

MANAGING FEARS AND
ANXIETY ASSOCIATED WITH
CORONAVIRUS DISEASE
(COVID-19)

Taking Care of Your Behavioural Health

Introduction

- In the event of an infectious disease outbreak, many people become anxious. Health officials may require the public to take measures to limit and control the spread of the disease.
- The measures may take the form of frequent Hand Washing or Use of Sanitizer, Social Distancing, Quarantine and Isolation.
- The government has the right to enforce laws related to public health if people within the country get sick with highly contagious diseases that have the potential to develop into outbreaks or pandemics.

Coronavirus Disease (COVID 19)

- Coronavirus disease is one of the infectious diseases causing pandemic. Many people including health staff (doctors and nurses) have become anxious and are taking measures to limit and control the spread of the disease.
- The measures taken include frequent Hand Washing with soap and water or Use of Sanitizer, Social Distancing, Quarantine, Isolation and testing of suspected cases.
- The Social Distancing, Quarantine, Isolation and testing associated with COVID -19 are making people distressed and are having psychological and mental health problems

Why COVID 19 is Triggering Mental Health Issues

The disease is causing many to:

- Mental Switch from living to survival
- Increased Health Anxiety
- Fear of infection
- Decreased Financial security
- Promotes Social withdrawal

- This seminar is to provide us with basic information about COVID and how to promote our own mental health and well being and those of our clients.
- It is provide us with tips about feelings and thoughts that people may have during and after social distancing, quarantine and isolation.
- It is to suggest referral centres

TIPS FOR SOCIAL DISTANCING, QUARANTINE, AND ISOLATION DURING AN INFECTIOUS DISEASE OUTBREAK

What Is Social Distancing?

- **Social distancing is a way to keep people from interacting closely or frequently enough to spread an infectious disease. Schools and other gathering places such as movie theaters may close and sports events and religious services may be cancelled.**

What Is Quarantine?

- Quarantine separates and restricts the movement of people who have been exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick. It lasts long enough to ensure the person has not contracted an infectious disease.

What Is Isolation?

- Isolation prevents the spread of an infectious disease by separating people who are sick from those who are not. It lasts as long as the disease is contagious.

WHAT TO EXPECT: Typical Reactions

- Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations such as an infectious disease outbreak that requires social distancing, quarantine, or isolation. People may feel:
 - Anxiety, worry, or fear related to Ones own health status
 - The health status of others whom you may have exposed to the disease

- The resentment that you and your friends and family may feel because you need to go into quarantine as a result of contact with the disease
- The experience of monitoring yourself or being monitored by others for signs and symptoms of the disease
- Time taken off from, family and friends, work and the potential loss of income and job security
- The challenges of securing things you need, such as groceries and personal care items

Other Concerns:

- Concern about being able to effectively care of others in your charge
- Uncertainty or frustration about how long you will need to remain in this situation, and uncertainty about the future
- Loneliness associated with feeling cut off from the world and from loved ones
- Anger if you think you were exposed to the disease because of others' negligence
- Boredom and frustration because you may not be able to work or engage in regular day-to-day activities

- Uncertainty or ambivalence about the situation
- A desire to use alcohol or drugs to cope
- Symptoms of depression, such as feelings of hopelessness, changes in appetite or sleeping too little or too much
- Symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), such as intrusive distressing memories, flashbacks (reliving the event), nightmares, changes in thoughts and mood, and being easily startled
- If you or a loved one experience any of these reactions for 2 to 4 weeks or more refer him/her to a psychologists.

Ways To Support Yourself During Social Distancing, Quarantine and Isolation

UNDERSTAND THE RISK

- Consider the real risk of harm to yourself and others around you.
- The public perception of risk during a situation such as an infectious disease outbreak is often inaccurate.
- Media coverage may create the impression that people are in immediate danger when really the risk for infection may be very low.

Take steps to get the facts:

- Stay up to date on what is happening, while limiting your media exposure. Avoid watching or listening to news reports 24/7 since this tends to increase anxiety and worry.
- Remember we are all affected by what they hear and see on television
- Look to credible sources for information on the infectious disease outbreak.

BE YOUR OWN ADVOCATE

- Speaking out about your needs is particularly important if you are in quarantine, since you may not be in a hospital or other facility where your basic needs are met.
- Ensure you have what you need to feel safe, secure and comfortable.
- Work with health officials if you need something to be delivered to you as needed.
- If approved by health authorities and your health care providers, arrange for your friends and loved ones to bring you newspapers and books.
- Inform health care providers of any needed medications that you are taking and ensure that you continue to receive those medications.

EDUCATE YOURSELF

- Health Care providers and health authorities should provide information on the disease, its diagnosis and treatment.
- Do not be afraid to ask questions—clear communication with a health care provider may help reduce any distress associated with social distancing, quarantine or isolation.
- Ask for written information when available
- Ask Health Care providers to obtain information in the event that you are unable to secure this information on your own

WORK WITH YOUR EMPLOYER TO REDUCE FINANCIAL STRESS

- If you are unable to work during this time, you may experience stress related to your job status or financial situation.
- Provide your employer with a clear explanation of why you are away from work

Specific Responses to Coronavirus Information

- Includes a wide range of thoughts, feelings and reactions:
 - Anxiety, worry or panic
 - Social withdrawal
 - Difficulty concentrating or sleeping
 - Overexposure to media
 - Feeling helpless or confused
 - Hyper-vigilance to your health
 - Anger
 - Feelings of loss or grief
 - Skepticism or bravado
 - Excitement, relief, curiosity

MANAGING AND COPING WITH COVID 19 INFORMATION

- Many of them are ingredients for a healthy mental and physical lifestyle:
- Get the facts: Stay informed with the latest health information from GHS website
- Keep things in perspective:
 - Limit worry and agitation by lessening the time you spend watching or listening to upsetting media coverage.
 - Take a break from watching the news and focus on the things that are positive in your life and things you have control over.

