



New York State  
Psychiatric Institute



COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY  
*Department of Psychiatry*

# Mental Health of Front Line Providers during COVID Outbreak

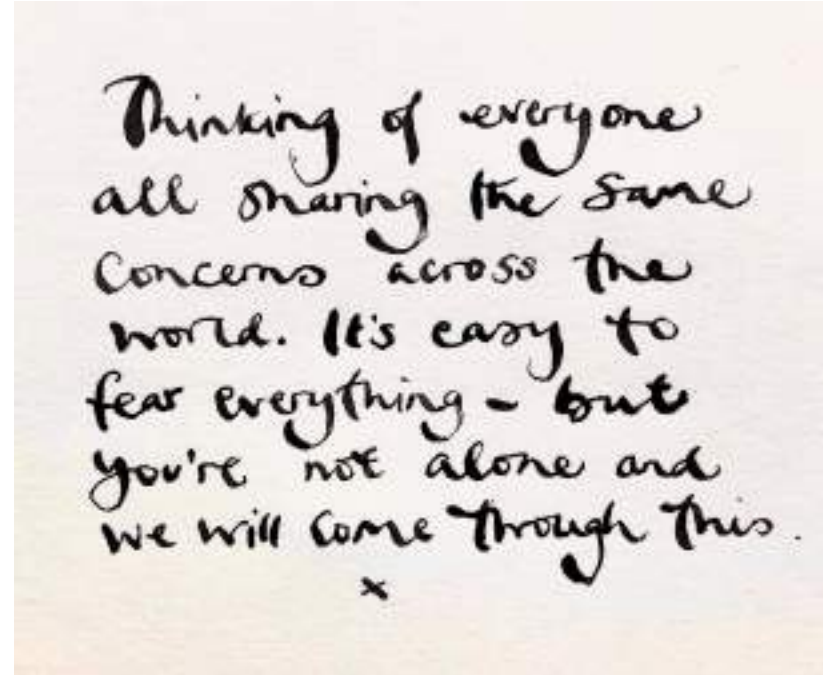
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# Outline

Psychosocial Impact of a Pandemic  
Strategies to Support Mental Health in  
the Time of COVID-19  
Personal Considerations  
Resources  
Contact



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# Psychosocial Impact of a Pandemic

Ripple effect across society

Economic downturn

Social disruptions

Employment concerns

Childcare/elder care (family)

Significant stressors on top of a health crisis

Implications for widespread mental health concerns

# Strategies to Support your Mental Health in the Time of COVID-19

- Empower yourself – you are psychologically well-equipped for this challenge
- In a crisis, it can be challenging to learn and practice *new* emotion regulation skills
- ED personnel are already quite adept at managing crises large and small
- You have an impressive arsenal of stress management skills

# Strategies to Support your Mental Health in the Time of COVID-19

- You have an impressive arsenal of stress management skills
- Data from past crises (9/11, epidemics, Hurricane Katrina) suggest most healthcare workers will experience temporary increase in stress/anxiety, and a smaller percentage will experience clinically significant elevations in symptoms
  - We can practice skills now that can mitigate risk to our mental health later
  - We are resilient, brains are malleable

# Strategies to Support your Mental Health in the time of COVID-19

- Identify and practice those skills that worked during past struggles
- Take a moment now to remind yourself what was most effective
  - Leaning on friends/family for support, your therapist, meditation, exercise, cooking, reading, yoga, affirmations, religion/spirituality?
  - Jot down a list of at least 3-5 concrete tools that are helpful to YOU as a person
  - Keep the list handy or take a picture of it on your phone so you can refer to it quickly instead of having to generate it in the midst of panic



# Strategies to Support your Mental Health in the time of COVID-19

Utilize “**growth mindset**” vs fixed mindset

- Fixed mindset – innate, unchangeable
- **Growth mindset – through personal effort and practice, we can learn new ways of being (by practicing cognitive flexibility or resilience skills, I can become less anxious/depressed in the face of crises)**

When someone asks you how your night went



# Strategies to Support your Mental Health in the time of COVID-19

- Research suggests a buffering factor during times of crisis is “**psychological resilience**” or flexibility
  - Set of mental traits and abilities that reduces impact of trauma on wellbeing
  - These are skills that can be taught and built with practice like a muscle
- **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)**
  - Evidence based treatment
  - Part of cognitive behavioral therapies
  - Very effective set of skills for coping with challenges outside of our control like pandemics or the experiences commonly shared by ED staff

