MANAGING ANXIETY AND GRIEF IN THE TIME OF COVID-19:
IN SERVICE OF FAMILIES

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We are affected
A Tsunami of Death
Race and COVID-19
Stress and Anxiety
Psychological Effects of a Global Pandemic

Significant increase in stress related to Economy and Work during pandemic

**ECONOMY**

- May 2020: 70%
- August 2019: 46%

**WORK**

- May 2020: 70%
- August 2019: 64%

Note: "Work" is among those who are employed.
Parental sources of stress as a result of the coronavirus pandemic

% reporting very/somewhat significant source of stress in their life

- A family member getting coronavirus: 74%
- Government response to coronavirus: 74%
- Disrupted routines/adjusting to new routines: 74%
- Getting coronavirus: 73%
- Managing distance/online learning for their child(ren): 71%
- Basic needs (i.e., availability of and access to food, housing): 70%
- Self-isolation: 67%
- Access to health care services: 66%
- Missing out on major milestones: 63%
Stress about Government handling the crisis

Government response to coronavirus as a source of stress

Nearly 7 in 10 Americans (67%) say the government response to coronavirus is a significant source of stress in their life.
The Context of Dying During COVID-19

- Shocking and unanticipated death
- Isolation of family from the dying and from supports
- High anxiety and helplessness – fragmented caregiving and attachment bonds
- Existential crisis – Where is God now? Loss of religious community and important rituals
- Profound loss of meaning
- Disproportionate loss within minority communities
- Overwhelmed medical systems void of family supporters as a key role in care
What is “Normal” Grief?

- Emotional
- Behavioral
- Physical
  - Abnormal symptoms such as use of drugs, alcohol, violence, and suicidality warrant reaching out for professional help.

- Duration varies from person to person.
- Research shows that the average recovery time is 18-24 months.
- Grief reactions can be stronger around significant dates, e.g., death anniversaries, birthdays, and holidays.
What is “Prolonged Grief”? 

ICD-10 Criteria:
- Death of a close person
- Persistent and pervasive grief response accompanied by longing for or preoccupation with deceased
- Intense emotional pain (sadness, guilt, anger, denial, blame, loss of sense of self, absence of positive mood, numbness, avoidance of social and other activities)
- Minimum of 6 months after death, exceeding social, cultural and religious norms
- Significant impairment in personal, familial, social, occupational or other functioning
A Public Health Crisis

- We are grieving in isolation
- A spike in COVID-19-related prolonged and complicated grief is a potential public health crisis
- Urgency in the need for timely access to mental health services
- Opportunity to think creatively about bereavement efforts
  - We have learned from previous epidemics – e.g., Ebola in Congo
  - Funerals are being live-streamed
  - Physicians and chaplains use speaker and video chat functions to allow families to say goodbye to a critically ill loved one and to deliver last rites
  - A new era of “e-mourning”
Where to go next?
What can we do to effectively manage our stress?

- **F** = Focus on what’s in your control
- **A** = Acknowledge your thoughts & Feelings
- **C** = Come back to your body
- **E** = Engage in what you’re doing
- **C** = Committed action
- **O** = Opening Up
- **V** = Values
- **I** = Identify resources
- **D** = Disinfect & distance
F = Focus on what’s in your control

- Fear and anxiety are a normal, natural response to challenging situations infused with danger and uncertainty.
- The more we focus on what’s not in our control, the more hopeless or anxious we’re likely to feel.
- Most useful thing anyone can do in any type of crisis: FOCUS ON WHAT’S IN YOUR CONTROL
- Here and Now
  - Our Inner and Outer worlds
ACE Formula

- A = Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings
- C = Come back into your body
- E = Engage in what you’re doing
A = Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings
C = Come back into your body

- Slowly pushing your feet hard into the floor.
- Slowing straightening up your back and spine; if sitting, sitting upright and forward in your chair.
- Slowly pressing your fingertips together.
- Slowly stretching your arms or neck, shrugging your shoulders.
- Slowly breathing.
E = Engage in what you’re doing

- Look around the room and notice 5 things you can see.
- Notice 3 or 4 things you can hear.
- Notice what you are doing now.
- End the exercise by giving your full attention to the task at activity at hand.
Dropping Anchor is a VERY useful skill

