Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and Mental Health

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What is mental and behavioral health?

• **Mental health** includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being.

• It affects how we think, feel, and act as we cope with life.
  • It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.

• **Mental health** is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood.

https://www.tpr.org/post/how-can-we-change-minds-about-mental-health
What is mental and behavioral health?

- *Mental health* focuses solely on a person's psychological state, whereas *behavioral health* is a broader umbrella that can incorporate physical and mental struggles—eating habits, exercise routines, and alcohol consumption, etc.

https://www.insynchcs.com/blog/behavioral-health-vs.-mental-health
Mental Health and COVID-19

• 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.
Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations.

How you respond to the outbreak can depend on your background, the things that make you different from other people, and the community you live in.
Vulnerable Groups

• People who may respond more strongly to the stress of a crisis include
  • Older people and people with chronic diseases who are at higher risk for COVID-19
  • Children and teens
  • People who are helping with the response to COVID-19, like doctors and other health care providers, or first responders
  • People who have mental health conditions including problems with substance use
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
• Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.
Recognize your stress

• Stress is a normal part of life. It is a natural response to an external pressure that disrupts your equilibrium. It often causes symptoms such as:
  • Sadness, confusion, irritability, anger, uneasiness, and suicidal thoughts
  • Reduced concentration, efficiency, and productivity
  • Social withdrawal and isolation
  • Interpersonal problems (e.g., lies, defensiveness, communication concerns)
  • Tension (e.g., headaches, jaw clenching, teeth grinding)
  • Body pain (e.g., headaches, muscle spasms)
  • Reduced energy (e.g., tiredness, weakness, fatigue)
  • Sleeping problems (e.g., insomnia, nightmares)
Mental Health Strategies

Coping with the COVID-19 Pandemic
Five Essential Elements of Disaster Mental Health for Children and Adolescents

• Element One: Promote a Psychological Sense of Safety
  • This is in addition to promoting physical safety
  • Use clear practical and simple language based on accurate info; avoid speculative info.
  • Give children activities to work on

• Considerations for our Elders
Five Essential Elements of Disaster Mental Health for Children and Adolescents

• **Element Two: Promote Calming**
  • A basic goal for disaster mental health is to limit the length of time individuals experience the fight, flight, freeze, or surrender responses
  • The goal is to promote the flexible use of a variety of healthy calming strategies at various points in time and various situations
    • controlled breathing, muscle relaxation, and positive imagery exercises
  • Providing child- or adolescent-friendly spaces that are:
    (a) are out of high-traffic areas,
    (b) are staffed by calm and attentive adult caregivers, and
    (c) offer a variety of age-appropriate calming activities (e.g., building blocks, play-dough, and coloring materials for younger children)
  • Developmental disabilities
• Considerations for our Elders
Five Essential Elements of Disaster Mental Health for Children and Adolescents

• **Element Three: Promote a Sense of Self-Efficacy and Collective Efficacy**
  • Self-efficacy refers to a person’s belief in his or her capacity to exert control over his or her own motivation, behavior, and social environment.
    • Psychoeducation
    • Problem solving
    • Proximity seeking
    • Secondary control strategies
  • Collective efficacy refers to the belief that one belongs to a group capable of effectively meeting environmental demands through organized and planned action
    • Disaster preparedness plans

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Five Essential Elements of Disaster Mental Health for Children and Adolescents

• Element Four: Promote Connectedness
  • The positive effects of sustained connection to attachment figures and receipt of social support from loved ones and social groups.
  • Received versus perceived support
  • Promote social connectedness at several different levels
  • A common site for people to gather
  • Primary support system
  • Referrals
  • Normalize help-seeking behaviors
  • Shared activities with similar age kids

• Considerations for our Elders
Five Essential Elements of Disaster Mental Health for Children and Adolescents

- **Element Five: Instill Hope**
  - Instills reminder of positive aspects of life
  - Safety and comforting adults offer reassurance that they will not always feel terrified and unsafe
  - Provide information on coping strategies
  - DO NOT challenge thoughts and feeling rather validate and provide hopeful statements
  - Replace activities the children missed
  - Help them generate their own idea of hope
  - Increases self-agency

- Considerations for our Elders
Conclusion

• The needs of children and adolescents may vary widely based on the nature of disaster-related experiences; individual-level psychological, developmental, and social characteristics; and community and cultural contexts.

• The structure and predictability of familiar roles and routines provide an important counterbalance to the disruptions of crisis response and post-disaster recovery phases
Questions and Comments

• What are your mental health coping strategies?
• What are mental health best practices you utilize in your community?
• How is your community addressing the mental health concerns related to COVID-19?
• What mental health resources are available in your communities and can you share them with the participants?
• What are other cultural considerations we should be aware of?
References


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