

How Peer Grief Helpers Can Respond to Stress During the Pandemic

SADOD

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presented by:

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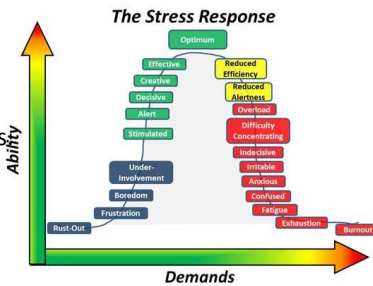
***Do you think it is easy to change?
Alas, it is very hard
to change and be different.
It means passing through the
waters of oblivion.***

- D.H.Lawrence (1971)

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What is Stress?

- Stress is a normal physical response to demands or perceived threats.
- The stress response is the body's way of protecting us.



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Three Types of Stress

Positive

Brief increases in heart rate, mild elevations in stress hormone levels.

Tolerable

Serious, temporary stress responses, buffered by supportive relationships.

Toxic

Prolonged activation of stress response systems in the absence of protective relationships.

Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University

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What is Trauma or Traumatic/Toxic Stress?

A level of stress that is so intense that it is overwhelming to manage, and results in overwhelming demands placed upon the physiological system which result in a *profound felt sense* of:

- Loss of Control
- Vulnerability
- Immobilization



The Bones in My Body – B. Mattox

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Two Key Points

The immediate effects and long-term impacts of this rapidly changing situation will not be evenly distributed.

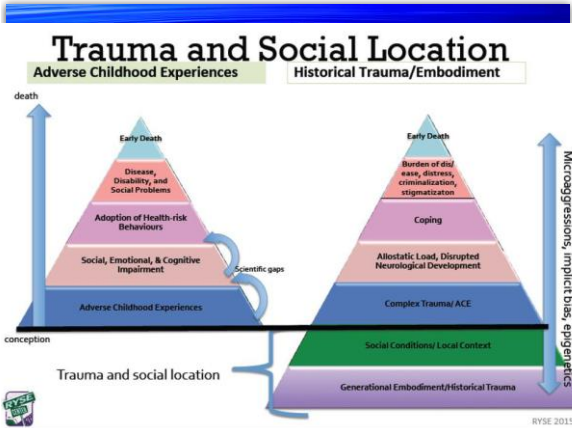
- For the millions... who were already struggling with low-wage work, lack of affordable childcare, and meeting their family's basic needs from paycheck to paycheck, the stresses are increasing exponentially.
- When unstable housing, food insecurity, social isolation, limited access to medical care, the burdens of racism, and fears related to immigration status are added, the toxic overload of adversities can also lead to increasing rates of substance abuse, family violence, and untreated mental health problems.

The most highly relevant science-based messages are urging both supportive relationships and social distancing as critical priorities.

- Prolonged physical separation is absolutely necessary to slow down the progression of a pandemic; [responsive social interaction](#) is essential for strengthening [resilience](#) in the face of adversity.

Shonkoff (2020)

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Reaction Continuums

Emotional	Shock; Sorrow; Anger; Guilt; Fear; Numbness	↔	Feeling some control of your emotions; Experiencing some positive emotions
Cognitive/Thinking	Confusion; Intrusive thoughts; Short-term memory problems; Difficulty concentrating, Mind racing	↔	Thinking and remembering as clearly as usual
Behavioral	Irritability; Difficulty sleeping; Lack of pleasure in regular activities; Quick to snap at people	↔	Acting "like yourself"
Physical	Fatigue; Exhaustion; Stomachaches; Easily startled; Body aches; Headaches	↔	No noticeable physical symptoms
Relational	Withdrawal; Fighting; Fear of being alone; Feeling obligated to interact with people	↔	Interacting with others in safe and healthy ways; Accepting support when needed
Spiritual/Meaning-Making	"Nothing matters." "Why would God do this?" "Why do I bother to do this kind of work?"	↔	Finding meaning and hope in your life

Key Principles of Trauma-Informed Care



Safety



Predictability



Control

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SAFETY - PREDICTABILITY - CONTROL

