is thinking about harming themselves or attempting suicide, seek help right away:

- Call 911 for emergency services or go to the nearest emergency room.
- Call your doctor.
- Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>), a 24-hour toll-free hotline, at 800-273-8255 (TALK). The deaf and hard of hearing can use the chat feature on the website or contact the Lifeline via TTY at 800-799-4889
- Contact social media outlets directly if you are concerned about a person's social media updates or dial 911 in an emergency. For more information about how to contact social media outlets, visit the Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

Take any comments about suicide or wishing to die seriously— even those said by children and adolescents. Even if you do not believe your family member or friend will attempt suicide, the person is in distress and can benefit from your help in finding treatment.

U.S. National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). (n.d.). In *Helping children and adolescents cope with disasters and other traumatic events: What parents, rescue workers, and the community can do* (NIH Pub. No. 19-8066). Retrieved May 3, 2019, from <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/>