



**Community**

**Psychological First Aid & COVID-19**  
*A Minnesota Community Support Model*

## Is a model that:

- Integrates public health, community health, and individual psychology
- Includes preparedness for communities, work places, healthcare systems, schools, faith communities, and families
- Does not rely on direct services by mental health professionals
- Uses skills you probably already have...

Principles and techniques of PFA meet four basic standards.

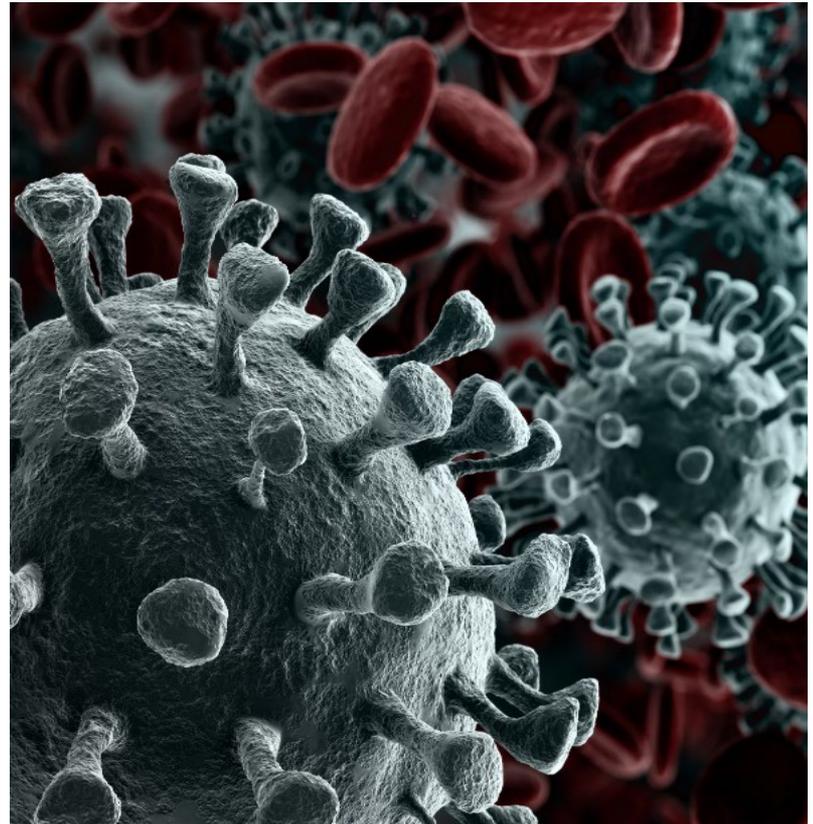
- Consistent with research evidence on risk and resilience following trauma
- Applicable and practical in field settings
- Appropriate to developmental level across the lifespan.
- Culturally informed

The International Federation of the Red Cross defines stress as “A very broad term referring to the effect of anything in life to which people must adjust.”

- For instance, anything we consider challenging causes stress, even if it is something we willingly choose to do
- The key is that stress requires us to adjust our attention and behavior and makes demands upon our energy.

# An Event is More Stressful or Traumatic When ...

- Event is unexpected
- Many people die especially children
- Event lasts a long time
- The cause is unknown
- The event is poignant or meaningful
- Event impacts a large area



# Common Physical, Emotional, Behavioral, and Cognitive Stress Reactions



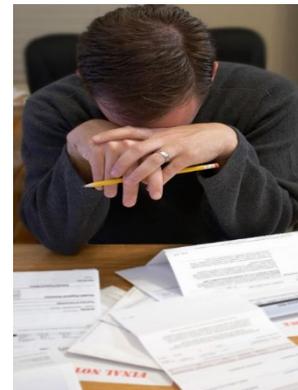
- Muscle pain
- Headaches
- Stomach pain
- Sleep issues



- Fear and Anxiety
- Sadness and Depression
- Anger and Irritability



- Family difficulties
- Substance abuse
- Abuse behavior
- Keeping excessively busy



- Difficulty concentrating, and with memory
- Recurring dreams or nightmares
- Flashbacks

# Potential Responder Traumatic Stress Reactions

- Social discomfort and withdrawal
- Fear
- Exhaustion
- Disconnection from others
- Hopelessness
- Guilt
- Avoidance

- Sudden outbursts of anger
- Inability to care for oneself or a disinterest in self-care
- Insomnia
- Hypersensitivity
- Irritability
- Intense nightmares
- Problems focusing

# Common Sensory Reactions

- Sight
- Sound
- Smell
- Taste
- Touch



# Stress and COVID-19

- Incomplete knowledge about COVID-19 and conflicting opinions.
- Perceived mismatch of governmental action and public expectations.
- Insufficient supplies (personal protective equipment, ventilators, hospital beds).
- No approved vaccine or treatment.
- Possible high levels of contagion, illness.
- Elderly and those with pre-existing health issues are more at risk for severe illness and/or death.



