

KEEPING MENTALLY HEALTHY DURING THE COVID-19 EPIDEMIC

MESSAGE FOR GENERAL POPULATION

1. COVID-19 has and is likely to affect people from all socioeconomic groups and in many locations. geographical locations. No one is immune. Be empathetic to all those who are affected. People who are affected by COVID-19 have not done anything wrong, and they deserve our support, compassion and kindness.
2. Do not refer to people with the disease as “COVID-19 cases”, “victims” “COVID-19 families” or “the diseased”. They are “people who have COVID-19”, “people who are being treated for COVID-19”, or “people who are recovering from COVID-19”, and after recovering from COVID-19 their life will go on with their jobs, families and loved ones. It is important to separate a person from having an identity defined by COVID-19, in order to reduce stigma.
3. Minimize watching, reading or listening to news about COVID-19 that causes you to feel anxious or distressed; seek information only from trusted sources and mainly so that you can take practical steps to prepare your plans and protect yourself and loved ones. Seek information updates at specific times during the day, once or twice. The sudden and near-constant stream of news reports about an outbreak can cause anyone to feel worried. Get the facts; not rumours and misinformation. Gather information at regular intervals from the reliable authorities (e.g NCDC, Ministry of Health, WHO) and platforms in order to help you distinguish facts from rumours. Facts can help to minimize fears
4. Protect yourself and be supportive to others. Assisting others in their time of need can benefit both the person receiving support and the helper. For example, check by telephone on neighbours or people in your community who may need some extra assistance. Working together as one community can help to create solidarity in addressing COVID-19 together
5. Find opportunities to amplify positive and hopeful stories and positive images of local people who have experienced COVID-19. For example, stories of people who have recovered or who have supported a loved one and are willing to share their experience.
6. Honour carers and healthcare workers supporting people affected with COVID-19 in your community. Acknowledge the role they play in saving lives and keeping your loved ones safe.

MESSAGE FOR CARERS OF CHILDREN

7. Help children find positive ways to express feelings such as fear and sadness. Every child has his or her own way of expressing emotions. Sometimes engaging in a creative

activity, such as playing or drawing can facilitate this process. Children feel relieved if they can express and communicate their feelings in a safe and supportive environment.

8. Keep children close to their parents and family, if considered safe, and avoid separating children and their caregivers as much as possible. If a child needs to be separated from his or her primary carer, ensure that appropriate alternative care is provided and that a social worker or equivalent will regularly follow up on the child. Further, ensure that during periods of separation, regular contact with parents and carers is maintained, such as twice-daily scheduled telephone or video calls or other age-appropriate communication (e.g. social media).
9. Maintain familiar routines in daily life as much as possible, or create new routines, especially if children must stay at home. Provide engaging age-appropriate activities for children, including activities for their learning. Where possible, encourage children to continue to play and socialize with others, even if only within the family when advised to restrict social contact.
10. During times of stress and crisis, it is common for children to seek more attachment and be more demanding on parents. Discuss COVID-19 with your children in an honest and age-appropriate way. If your children have concerns, addressing them together may ease their anxiety. Children will observe adults' behaviours and emotions for cues on how to manage their own emotions during difficult times.

MESSAGE FOR OLDER ADULT AND PEOPLE WITH UNDERLYING HEALTH CONDITIONS

11. Older adults, especially in isolation and those with cognitive decline/dementia, may become more anxious, angry, stressed, agitated and withdrawn during the outbreak or while in quarantine. Provide practical and emotional support through informal networks (families) and health professionals.
12. Share simple facts about what is going on and give clear information about how to reduce risk of infection in words older people with/without cognitive impairment can understand. Repeat the information whenever necessary. Instructions need to be communicated in a clear, concise, respectful and patient way. It may also be helpful for information to be displayed in writing or pictures. Engage family members and other support networks in providing information and helping people to practise prevention measures (e.g. handwashing, etc.).
13. If you have an underlying health condition, make sure to have access to any medications that you are currently using. Activate your social contacts to provide you with assistance, if needed.

14. Be prepared and know in advance where and how to get practical help if needed, like calling a taxi, having food delivered and requesting medical care. Make sure you have up to two weeks of all your regular medicines that you may require.
15. Learn simple daily physical exercises to perform at home, in quarantine or isolation so you can maintain mobility and reduce boredom.
16. Keep regular routines and schedules as much as possible or help create new ones in a new environment, including regular exercising, cleaning, daily chores, singing, painting or other activities. Keep in regular contact with loved ones (e.g. via telephone, e-mail, social media or video conference).

MESSAGE FOR PEOPLE IN ISOLATION

17. Stay connected and maintain your social networks. Try as much as possible to keep your personal daily routines or create new routines if circumstances change. If health authorities have recommended limiting your physical social contact to contain the outbreak, you can stay connected via telephone, e-mail, social media or video conference.
18. During times of stress, pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in healthy activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Exercise regularly, keep regular sleep routines and eat healthy food. Keep things in perspective.
19. A near-constant stream of news reports about an outbreak can cause anyone to feel anxious or distressed. Seek information updates and practical guidance at specific times during the day from health professionals and reliable authorities (e.g. NCDC, Ministry of Health, WHO websites) and avoid listening to or following rumours that make you feel uncomfortable.

IN SUMMARY

- It is normal to feel sad, stressed, confused, scared or angry during a crisis. Talking to people you trust can help. Contact your friends and family.
- If you must stay at home, maintain a healthy lifestyle -including proper diet, sleep, exercise and social contacts with loved ones at home and by email and phone with other family and friends
- Don't use smoking, alcohol or other drugs to deal with your emotions. If you feel overwhelmed, talk to a health worker or counsellor. Have a plan, where to go to and how to seek help for physical and mental health needs if required
- Get the facts. Gather information that will help you accurately determine your risk so that you can take reasonable precautions. Find a credible source you can trust such as NCDC, Ministry of Health and WHO websites.

- Limit worry and agitation by lessening the time you and your family spend watching or listening to media coverage that you perceive as upsetting
- Draw on skills you have used in the past that have helped you to manage previous life's adversities and use those skills to help you manage your emotions during the challenging time of this outbreak.

SOURCE: The World Health Organisation (WHO) Mental Health Advisory webpage on COVID-19