



## **MAINTAINING MENTAL HEALTH DURING COVID-19**

In January 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of a new coronavirus disease, COVID-19, to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. WHO stated that there is a high risk of COVID-19 spreading to other countries around the world. In March 2020, WHO made the assessment that COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic.

WHO and public health authorities around the world are acting to contain the COVID-19 outbreak. However, this time of crisis is generating stress throughout the population. The considerations presented in this document have been developed by the WHO Department of Mental Health and Substance Use as a series of messages that can be used in communications to support mental and psychosocial well-being in different target groups during the outbreak.

Coronavirus pandemic has cast a gloomy shadow over the start of spring, with more and more people diagnosed with COVID-19 and an increasing number of fatalities. Consequently, extreme measures are being put in place to contain the virus. Cities have gone into lockdown and workers are being advised to work from home.

All colleges and university campuses have been temporarily closed . Over a billion students worldwide are unable to go to school or university, due to measures to stop the spread of COVID-19. It is uncertain when these campuses will reopen, with many universities considering a move to online courses for the foreseeable future.

All this may be causing great anxiety and concern for students, a demographic already vulnerable to mental health issue, which may be made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Student Mental Health during COVID19:**



News of a widespread public health concern like COVID-19 (Coronavirus) can cause feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. Many students across the nation are dealing with sudden changes to their regular schedules and some are faced with having to quickly leave their campuses without contingency plans yet in place. These developments can be stressful. At the same time, families and school leaders

are working to provide the necessary support to their loved ones and students.

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. **Coping with stress will make you, the people you care about, and your community stronger.**

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
- Worsening of mental health conditions
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

The National College Health Assessment indicates that around one in four students suffers from a diagnosable mental illness, while a much greater proportion report feeling overwhelmed (around 70 percent) or very lonely (around 60 percent). These figures overlap with other recent surveys.

This time can be a particularly anxious and lonely time for college and university students. April can contain a series of grueling make-or-break final exams, and many final-year students will be frantically searching the job market with uncertainty about the future.

Importantly, mental health research indicates that routine and structure can foster positive mental health and psychological resilience. As such, the closure of campuses and cancellation of classes, combined with admonitions to stay at home and avoid social contact may hit students hard.

This may be exacerbated by legitimate worries about the virus and the health of self, family, and friends. Stripped of their collegiate activities, opportunities for socializing, and comforting routines, students may need to take innovative measures to protect their mental health during this crisis.

### **Ways to maintain Mental Health:**

A large body of evidence indicates that certain activities can protect mental health and enhance psychological wellbeing. Some of these may be particularly suited to the student population. Some potential activities are given below which may help isolated and vulnerable students stuck at home. With school closures and cancelled events, many teens are missing out on some of the biggest moments of their young lives — as well as everyday moments like

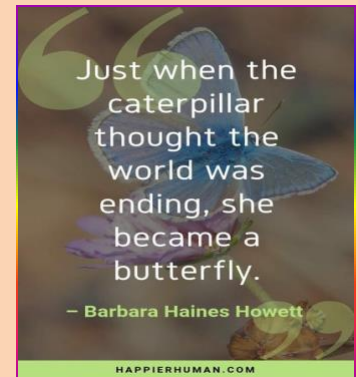


chatting with friends and participating in class.

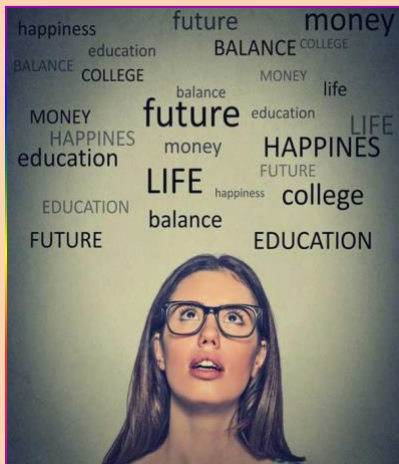
For teenagers facing life changes due to the outbreak who are feeling anxious, isolated and disappointed, know this: you are not alone because your anxiety, and stress are common Now it's a time to think about what you can do to practice self-care and look after your mental health.