# Potential Psychosocial Consequences of COVID-19



# Possible Grief and Loss Issues

## Loss of loved ones

- Inability to see loved ones or say “good-bye” to those who may die in the hospital or while separated from family.
- Inability to retrieve the body for timely burial or funeral rituals.

## Personal Loss

- Control
- Income
- Privacy
- Valued civil liberties
- Trust (i.e., in government, in humankind, etc.)
- Spiritual beliefs or faith



# Possible Economic Impact of COVID-19

- Drastic decline in many economic sectors.
- Escalating unemployment.
- Financial difficulties due to closures of businesses.
- Lost work time related to illness or caring for others.

National Center for P.T.S.D



# Possible Supply Impact of COVID-19

- Impairment of essential services such as utilities, transportation and communications.
- Reduced supply of medications, medical care, and hospital beds.
- Short supply of food, water, and power.



National Center for P.T.S.D

# Possible Social Impact of COVID-19

- Isolation/quarantine (home care impact).
- Social distancing (comfort impact).
- School dismissal (work/child care impact).
- Closing places of assembly (social and spiritual support impact).

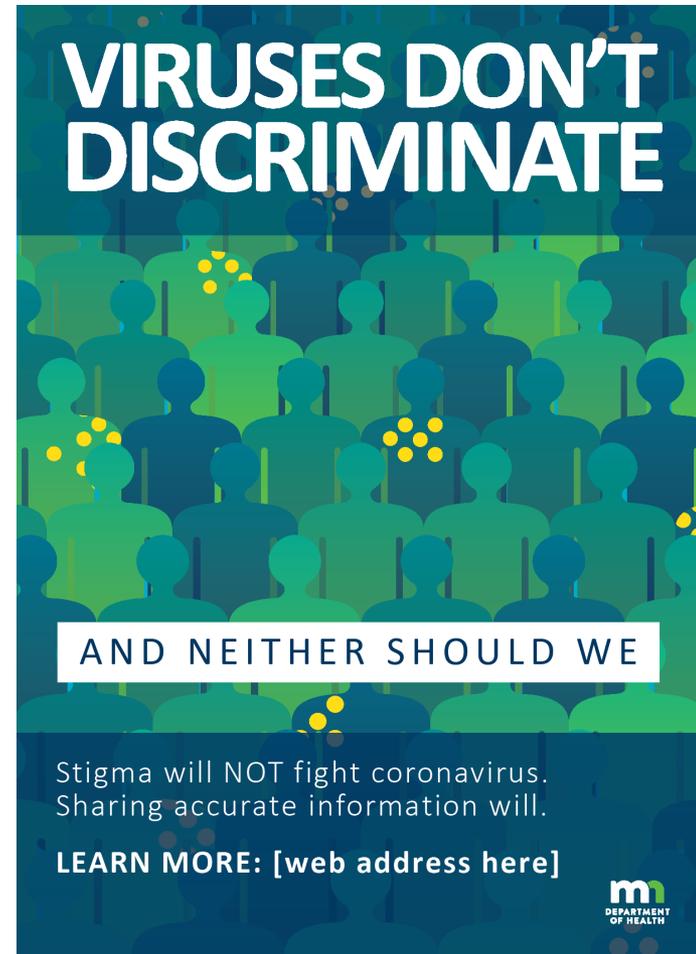


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# Possible Psychological Impact of COVID-19

- Reacting to inconsistent information.
- Fear of exposure/infection.
- Massive loss and grief.
- Exposure to traumatic images.
- An inability to see loved ones.
- Not being able to say “good-bye” to those who may die in the hospital or while separated from family.

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# Consequences with Comprehensive Psychological and Social Support Strategy



# PFA Strategies Help to Build Resilience

- Safety
- Calm & Comfort
- Connectedness
- Empowerment & Self-Efficacy



## Psychological First Aid Help Card

**Goal: Limit distress and negative health behaviors**

**Key: Provide PRACTICAL HELP & SUPPORT RESILIENCE**

### PROMOTE SAFETY

- SAFEGUARD & SUSTAIN
- Meet basic survival needs
- Provide simple accurate information
- Repeat information as often as needed
- Identify resources

### CALM & COMFORT

- FACILITATE FUNCTION
- Have a Compassionate Presence with them
- Active listening
- Don't push for information
- Use stress management techniques
- Be flexible and supportive
- Comfort, Console, Soothe

### CONNECTEDNESS

- Help connect friends & loved ones
- Keep children with relatives
- Ask questions
- Make referrals as need

