

Psychological Coping During the Coronavirus Outbreak

Practical Strategies for Frontline Staff

Dr. Heather Fulton, RPsyc
DrHeatherFulton.com

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Agenda

1. COVID-19 and impact on mental health
 - Unique factors as Frontline Shelter Workers
2. Tips for front line workers on how to cope
3. Tips for managers on supporting staff
4. Tips specific for people who already have anxiety/trauma/other mental health challenges
5. Resources
6. Q & A



COVID-19 & Impact on Mental Health

- Common mental health concerns of frontline workers during pandemics:
 - Stigma
 - Fear of infection
 - Hypersensitivity to bodily sensations
 - Fear of infecting others
 - Including loved ones
 - Isolation, separation from loved ones
 - Pressure to not work
 - Guilt re: need/choice to work
 - Frustration with others
 - Unclear recommendations from authority figures
 - Dissatisfaction with policies and decisions (e.g. PPE, quarantine)
 - Frustration with others' adherence to recommendations
 - Envy

COVID-19 & Mental Health

- Other factors that may influence levels of distress & coping
 - Open-ended nature of pandemic & unique features compared to other disasters
 - Media, social network coverage: anxiety is contagious
 - Individual's previous trauma and mental health history
 - Social and economic resources
 - Other life stressors

Understanding anxiety

$$\text{Anxiety} = \frac{\text{Likelihood of bad thing happening}}{\text{Ability to cope}}$$

Understanding anxiety in this situation

- Uncertainty
- Risk of overestimating
 - Perception of risk \neq actual risk

$$\text{Anxiety} = \frac{\text{Likelihood of bad thing happening}}{\text{Ability to cope}}$$

- Underestimate
- Lack of autonomy/control

- Uncertainty
- Risk of catastrophizing
- Attention to bodily sensations/symptoms

Tips for coping

- Understand uncertainty
 - **Researching:** Often a helpful coping strategy
 - Unlikely to help in this situation
 - Keep time-limited: stay informed on updates and advisories from legit sources
 - Ask yourself:
 - Is this researching/talking to others decreasing uncertainty? Decreasing my anxiety? Is it helpful?



Tips for coping

- Understand uncertainty

- **Stockpiling:** is contagious

Other
less
helpful
behaviors

- What is necessary? What do I *need* vs *prefer*
 - Is this to cope with an emotion? Feel + in control?
 - How will I feel after I buy this?
 - Delay acting on urge



Tips for coping

- Managing uncertainty
 - Understanding perception of risk \neq actual risk
 - Stories affect us more than stats
 - Availability of info \neq actual risk
 - Lack of info can lead to rumour and speculation – recognize it as such
 - Ask: What is the worst case scenario? What is the best case scenario?
 - Include routine and structure when possible
 - Accept eliminating uncertainty is futile, even at best of times

Tips for coping

- Understanding **lack of control/autonomy**
 - Struggle against this can increase feelings about it
 - *This shouldn't be happening*
 - *They shouldn't be doing this*
 - *I shouldn't be feeling this way*
 - Attempts to suppress emotion/thoughts often backfire
 - **Radical acceptance**
 - Unlikely to make you feel better- gives you a starting point
 - \neq situation is okay, acceptable, not a big deal, or you're helpless
 - Just accepting the facts of the situation
 - Helps you be effective in next steps

Tips for coping

- Managing lack of control/autonomy
 - Focus on:
 - What you can control
 - Your values, meaning in the situation
 - Compassion for self and others
 - Compassion = empathy + understanding
 - We are all stressed
 - We are all doing our best

Last practical tips:

- Taking care of yourself makes you a better helper
- You already have many coping skills and abilities that can apply to this new situation
- This is an ongoing process: marathon not a sprint



Managers - Tips to support staff

- Remember that everyone copes differently- and that varies over time and with different stressors too



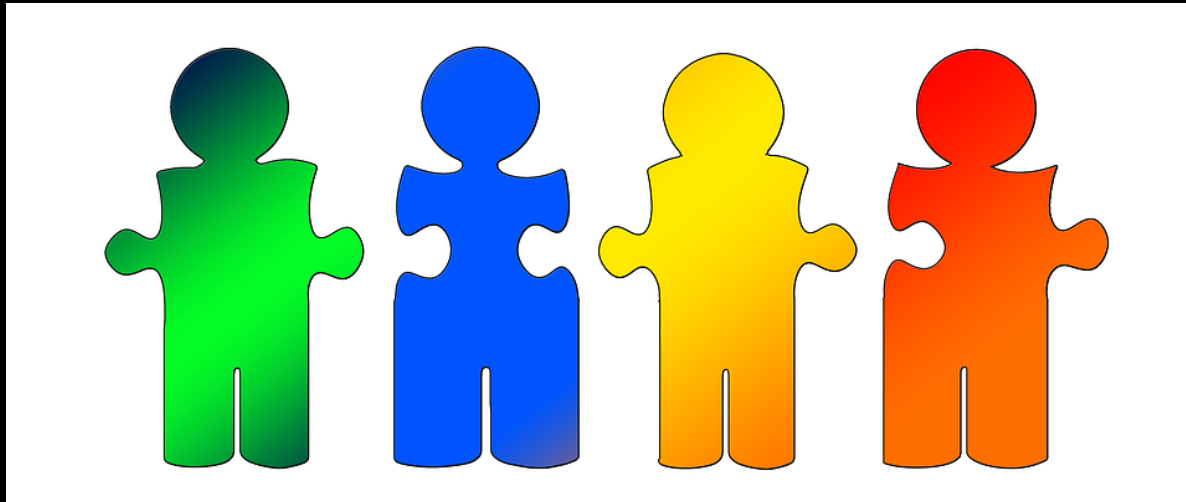
Managers - Tips to support staff

- Reduce uncertainty for your staff
 - Communicate regularly and often
 - Lack of information is a major stressor and source of frustration for helping professionals during outbreaks (Brooks et al., 2020)
 - Explain WHY of decisions
 - Explain if you don't know something (including why you may not and when you may know more)



Managers - Tips to support staff

- Increase autonomy of staff as much as possible
 - Give opportunities for people to:
 - Express their opinions and thoughts on decisions
 - Included in decision making process
 - Yes, there IS time for this



Managers - Tips to support staff

- Remind staff of vision, reason we're here, the reasons we do what we do
 - Shared values and goals
 - Show appreciation – specific and timely
 - Emphasize and role model coping and wellness
 - Marathon not sprint



Resources for Staff

- Anxiety Canada
 - www.AnxietyCanada.com
 - MindShift app
 - COVID-19 resources
- Here To Help BC
 - <https://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/>
 - COVID-19 resources
- BounceBack
 - Free online/phone coaching program for mild-moderate low mood or anxiety
 - <https://bouncebackbc.ca/>
- For parents:
 - <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/parent-caregiver-guide-to-helping-families-cope-with-the-coronavirus-disease-2019>

Resources for Staff



- BCPA COVID-19 resources
 - Psychological first aid sessions to be rolled out widely
 - <https://www.psychologists.bc.ca/covid-19-resources>
- Starling Mind COVID-19 Coping Program
 - <https://info.starlingminds.com/covid19-free-mental-health>
- Dr. Nagasawa's DBT COVID-19 Coping Workbook
 - <https://www.baypsychology.ca/workshops>

Resources for Managers

- IASC Briefing note on MHPSS (see pg 6 for frontline staff)
 - <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-reference-group-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-emergency-settings/briefing-note-about>
- IFRC MHPSS guide:
 - <https://pscentre.org/?resource=mhpss-in-an-outbreak-of-novel-coronavirus-english>

Q & A