Safety

- External/Physical Safety
- Protection from harm
- Reduction of unnecessary triggers
- Internal/Emotional Safety
- Relational/Social Safety



Control

- Empowerment
- Choice
- Collaboration
- Opportunities for mastery
- Strengths-focus
- Fostering internal control
- Capacity to self and/or co-regulate
- Maintaining high expectations



Predictability

- Consistency
- Trustworthiness
- Structure and routine
- Sense of organization
- Minimizing/preparing for triggers



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Safety During C19

- Physical Safety begins with following the guidelines from credible sources
 - Washing hands; social/physical distancing
- Minimizing the harm** from things like of loss of income, delayed access to medical care (for other issues), loneliness, etc.
- Reducing unnecessary sources of toxic stress.** For example, if media/social media viewing is increasing your anxiety, consider limiting your exposure: Stick to credible sources and significantly reduce the frequency of checking social media.
- Increasing a sense of internal and emotional safety**
 - Engaging in healthy and fun self-care activities: yoga, mindfulness, living room dance parties, crafting, video games, hiking, whatever works for you.
- Maintaining and fostering relational and social safety** is perhaps the most significant determinant of how people fare psychologically both during and after a potentially traumatic experience.
 - Stay connected to your loved ones, even if physically distant.
 - Reach out to your neighbors who might be isolated.
 - Practice patience and kindness with the people you live with.

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Predictability During C19

- What are the **rituals and routines** that you/your family consistently do how can you maintain (or start) those during this time?
- What kind of **schedule** would you like to try to maintain during this time especially if you or your children are home? Discuss it with members of your household and write out a plan.
- What will help you feel as **organized** as possible in your own life? To-do lists? Setting goals?

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Control During C19

- When we **help others**, we are foremost helping ourselves. What can you do to feel like you are helping?
 - Write cards of encouragement to potentially isolated or vulnerable groups
 - letters of thanks to health care providers or first responders
 - hold or contribute to online fundraisers for those who are economically impacted, etc...)
- Is there a skill you want to learn? Another language? Playing an instrument? There's an app or a website that can help you. **Small islands of mastery** are a great way to help give you a little sense of control.
- **Give** yourself and your children **choices** (within a predictable structure) and **collaborate** around decision making.
- **Focus on** your and your family's **strengths**. What you focus on grows. Focusing on strengths can increase your sense of control in your own life as well as your sense of relational safety.

We may be vulnerable, but we are not powerless.

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Why Do We Grieve?

We cope with loss because we are wired with a set of in-born psychological processes that help us do the job. The most obvious of these is our ability to feel and express sadness.

When we feel sad, we are more likely to turn our attention inward, to reflect, take stock, and recalibrate to the reality of the loss.



Celeste Roberge – The Weight of Grief
Riverside Trauma Center

When we express sadness, we tell others that we are in pain, and that we are likely to need their care and sympathy.

Bonanno (2009)

"Beware of the stories you tell, you will be lived by them."

We don't just tell stories, stories tell us. The tales we tell hold powerful sway over our memories, behaviors and even identities. Stories are fundamental to our being.

- Meichenbaum (2012)



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Self-Care as an Ethical Obligation

“We can’t teach what we don’t know.
We can’t lead where we won’t go.”
- Malcolm X



“If you don’t live it, it won’t
come out of your horn.”
- Charlie Parker

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Self-Care The 3Rs

1) Reflection

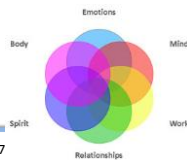
- Take time to reflect on the people you are working and living with, your level of stress, what helps and what assistance that you might need

2) Regulation

- Acknowledge and regulate your reactions
- Be aware that strong emotions are contagious
- Know what your own trigger points are and what upsets you
- Take time to calm yourself when you do get angry or hurt and ask for help and debrief when necessary

3) Relaxation

- Make time for yourself to relax and “play”
- Maintain/develop your social support system
- Maintain a sense of humor
- Be patient and realistic with yourself



Adapted from State of Victoria, Child Safety Commissioner (2007)

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