- Useful for handling difficult thoughts, feelings, emotions, memories, urges and sensations more effectively;
- Helps switch off auto-pilot and to engage in your life;
- Helps with grounding and steadying yourself in difficult situations;
- Disrupts rumination, obsessing and worrying;
- Focuses your attention on the task or activity you’re doing.
C = Committed Action
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- What are the simpler ways to look after yourself, those you live with, and those you can realistically help?
- What kind, caring, supportive deeds can you do?
- Can you say some kind words to someone in distress – in person or via a phone call or text message?
- Can you help someone with a task or a chore, or cook a meal, or hold someone’s hand, or play a game with a young child?
- Can you comfort and soothe some who is sick?
O = Opening Up
V = Values

- What do you want to stand for in the face of this crisis?
- What sort of person do you want to be, as you go through this?
- How do you want to treat yourself and others?
- What can you say and do that will enable you to look back in years to come and feel proud of your response?
I = Identify Resources

- Identify resources for help, assistance, support, and advice.
- **National Consumer Voice** – an excellent resource!

One important aspect of this process involves finding a reliable and trustworthy source of information for updates and guidelines.

- World Health Organization
- CMS
- NORC
D = Disinfect & Distance Physically

- Can’t say it enough:
  - Disinfect your hands regularly
  - Practice social distancing, as realistically as possible

- Physical distancing does not mean cutting off emotionally.

- These actions are truly caring in nature.
  - Remember the Golden Rule!
In Summary

- **F** = Focus on what’s in your control
- **A** = Acknowledge your thoughts & Feelings
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- **C** = Committed action
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- **I** = Identify resources
- **D** = Disinfect & distance

Dr. Russ Harris, author of The Happiness Trap
Giving Yourself Time to Grieve

- Find supportive people to reach out to during your grief.
- Take care of your health.
- Postpone major life changes.
- Consider keeping a journal.
- Participate in activities.
- Find a way to memorialize ones who have died.
- Consider joining a grief-support group or contacting a grief counselor for additional support and help. Utilize your EAP benefits.
Loss is Multifaceted

- And so is grief.
- There is no “one size fits all” – my process will be different from your process, and so on.
- Give yourself and others permission to bereave the loss, and hold no expectations for the duration of how it should look and feel.
We are CREATIVE & RESILIENT
Thank YOU
Grief Resources

- The Portland Institute for Loss and Transition
  - www.portlandinstitute.org


Anxiety Resources

- Helpful/Free Apps
  - COVID COACH
  - Headspace
  - Daily OM
  - Five Minutes of Gratitude – A daily gratitude journal
RESOURCES
Taking Care of You
Tips for Family Members and Residents

• Typical reactions to stress
• Self-Care tips
• Creating a Self-Care Plan (family members)
• Ideas for Staying Connected with Your Loved One (family members)

https://theconsumervoice.org/issues/other-issues-and-resources/covid-19/residents-families
Consumer Voice COVID-19 Information

Information for Advocates

- Fact Sheets
- Weekly Webinars
- Map with State COVID-19 Nursing Home policies

Information for Residents and Families

- Tips to Stay Connected
- Get Help/Take Action
- Share Your Story

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Trauma-Informed, Person-Centered Care Resources

• **NORC**
  - Trauma-informed care – [https://ltcombudsman.org/issues/trauma-informed-care](https://ltcombudsman.org/issues/trauma-informed-care)
  - Person-centered care - [https://ltcombudsman.org/issues/person-centered-care](https://ltcombudsman.org/issues/person-centered-care)

• **Consumer Voice**
  - Resident-Directed Care/Culture Change [https://theconsumervoice.org/issues/for-advocates/resident-directed-care](https://theconsumervoice.org/issues/for-advocates/resident-directed-care)
  - My Personal Directions for Quality Living - [Blank Form](https://theconsumervoice.org/issues/recipients) & [Sample](https://theconsumervoice.org/issues/family)
    - A tool from Consumer Voice, with edits by SAGE, for individuals to share what matters to them for person-centered care.
  - Information for LTC consumers - [https://theconsumervoice.org/issues/recipients](https://theconsumervoice.org/issues/recipients)
  - Information for Family Members - [https://theconsumervoice.org/issues/family](https://theconsumervoice.org/issues/family)
Resources

National Long-Term Care Ombudsman Resource Center (NORC)
www.ltcombudsman.org
  • Coronavirus Prevention in Long-Term Care Facilities: Information for Ombudsman Programs
    https://ltcombudsman.org/omb_support/COVID-19

National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care (Consumer Voice)
www.theconsumervoice.org
  • Coronavirus in Long-Term Care Facilities: Information for Advocates
    https://theconsumervoice.org/issues/other-issues-and-resources/covid-19
  • Coronavirus in Long-Term Care Facilities: Information for Residents and Families
    https://theconsumervoice.org/issues/other-issues-and-resources/covid-19/residents-families