



Indian Association of Clinical Psychologists

(Registered as per Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860, Reg. No. 3694)

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**Members of the
Executive Council
2020-2022**

No. IACP/GS/Advisory/01(COVID-19)

Date: 29 March, 2020

COVID 19 - PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT ADVISORY

The COVID-19 pandemic is enormously stressful for all of us. India has declared COVID-19 outbreak as a National Disaster. There is a National Lockdown of 3 weeks in India to prevent the uncontrollable spread of infection.

This pandemic has impacted the wellbeing of everyone in some way or the other. Hence, it is normal to experience a wide range of stress reactions. Some may experience normal stress reactions like anxiety/worry while others may experience extreme anxiety, panic, depression, or worsening of physical or mental health conditions.

Persons impacted strongly requiring psychosocial counselling at some point in time are those who are responders to COVID-19, family members of the deceased, those quarantined, people with chronic diseases, those with pre-existing mental health conditions, health care providers, people recovered from COVID-19, caregivers, children and elderly.

Indian Association of Clinical Psychologists (IACP) has taken the initiative to form a 'COVID 19 psychological support group' which aims to provide free telephonic/online counselling and Psychological first aid (PFA) to people in emotional distress to help them to cope better in this crisis.

How to Minimize Stress and improve wellbeing during COVID-19 pandemic:

1. Follow preventive measures strictly:

- Strictly follow Lockdown as directed by Government of India.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water. Thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Maintain social distancing. Maintain at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.
- Practice respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately.
- If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical care immediately. Try to seek appointment in advance.
- Follow the directions of your local authorities.
- Do follow strict Quarantine if advised by the doctor.

2. "Stress reactions are Normal to Abnormal Situations."

Remember, being stressed is not a sign of weakness.

- #### **3. Limit news exposure.** Restrict your COVID-19 related news watching/reading and listening time to 2-3 times a day just for an update, e.g. morning and night.

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- 4. Seek information from reliable sources** (like WHO, Government of India or ICMR). Counter and challenge your apprehensions and fears with a reliable source of information.
- 5. Take care of your body:** Maintain healthy diets, hygiene etiquettes, sleep (6-7 hours at least) and ensure adequate rest. Do indoor physical exercise or Yoga for 30-45 minutes at least
- 6. Try to follow a routine:** Plan for the day. If you had a schedule earlier and if it is possible, continue
- 7. Stay socially connected:** This can be the time to catch up with friends and relatives through phone or social media and also lost or forgotten friends. It can also be an excellent excuse to mend a broken relationship. Don't hesitate to seek support from friends, relatives and colleagues.
- 8. Follow distraction and engagement techniques:** If anxiety and worry are more than usual, techniques like listening to music at pleasant volume, reading, learning new things at home. Take this as an opportunity to revive your hobbies and memories.
- 9. Do relaxation exercise** such as pranayama, meditation, guided mindfulness relaxation, or deep breathing twice a day for 10-15 minutes at least. As positive mood will improve your immunity and keep you stress-free.
- 10. Avoid using unhelpful coping strategies** such as tobacco, alcohol, drugs or self-medication
- 11. Parents to interact constructively with children** talking to them, give them information about COVID 19 based on their maturity level, planning one task at a time, creating a daily routine, completion of pending assignments, engage in indoor play and creative activities and helping in house chores. One can play using board games and indoor sports activities, etc. and avoid video games. Maintain discipline at home to be followed by children by putting up signs and alarms.
- 12. Taking care of older adults,** 65 years and older is essential as they are at higher risk for severe illness. Let them spend less time watching, listening or reading about corona outbreak, engage in interactive activities/games with them, make sure they take their medicines regularly. Break their difficult task into small tasks. They can be given easy and interesting tasks they can work on. e.g. organizing old photos and memorabilia together, and enjoy the stories and happy memories they inspire.
- 13. Avoid stigmatizing people who have unfortunately got infected:** Even while maintaining social distancing, you can empathise with them, support them emotionally and practically using social media technology.
- 14. Warning signs** which indicate that one needs immediate help of a Mental Health Professional are Feeling very low/ sad, severe anxiety/ overwhelming fear, suicidal ideas or acts, hopeless, feeling panicked when you hear talk of the virus, negative pervasive thoughts, loss of pleasure and interest, frequent crying, major sleep problems, significantly reduced appetite, weight loss, low energy, difficulty in carrying out daily tasks, alcohol, drug and medication abuse.



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15. It is strongly recommended that if one observes above mentioned reactions in oneself or any other person, persisting for long, one should contact a mental health professional. One may seek help from 'COVID 19 Psychological Support Group' by contacting a psychosocial counsellor from their region/state by visiting <http://iacp.in>

IACP will keep updating its members and the general public about further development and guidelines on a regular basis. We wish you all a safe, healthy and secure future. Stay positive and take care.

Dr Kalpana Sriastava
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