Coping with Global Health Issues

TIPS AND TOOLS
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Grinnell College
Student Health and Wellness
Reactions to Global Health Concerns

The outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) may be stressful for people and communities. Fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in adults and children.

**Reactions during an infectious disease outbreak can include:**

- Fear and worry about your own health status and that of your loved ones who may have been exposed to COVID-19
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

People with preexisting mental health conditions should continue with their treatment plans during an emergency and monitor for any new symptoms. Call your healthcare provider if stress reactions interfere with your daily activities for several days in a row.

Taken from: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/coping.html
5 Ways to View News Coverage About COVID-19

1. **Keep things in perspective.** Take a deep breath and remind yourself that most people who contract COVID-19 will only experience mild symptoms. Work is being done to help people who may be more vulnerable to the coronavirus, such as senior citizens and those with underlying health conditions. As coverage increases, it’s important to take the necessary precautions to keep your family and loved ones safe.

2. **Get the facts.** It is helpful to adopt a more clinical and curious approach as you follow news reports about the virus. To that end, you will want to find a credible source you can trust. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a web-page dedicated to information on the coronavirus outbreak. You may also find useful information from local or state public health agencies or even your family physician.

3. **Communicate with your children/family.** Discuss the news coverage of the coronavirus with honest and age-appropriate information. Parents can also help allay distress by focusing children on rules and schedules. Remember that children will observe your behaviors and emotions for cues on how to manage their own feelings during this time.

4. **Keep connected.** Maintaining social networks can foster a sense of normality and provide valuable outlets for sharing feelings and relieving stress. Feel free to share useful information you find on governmental websites with your friends and family. It will help them deal with their own anxiety.

5. **Seek additional help.** Individuals who feel an overwhelming nervousness, a lingering sadness, or other prolonged reactions that adversely affect their job performance or interpersonal relationships should consult with a trained and experienced mental health professional. Psychologists and other appropriate mental health providers can help people deal with extreme stress. These professionals work with individuals to help them find constructive ways to manage adversity.

Taken from the American Psychological Association; Updated March 2020
https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/pandemics/
Leaves on a Stream Meditation

- Sit in a comfortable position and either close your eyes or rest them gently on a fixed spot in the room.
- Visualize yourself sitting beside a gently flowing stream with leaves floating along the surface of the water. Pause 10 seconds.
- For the next few minutes, take each thought that enters your mind and place it on a leaf...let it float by. Do this with each thought - pleasurable, painful, or neutral. Even if you have joyous or enthusiastic thoughts, place them on a leaf and let them float by.
- If your thoughts momentarily stop, continue to watch the stream. Sooner or later, your thoughts will start up again. Pause 20 seconds.
- Allow the stream to flow at its own pace. Don’t try to speed it up and rush your thoughts along. You’re not trying to rush the leaves along or “get rid” of your thoughts. You are allowing them to come and go at their own pace.
- If your mind says “This is dumb,” “I’m bored,” or “I’m not doing this right” place those thoughts on leaves, too, and let them pass. Pause 20 seconds.
- If a difficult or painful feeling arises, simply acknowledge it. Say to yourself, “I notice myself having a feeling of boredom/impatience/frustration.” Place those thoughts on leaves and allow them to float along.
- From time to time, your thoughts may hook you and distract you from being fully present in this exercise. This is normal. As soon as you realize that you have become sidetracked, gently bring your attention back to the visualization exercise.

Taken from https://www.mindfulnessmuse.com/acceptance-and-commitment-therapy/leaves-on-a-stream-cognitive-defusion-exercise
Change your Intake

• **Limit C.A.T.S.** (Caffeine, Alcohol, Tobacco, and Sugar and Sweetener). These substances play a role in causing physical anxiety and when intake of these substances is decreased the body immediately becomes less anxious.

• **Create Demand Delays.** Our culture demands an instantaneous response to communication. Create technology-free time by waiting to check email for at least one hour into your day; checking voicemail at specific times; turn off things that ring and ding while you are focusing on work; turn off everything that rings, including cell phones, while you eat your meal for instance.

• **Lower Stimulation Intake** by taking a break at least every 90 minutes to take a moment to look outside, walk up and down a hallway, or take a drink of water.

• **Increase Intake of Nutritious Foods.** Add protein; add dark green, leafy vegetables, and eat regular meals.

5 Steps to Stop Worrying

1. What are you predicting will happen and what is the likelihood it will actually happen? Once you identify the perceived threat, make some evidence-based predictions about how likely this is. How many times has this worst-case scenario actually happened to you before? Would there be steps you could take to reduce the likelihood?

2. What is the worst case scenario, best case scenario, and most likely scenario? Don’t only consider the worst case!

3. How many times have you made this prediction and it came true? Another way to consider the usefulness of your worry is to actually count how many times the worst case scenario has happened.

4. If it did happen, what would you do to cope with it? Think about what would happen next and what you would do to get through the difficult situation.

5. What are the costs and benefits of worrying about this? How effective is it to worry about this situation?

Adapted from https://cogbtherapy.com/cbt-blog/5-steps-to-stop-worrying
Better Breathing Through 4-7-8

To practice 4-7-8 breathing, find a place to sit or lie down comfortably. Be sure you practice good posture, especially when starting out. If you’re using the technique to fall asleep, lying down is best.

- Exhale, emptying the lungs of air
- Breathe in quietly through the nose for 4 seconds
- Hold the breath for a count of 7 seconds
- Exhale forcefully through the mouth, like you are blowing out pursing the lips and making a “whoosh” sound, for 8 seconds
- Repeat the cycle up to 4 times
Stigma and Resilience

Fear and anxiety about a disease can lead to social stigma toward people, places, or things. It is important to remember that people - including those of Asian descent - who do not live in or have not recently been in areas of ongoing spread of the virus that causes COVID-19, or have not been in contact with a person who is a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 are not at greater risk of spreading COVID-19 than other Americans.

How You Can Help Counter Stigma During COVID-19

- Maintain privacy and confidentiality of those seeking healthcare and those who may be part of any contact investigation.
- Quickly communicate the risk or lack of risk from associations with products, people, and places.
- Raise awareness about COVID-19 without increasing fear.
- Share accurate information about how the virus spreads.
- Speak out against negative behaviors, including negative statements on social media about groups of people, or exclusion of people who pose no risk from regular activities.
- Be cautious about the images that are shared. Make sure they do not reinforce stereotypes.
- Engage with stigmatized groups in person and through media channels including news media and social media.
- Thank healthcare workers and responders. People who have traveled to areas where the COVID-19 outbreak is happening to help have performed a valuable service to everyone by helping make sure this disease does not spread further.

Share the need for social support for people who have returned from China or are worried about friends or relatives in the affected region.

Taken from: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/related-stigma.html
Campus Resources and Contacts

**SHAW Main Office**
641-269-3230

**Need to Talk**
(24/7 counseling hotline for current Grinnell students)
641-269-4404

**Need a Nurse**
(After hours nursing consults for current Grinnell students)
641-269-3230; Press 2

**Grinnell College Campus Safety**
(For emergencies, call Campus Safety and ask to speak with RLC on call; Available for after hours transportation needs)
641-269-4600

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**
(24/7, Free, Confidential)
1-800-273-8255

**Crisis Text Line**
(24/7 Free Service with Crisis Counselor)
Text HOME to 741741

**National Sexual Assault Hotline**
(24/7, Free, Confidential)
1-800-656-4673

**Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network**
Chat online at: hotline.rainn.org/online

**The Disaster Distress Hotline**
1-800-985-5990