### SELF EMPOWERMENT

- ACTION EDUCATE
- Clarify disaster information
- Engage towards meeting own needs
- Guide toward what to expect, teach resilience
- Work to 'normal' life activities
- Exercise

**Overall, People want to be heard!**

### PREVENTION STRATEGIES

- Share your thoughts with someone you trust
- Keep active with regular exercise
- Eat properly balanced diet—avoid food high in processed sugar
- Avoid tobacco, alcohol, and illegal drugs which mask stress
- Look for humor in a situation wherever you can
- Help others as one can; don't have an agenda
- Maintain a regular routine with uninterrupted sleep cycles
- Learn and use coping techniques including breathing and muscle relaxation
- Look at life's daily challenges as opportunities

### SELF CARE

- Check your readiness to respond before you go
- Understand the nature of the request
- Give consideration to your physical and emotional health
- Use the support resources during response
- Promote your own resiliency
- Expect recovery period after an incident
- Talk about your experiences

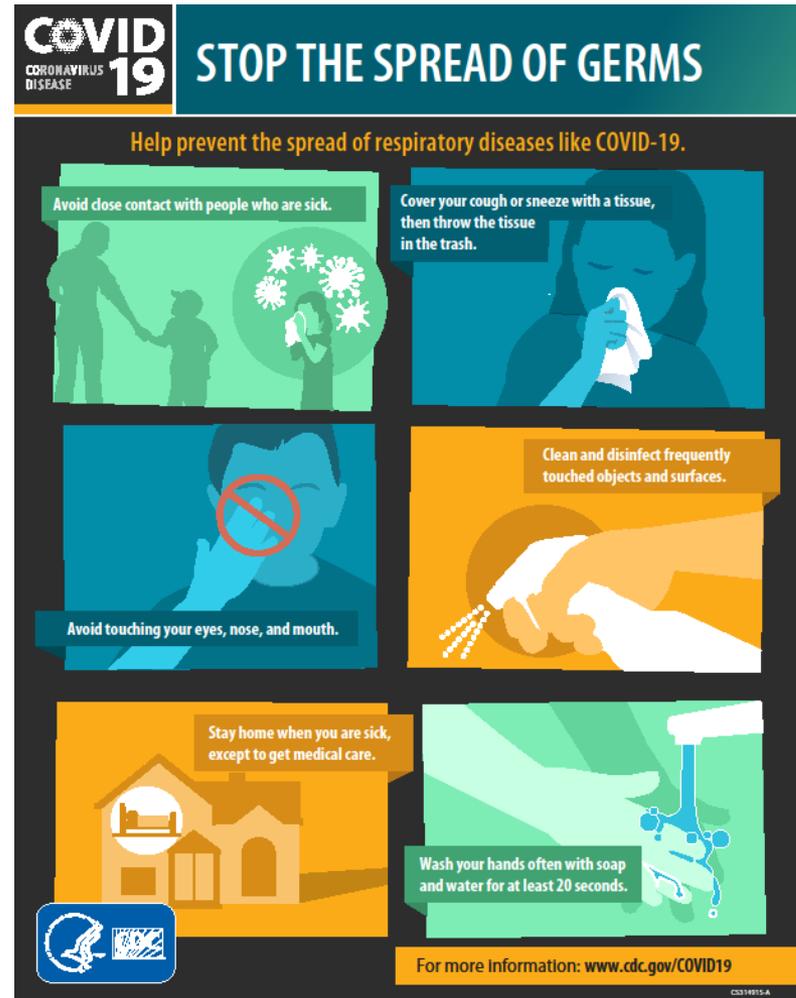
**When in doubt CONSULT!! with supervisors or local resources**

- Remove from immediate danger area as soon as possible
- Meet basic survival needs



# Promote Safety: Increase Adaptive Behavior

- Wash hands frequently.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Clean your hands after coughing or sneezing.
- Don't touch your face.
- Stay at home if you are sick.



# Connectedness

- Help connect with friends & loved ones
- Help connect with pets
- Connect with disaster resources and support services
- Connect with community resources and support services



# Promote Connectedness: Ensure Supportive Connections

Identify people who:

- Lack strong support.
- Are socially isolated.
- Have a support system that are providing undermining messages.

Help to identify and link people with individual & community supports.

- Develop a disaster communication plan



# Promote Connectedness: Reduce Social Isolation During Social Distancing, Public Health Isolation, and Quarantine

- Keep up a normal daily routines as much as possible.
- Maintain a positive attitude.
- Keep in touch with family members and friends via telephone, email or social media.
- Eat healthy, exercise regularly.
- Take the time to do some of those things you never usually have time for, such as board games, craft, drawing and reading.