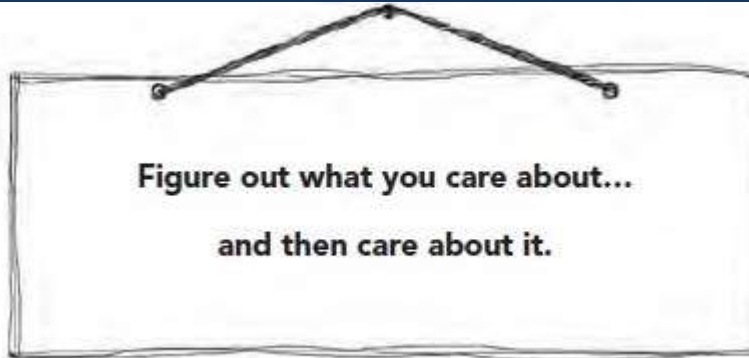




## Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)



# ACT to Support your Mental Health in the time of COVID-19 - Values



Remind yourself why you chose  
this field

Likely out of a desire to care for others  
and to assist those in need

Values are like cardinal directions, not trophies to put on the shelf



# ACT to Support your Mental Health in the time of COVID-19 - Values

- Spend some time reflecting on your values & how they relate to your chosen field
- What are you being called to do during this pandemic and how does that relate to your core values?
- Be intentional in choosing to act in accordance with those values as you face crises, moment-to-moment

# ACT to Support your Mental Health in the time of COVID-19 - Defusion

- Noticing thoughts as thoughts (passing mental phenomena), rather than facts or mandates for behavior
- “There goes my brain telling me the story again that...”
  - Typically “...I’m not good enough” or “they think I’m stupid”, but during COVID-19, “this will never end”, “I can’t handle any more stress”
- Lemon exercise (power of thoughts); mountain & weather

## Cognitive Distortions

Notice thoughts as they function in your life instead of their validity.

Ask: “is that thought helping me move forward in a productive way right now?”



# ACT to Support your Mental Health in the time of COVID-19

- Remember this is unprecedented – it’s okay to not be okay
- **Give yourself permission to feel – Radical Acceptance**
  - Avoidance of emotions/thoughts tends to make them stronger and harder to manage effectively
  - Approach difficult emotions with curiosity and self-compassion
  - Designate a brief “worry time” each day
    - Jot down difficult thoughts or emotions throughout the day to come back to later during your “worry time”
    - Allows you to compartmentalize and stay productive



# ACT to Support your Mental Health in the time of COVID-19

- Give yourself permission to feel
  - Meaning-finding in the event
    - Out of negative experiences often come valuable changes in our perspectives
    - Reflect: What interesting new people have you met or have touched your life as a result of past challenges? How have challenges changed your perspective?
    - Cultivate gratitude for the challenges we face
    - Process emotions - Journaling, talking with friends/family, debriefing with colleagues, therapy



# ACT to Support your Mental Health in the time of COVID-19

- **Coping with uncertainty and lack of control**
  - Practice mindful awareness of the here and now
    - **At work:** When external circumstances are difficult to cope with in an ED setting, practice mindful awareness of the self & internal cues
      - Intentionally slowing own breathing
      - Noticing own thoughts and emotions
      - Mindfulness of behaviors toward others, intentional connection with colleagues
    - **At home or on break:** mindful cooking/eating, mindful showering, meditation, intentional connection with loved ones







Mind Full, or Mindful?

# ACT to Support your Mental Health in the time of COVID-19

- Coping with uncertainty and lack of control
- Calm your body's physiological arousal to stress
  - Diaphragmatic Breathing/square breathing
  - Meditation
  - Progressive Muscle Relaxation
  - Grounding – noticing body in chair, all the blue things in the room, etc



# ACT to Support your Mental Health in the time of COVID-19

- Coping with uncertainty and lack of control
  - Manage your media consumption
    - COVID-19 news is everywhere
    - Practice social media distancing to protect mental health
    - Limit to 2x/day for 10 min on 2 news sources (e.g., 9 am and 9pm for 10 min each on your favorite 2 news platforms)
  - DO FaceTime/Zoom/call with friends and family regularly to stay connected

# Personal Considerations

## Communication with others during times of uncertainty

You may be bombarded with questions from family/friends

Validate their fears; reflect “I hear that you are worried about...”

