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Strategies for Coping with the Coronavirus

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(Adapted from the American Psychological Association, 2020)

The coronavirus has caused much disruption in usual daily life. Students are home from school. Many people, if they can, are working from home. Sporting events, vacations, leisure activities, religious services, and large group gatherings have been cancelled. In an effort to slow the disease's spread, public health officials are asking people to separate themselves from others through social distancing, quarantine, and isolation. Days or weeks at home with limited resources, reduced stimulation and decreased social contact can take its toll on mental health. Recommended interventions include:

Social Distancing: Keeping a safe distance (6 feet) from others and avoiding large group gatherings,

Quarantine: Avoiding contact with others, and if having been exposed, learning if you have become ill.

Isolation: Separating one with known Coronavirus, from others, to prevent further spread, until you've recovered.

People asked to stay at home will be cut off from their usual routines for at least two weeks, the estimated incubation period for the virus. As a result, stress may occur from a decrease in meaningful activity, sensory stimuli and social engagement, financial strain from being unable to work, and lack of usual coping strategies such as working out or going to religious services.

POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES ON MENTAL HEALTH:

Fear and Anxiety: Worry about yourself or your family becoming ill, obtaining food or supplies, taking time off of work or fulfilling family obligations, and trouble sleeping or focusing on daily tasks.

Depression and Boredom: Sadness or low mood from loss of work and daily routines resulting in despair or loneliness.

Anger, Frustration and Irritability: Loss of control and personal freedom may create resentment or blame of other's negligence.

Stigmatization: Judgment, ridicule, sympathy or avoidance from others who fear contracting the illness from you.

(More helpful information on the next page.)

Some people will be more vulnerable than others to these consequences. These include people with pre-existing mental health conditions, distressed health care workers, and those with disabilities who already live with special medical needs and accommodations.

IMPORTANT COPING STRATEGIES:

- 1. Limit news consumption to reliable sources:** Balance your time with reading, music, educational experiences, game or family movie night.
- 2. Create and follow a daily routine:** Engage exercise, meals, work, chores or home projects with periods of rest.
- 3. Stay virtually connected with others:** Reach out with phone calls, texting, video chats and social media.
- 4. Stay emotionally connected with family:** Have face to face conversations. Check in with each other. Share stories about your life. Talk about hopes and dreams. Reminisce with old photo albums.
- 5. Maintain a healthy lifestyle:** Attend to sleep, healthy diet, hygiene and exercise. Get outdoors. Avoid alcohol and drugs. When needed, arrange for phone or online video counseling with a qualified and experienced therapist.
- 6. Use research-based relaxation strategies:** Keep a gratitude journal. Replace negative, catastrophizing thoughts, with focus on what you can control. Practice acceptance. Download relaxation or mindfulness apps that teach deep breathing, positive imagery, and muscle relaxation exercises. Make quiet time for meditation or prayer.

When the crisis has subsided, you may have mixed feelings of relief and gratitude, frustration or anger, and personal growth including increased spirituality. You may also experience persisting anxiety, have trouble sleeping, feel a sense of loss, or notice continuing or increased substance abuse. It's normal to feel anxious but not extreme levels of distress. If you should feel enduring distress, do not hesitate to contact our office and get the help you may need with your successful recovery from this crisis.

We are in this together and together we can survive, thrive and become even more resilient than we were before it began.

With Thoughts of Healing and Recovery,

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