



# Stress and Coping

# Outbreaks can be stressful

- ▶ **The outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) may be stressful for people. 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 mental health conditions
  - ▶ Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs
- ▶ **Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. 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 severe illness from COVID-19
  - ▶ Children and teens
  - ▶ People who are helping with the response to COVID-19, like doctors, other health care providers, and first responders
  - ▶ People who have mental health conditions including problems with substance use



# Common reactions to COVID-19

- ▶ **Concern about protecting oneself** from the virus because they are at higher risk of serious illness.
- ▶ **Concern that regular medical care or community services may be disrupted** due to facility closures or reductions in services and public transport closure.
- ▶ **Feeling socially isolated**, especially if they live alone or are in a community setting that is not allowing visitors because of the outbreak.
- ▶ **Guilt** if others help them with activities of daily living.
- ▶ **Increased levels of distress** if they:
  - ▶ Have mental health concerns before the outbreak, such as depression.
  - ▶ Live in lower-income households or have language barriers
  - ▶ Experience stigma because of age, race or ethnicity, disability, or perceived likelihood of spreading COVID-19.



# People at Higher Risk

- ▶ People at higher risk for severe illness, such as older adults, and people with underlying health conditions are also at increased risk of stress due to COVID-19.
- ▶ Older adults and people with disabilities are at increased risk for having mental health concerns, such as depression.
- ▶ Mental health problems can present as physical complaints (such as headaches or stomachaches) or cognitive problems (such as having trouble concentrating).
- ▶ Doctors may be more likely to miss mental health concerns among
  - ▶ People with disabilities - due to a focus on treating underlying health conditions, compared to people without disabilities.
  - ▶ Older adults - because depression can be mistaken for a normal part of aging.



# For people coming out of quarantine

- ▶ It can be stressful to be separated from others if a healthcare provider thinks you may have been exposed to COVID-19, even if you do not get sick.
- ▶ Emotional reactions to coming out of quarantine may include
  - ▶ Mixed emotions, including relief after quarantine
  - ▶ Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones
  - ▶ Stress from the experience of monitoring yourself or being monitored by others for signs and symptoms of COVID-19
  - ▶ Guilt about not being able to perform normal work or parenting duties during quarantine
  - ▶ Sadness, anger, or frustration because friends or loved ones have unfounded fears of contracting the disease from contact with you
  - ▶ Other emotional or mental health changes
  - ▶ Children may also feel upset or have other strong emotions if they, or someone they know, has been released from quarantine.

# What Direct Support Staff can do

- ▶ Help connect people with family and loved ones to help lower distress and feelings of social isolation.
- ▶ Help strengthen their social support
- ▶ Let older adults and people with disabilities know it is common for people to feel distressed during a crisis. Remind them that asking for and accepting help is a sign of strength.
- ▶ Have a procedure and referrals ready for anyone who shows severe distress or expresses a desire to hurt him- or herself or someone else.
- ▶ Recommend stress coping strategies



# Coping with Stress

- ▶ Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media.
- ▶ Take care of your body.
  - ▶ Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate
  - ▶ Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals.
  - ▶ Exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep.
  - ▶ Avoid alcohol and drugs
- ▶ Make time to unwind. Try to do some other activities you enjoy.
- ▶ Connect with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.
- ▶ Know the facts to help reduce stress. Sharing the facts about COVID-19 and understanding the risk to yourself and people you care about can make an outbreak less stressful.



# Coping with Stress

- ▶ Call your healthcare provider if stress gets in the way of your daily activities for several days in a row.
- ▶ People with preexisting mental health conditions should continue with their treatment and be aware of new or worsening symptoms.

## Need help? Know someone who does?

If you, or someone you care about, are feeling overwhelmed with emotions like sadness, depression, or anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or others

- Call 911
- Visit the [Disaster Distress Helpline](#), call 1-800-985-5990, or text TalkWithUs to 66746
- Visit the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) or call 1-800-799-7233 and TTY 1-800-787-3224





# Strengthening Social Support

- ▶ Social support can diminish many of the adverse effects of stress
- ▶ Explore possible stressors and the availability of social support
  - ▶ What is your biggest worry these days? How do you deal with this worry? What are some of the things that give you comfort, strength and energy? Who do you feel most comfortable sharing your problems with? When you are not feeling well, who do you turn to for help or advice? How is your relationship with your family? In what way do your family and friends support you and in what way do you feel stressed by them?
- ▶ Based on the information gathered, consider the following strategies
  - ▶ Problem Solving
  - ▶ Strengthening Social Support
  - ▶ Teach Stress Management



# Strengthening Social Support

- ▶ Problem Solving
  - ▶ Use problem-solving techniques to help the person address major stressors. When stressors cannot be solved or reduced, problem-solving techniques may be used to identify ways to cope with the stressor. Try to encourage the person to develop their own solutions.
- ▶ Strengthening Social Support
  - ▶ Help the person to identify supportive and trusted family members, friends and community members and to think through how each one can be involved in helping. With the person's consent, refer them to other community resources for social support. Social workers, case managers or other trusted people in the community may be able to assist in connecting the person with appropriate resources.
- ▶ Teach Stress Management
  - ▶ Identify and develop positive ways to relax (refer to 'Coping with Stress', slide 5). Teach the person specific stress management techniques (e.g. breathing exercises). In some settings, you can refer to a health worker who can teach these techniques.



# For responders

- ▶ Responding to COVID-19 can take an emotional toll on you, and you may experience secondary traumatic stress. Secondary traumatic stress is stress reactions and symptoms resulting from exposure to another individual's traumatic experiences, rather than from exposure directly to a traumatic event.
- ▶ There are things you can do to reduce secondary traumatic stress reactions:
  - ▶ Acknowledge that secondary traumatic stress can impact anyone helping families after a traumatic event.
  - ▶ Learn the symptoms including physical (fatigue, illness) and mental (fear, withdrawal, guilt).
  - ▶ Allow time for you and your family to recover from responding to the pandemic.
  - ▶ Create a menu of personal self-care activities that you enjoy, such as exercising, or reading a book.
- ▶ Take a break from media coverage of COVID-19.
- ▶ Ask for help if you feel overwhelmed or concerned that COVID-19 is affecting your ability to care for your family and patients as you did before the outbreak.