### 1. Understand that your anxiety is completely normal:

If university closures and alarming headlines are making you feel anxious, you are not the only one. In fact, that's how you're supposed to feel. "Psychologists have long recognized that anxiety is a normal and healthy function that alerts us to threats and helps us take measures to protect ourselves. "Your anxiety is going to help you make the decisions that you need to be making right now — not spending time with other people or in large groups, washing your hands and not touching your face." Those feelings are helping to keep not only you safe, but others too. This is "also how we take care of members of our community. We think about the people around us, too."



### 2. Find balance in day to day life:



When we are under chronically difficult conditions, it's very helpful to divide the problem into two categories: things I can do something about, and then things I can do nothing about. There is a lot that falls under that second category right now, and that's okay, but find balance in the day-to-day activities -doing homework, watching a favorite movie or getting in bed with a novel as ways to seek relief. There are various forms of mediated social activity that may be appealing to students interested in continuing their learning. This can include online book clubs and online language exchange programs where students can practice a second language for free.

### 3. Find new ways to connect with your friends:

If you want to spend time with friends while you're practicing social distancing, social media is a great way to connect. Get creative: make attractive video clip related to precaution and prevention of COVID-19, share your experience to motivate others. But it's not going to be a good idea to have unfettered access to screens and or social media. That's not healthy, that's not smart, it may amplify your anxiety," Make screen time schedule.



#### 4. Be compassionate with yourself and with others:

There is much that we cannot control right now, but how we talk to ourselves during these challenging times can either provide a powerful buffer to these difficult circumstances or amplify our distress. Moments of feeling overwhelmed often come with big thoughts, such as “I cannot do this,” or “This is too hard.” This pandemic will cause a lot of stress for many of us, and we cannot be our best selves all the time. But we can ask for help or reach out when help is asked of us.

Have you been wanting to learn how to do something new, start a new book or spend time practicing a musical instrument? Now is the time to do that. Focusing on yourself and finding ways to use your new-found time is a productive way to look after your mental health.



#### 5. Feel your feelings:



Missing out on events with friends, hobbies, or sports matches is incredibly disappointing. The best way to deal with this disappointment? Let yourself feel it. “When it comes to having a painful feeling, the only way out is through. Go ahead and be sad, and if you can let yourself be sad, you’ll start to feel better faster.” Processing your feelings looks different for everyone. “Some are going to make art, some are going to want to talk to their friends and use their shared sadness as a way to feel connected in a time when they can’t be together in person, and some are going to want to find ways to get food to food banks,” What’s important is that you do what feels right to you.

#### 6. Take care of your health: This is the time to take care of your health properly. To maintain health some tips can be practiced

- Take deep breaths and relaxation exercise (Sit quietly and allow the body to breathe deeply (full inhales in, full exhales out), then gently invite your mind to return from the races and join you in the present moment as you sit and breathe. Invite your mind back kindly as many times as needed. Repeat the practice daily for 10 to 15 minutes or more.)
- Eat healthy and well-balanced meals (This could be a good time to try new recipes and boost the immune



system through healthy eating at regular intervals.

- Exercise regularly (It includes yoga, dancing, and workouts.)
- Get plenty of sleep (diminishing screen time and media consumption during the evening may help with sleep as well as exercise can help facilitate a good night's sleep)



### **7. Practice Religiosity/ Spirituality:**

Private religious activities such as prayer have been associated with positive mental health, and religiously-inclined students may consider building such activities into their daily routines. Non-religious students could consider cognate spiritual activities such as meditation and mindfulness.

COVID-19 has cast a vast shadow over the whole of society. Such activities may lead to some small shoots of hope, growth, and renewal—all of which are desperately needed in this time of COVID-19 crisis.

#### References:

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