Provide clear, concise information

Limit conversation length

Practice saying no

# Be a Coping Model!

Coping Model = modeling that we all experience anxiety

Emphasizing non-judgmental stance toward self, it's okay to have difficult feelings

This is effective for patients, but also for children, family members, friends, loved ones

i say 'no worries' a lot for a person that is full of worry

Anonymous asked:

What state do you live in?

taur answered:

constant anxiety

taur

181,933 notes Oct 5th, 2017

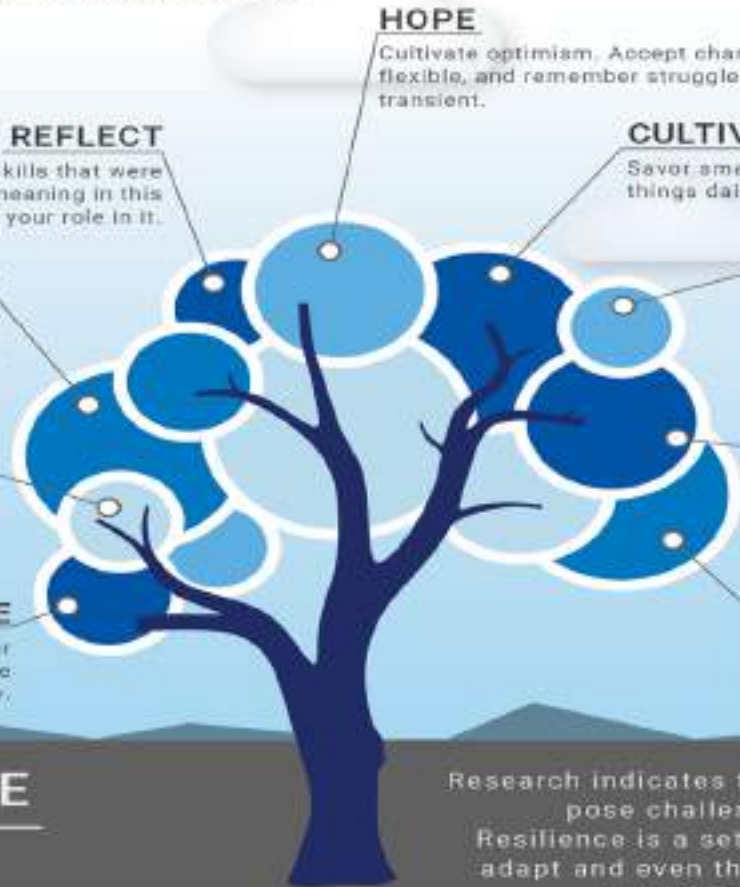
boredpanda.com



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# Personal Considerations

- Guilt and worry on the front lines
  - What if I get sick
    - Implications for colleagues AND family
    - Permit yourself that concern, use it to motivate change in behavior (e.g., checking PPE thoroughly, plan for what if scenario) rather than rumination on feelings, then move forward
    - Self-compassion
    - Advocate for self: assertive communication skills to get needs met



**HOPE**

Cultivate optimism. Accept change, be flexible, and remember struggles are transient.

**CULTIVATE GRATITUDE**

Savor small positive experiences. Identify 5 things daily for which you are grateful.

**PRACTICE MINDFULNESS**

Do what centers you. Breathe, meditate, get outside, use your 5 senses to ground yourself. Be aware of unhelpful thought patterns. Redirect rumination to problem solving.

**BE FLEXIBLE**

Practice flexibility of mind and behavior by noticing and accepting changes in circumstances and forging novel and creative paths forward.

**FORGIVE**

Be generous with yourself and others. Difficulties present opportunities for growth, self-discovery, and learning. Be realistic with your expectations.

**REFLECT**

Journal to identify coping skills that were effective in the past. Find meaning in this event and purpose in your role in it.

**CONNECT**

Invest meaningfully in your relationships. Practice vulnerability and seek support from trustworthy and compassionate individuals.

**LIVE YOUR VALUES**

Remind yourself what is truly important to you, and let that guide your actions. What is one small way you can live your values today?

**ENGAGE IN SELF CARE**

Check in with yourself. Are you getting your basic needs met? Do one pleasurable activity every day.

**GROWING RESILIENCE**

**Tips to Weather Harsh Seasons**

Anna E. Allmann, Ph.D

Research indicates that stressors and adverse life events pose challenges for many people's mental health. Resilience is a set of traits and skills individuals use to adapt and even thrive during adversity. Growth mindset suggests that with practice, people can grow in resilience. Here are 9 evidence-based methods to improve your coping strategies now.