- Most often, people just need someone to talk to about their experience
- Someone to care
- Someone to really listen
- Someone to lean on or cry with
- Someone to **BE PRESENT TO THEM!**



# Promote Calm: Encourage Self-Care

- Limit media exposure.
- Follow public health recommendations.
- Do things that bring you joy and laughter, and get enough sleep.
- Learn and practice coping techniques
- Talk to a mental health professional if your stress level seems overwhelming.



## Managing Stress and the Threat of COVID-19

### Stress and the Threat of COVID-19

Living through the threat of a public health emergency such as COVID-19 can be extremely stressful. Dealing with the threat of COVID-19 is upsetting because it is outside the range of a normal day to day experience. You may feel anxiety, or fear for yourself and your loved ones becoming exposed to the virus. At the same time, you may be feeling overwhelmed by the constant, rapidly changing, and often conflicting information provided by the media regarding the growing danger of COVID-19. While it is critical during this time to take care of your physical health, you also need to pay attention to your emotional health.

### Recognize Your Stress Reactions

It is important to recognize and monitor your stress level during a COVID-19 outbreak.

#### Physical Reactions

- When you are under stress, your body reacts. You may experience low energy, exhaustion, sleep problems, headaches, muscle aches, appetite change, increased heart rate, or stomach upset. Be sure to check with your doctor about any significant changes as many stress reactions mimic major physical disorders and diseases.

#### Emotional Reactions

- You may experience anxiety, worry, fear, sadness, tearfulness, and/or loss of interest in usual enjoyable activities. You may also feel frustration, irritability,

anger, or helpless. Strong feelings that won't go away, last longer than a few weeks, or are interfering with normal functioning may be a symptom of depression or anxiety and are a sign that you should seek professional mental health help.

#### Behavioral Reactions

- Some behaviors triggered by stressful events need to be stopped because they can not only harm your physical and mental health, but they also make the situation worse for others. Harmful behaviors include, but are not limited to, increased dependence on nicotine or alcohol, substance abuse, gambling, bullying, blaming others, spreading rumors or conspiracy theories and ignoring public health and safety recommendations.

#### Cognitive Reactions

- The stress of COVID-19 may affect your ability to think clearly, make it harder to pay attention, solve problems or remember. It does not mean that you are "crazy" or "losing your mind." These are common reactions in times of high stress. They are signals to you to take action to care for yourself.

### Psychological First Aid (PFA) Strategies

While physical First Aid is used to reduce physical pain from a body injury, Psychological First Aid (PFA) is a strategy to reduce the painful range of emotions and responses experienced by people exposed to high stress situations. The PFA strategies

# Tips to reduce COVID-19 anxiety



## TIPS TO REDUCE COVID-19 ANXIETY



Focus on what you can control – including your thoughts, behaviors.



Remember that you are resilient, and so is humankind. We will get through this.



Do what you can to reduce your risk; take comfort that you are caring for yourself and others.



Use technology to connect with others frequently.



Look for the good stuff: the helpers, time with family, and opportunities to pull together. Write down three things you are grateful for each day.



Limit exposure to news or social media updates.



Use reputable sources of news, avoid speculation and rumors.



Model peaceful behavior for those around you. Remember everyone experience stress differently.



Don't let fear influence your decisions, such as hoarding supplies.



Be gentle with yourself and others.



Create a regular routine, especially for children and work from home.



Maintain a healthy diet and exercise routines to help your immune system and mental health.



Spend time in nature while adhering to social distancing guidelines.



Reflect on your reactions. Many who have experienced trauma may be triggered by feelings of powerlessness. Understanding what you are feeling can help you consider how you want to respond to the triggers.



Practice meditation, yoga, or other mind-body techniques. Find apps or online videos to help.



Reach out if you need to talk. There are local and national hotlines and warmlines that can help!

# Self Empowerment & Self-Efficacy

- Engage towards meeting own needs through practical problem solving
- Clarify rumors and provide accurate information.
- Work to reestablish “normal life” activities
- Promote Resilience
  - Everyone who experiences a traumatic event is touched by it
  - We have the ability to “bounce forward” to a “New Normal”



# Promote Empowerment & Self-Efficacy: Encourage Preparedness

- Keep a supply of food, medications, hygiene supplies, vitamins, fluids, cleaning supplies.
- Educate about how to make environment safe such as telework options.
- Educate parents regarding potential school closures and the need to plan for alternate day care.
- Encourage everyone to follow public health guidance and practice social distancing.



# Everyone Should Develop a Personal Resiliency Plan

- Focus beyond the short term  
– DO IT NOW!
- Get to understand what triggers stress for you.
- Know your personal unique stressors and Red Flags for further assistance.
- Select from your own menu of positive coping responses.
- Practice stress reduction and self care daily .



## For More Information

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Center for Emergency Preparedness & Response

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/ep/behavioral/index.html>

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