- Anxiety is an emotion that tends to seek out confirmation (esp. for those with Internal Locus of Control). While at times this can be validating, it can also intensify the emotion, leaving you feeling helpless and overwhelmed. Acknowledge your emotion with understanding and then then turn your mind to other things (thought stopping, thought diversion and substitution).
- Practice mindfulness and acceptance:
 - Focus on asking “what now” rather than “why.”
 - Practice patience with yourself and others.
 - Let things unfold and assume others are trying to do the right thing.

- Focus on rational rather than emotional responses and engage in active problem solving.
- Find out who is available to answer your questions, provide accurate information and guide you.
- Find activities that give you a sense of mastery, even simple tasks such as cooking, cleaning your room, making your bed, doing your laundry, going for a walk, checking in on a friend or practicing a new skill.
- Purposefully engage in activities that are the opposite of focusing of worry. Listen to upbeat music, watch a comedy, read a book, etc.

- Rather than dwelling in thoughts and images of hopelessness, imagine yourself coping effectively.
- Notice how you would act, what you would do or say.
- See yourself being effective.
- Think about what you might say to a friend about the current situation that would support, encourage or reassure them, and say such things to yourself.
- Practice a mindset of gratitude.
 - Spend time each day thinking about at least three things you are grateful for.
 - Picture holding the things in your open hands (if they are objects).

- Significant plans may be radically altered by the current circumstances. Try not to dwell in regret. Other rituals, forms of celebrating, ways of connecting and memorable moments may well emerge from this situation. Inside emergency is the word emerge.
- Be aware of ruminating with catastrophic thoughts and language. Something as simple as saying “that’s interesting” rather than “that’s awful” can be helpful.
- Be aware of how your body can reinforce anxiety.
- Do not stay in bed.

- Take a walk outside and notice things around you, especially nature.
- Take time to breathe deeply. Take care of a pet or plant.
- Stretch often.
- Make eye contact with others and smile.
- Be mindful of your assumptions about others. Someone who has a cough or a fever does not necessarily have coronavirus. Self-awareness is important in not stigmatizing others in our community.
- Keep connected. Maintaining social networks can help maintain a sense of normalcy and provide valuable outlets for sharing feelings and relieving stress. Keep a sense of humour.

- Utilize your thoughts to effectively manage worry.
 - For example, the WORRY CONTAINER skill is an activity in which you picture in detail a container or box with a lid that closes. Find the thing in your mind that you are stuck worrying about. Imagine moving this from your mind and placing it firmly into the container. This box will hold whatever you place in it. Close the box and firmly move it to one side, perhaps placing it on a shelf. You can go back anytime you want and take the worry out or you can leave it there, giving you space to focus on other things

Other measures and Startegies:

- Thought Stopping
- Cognitive Restructuring
- Thought Diversion /Substitution
- Relaxation techniques

TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR

- If you are in a medical facility, you may have access to health care providers who can answer your questions.
- However, if you are quarantined at home and you are worried about physical symptoms you or your loved ones may be experiencing go to the Ghana Health Service website for accurate information:

USE PRACTICAL WAYS TO COPE AND RELAX

- Relax your body often by doing things that work for you—take deep breaths, stretch, meditate or pray, or engage in activities you enjoy.
- Pace yourself between stressful activities and do something fun after a hard task.
- Talk about your experiences and feelings to loved ones and friends, if you find it helpful.
- Maintain a sense of hope and positive thinking; and consider keeping a journal where you write down things you are grateful for or that are going well.

After Social Distancing, Quarantine or Isolation

- You may experience mixed emotions including a sense of relief.
- If you were isolated because you had the illness, you may feel sadness or anger because friends and loved ones may have unfounded fears of contracting the disease from contact with you, even though you have been determined not to be contagious.
- The best way to end this common fear is to learn about the disease and the actual risk to others.
- Sharing this information will often calm fears in others and allow you to reconnect with them.

- If you or your loved ones experience symptoms of extreme stress such as trouble sleeping, problems with eating too much or too little, inability to carry out routine daily activities or using drugs or alcohol to cope, speak to a health care provider or refer.
- If you are feeling overwhelmed with emotions such as sadness, depression, anxiety or feel like you want to harm yourself, speak to a health care provider or refer.

Referral

- Individuals who feel an overwhelming worry or anxiety can seek additional professional mental health support.
- There are psychologists at Regional and some district hospitals to help you manage your fears

Reference

1. Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services (SAMHA), (2014). Taking Care Of Your Behavioral Health: Tips For Social Distancing, Quarantine & Isolation During An Infectious Disease Outbreak, HHS Publication No. SMA-14-4894, <http://www.samhsa.gov/dtac>, Atlanta USA.
2. Wilson, S. Rue, EdD. (2020). www.harvard.edu/coronavirus, Harvard University Counseling and Mental Health Services,

- Thanks