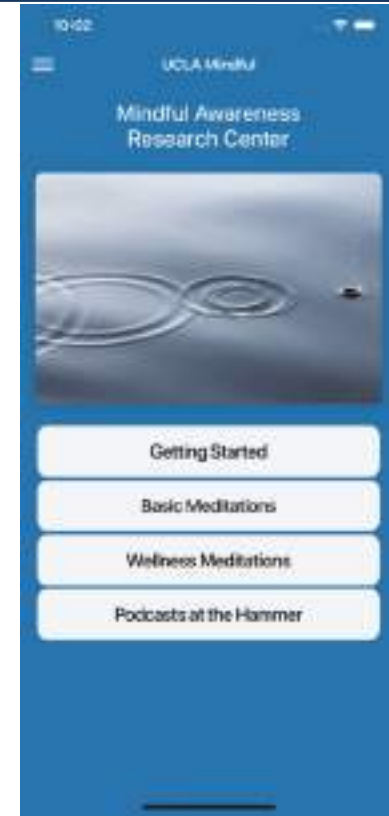
# Resources

CU apps

UCLA mindfulness app

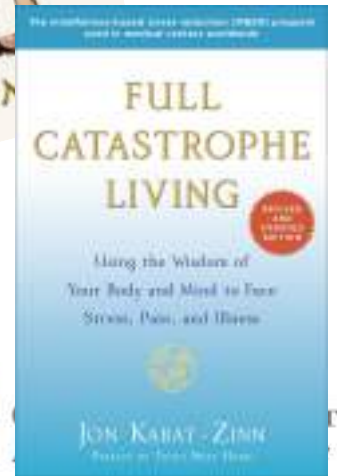
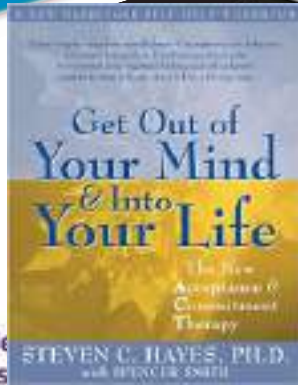
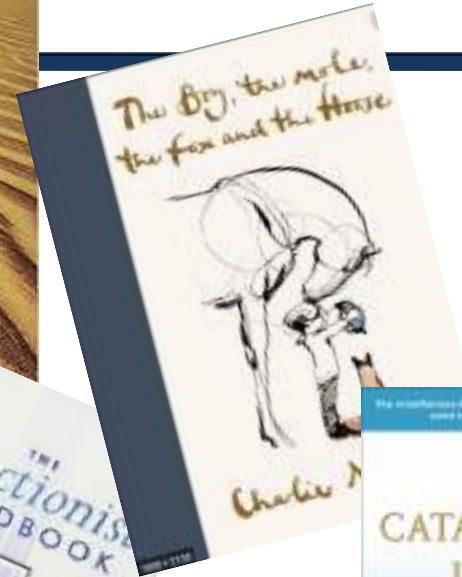
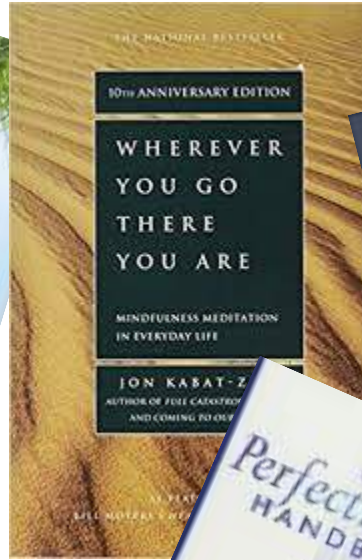
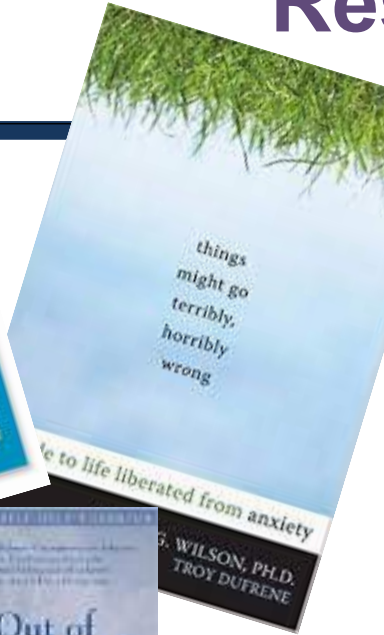
Calm app

Headspace app





# Resources



# Resources

The Happiness Lab – podcast

Jon Kabat-Zinn – Mindfulness, Healing, and Wisdom during COVID-19 - youtube

Online workouts

Yoga with Adrienne – youtube

Russ Harris' FACE COVID – youtube

APA.org – Pandemics (large list of variety of resources)

Child Mind Institute – info for talking with kids about COVID

# Contact Us

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**<https://www.columbiadoctors.org/psychiatry-psychology>**

**Cope Columbia**

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**1:1 peer support calls - 646-774-5366 (Evelyn Valentin, Lou Baptista-Neto's assistant)**