COPING WITH UNCERTAINTY IN THE WAKE OF CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Following the disruptive effects of covid-19 among them social distancing and self- quarantining that are currently dominating our daily lives, it is important that we be keen on our unique mental health needs and those of our loved ones. For instance, it is critical that we acknowledge and purpose to understand our emotions among them anxiety and fear brought about by the current situation of uncertainty that fills the entire world. No doubt covid-19 has heightened uncertainty over life, education, economy, employment, finances, relationships and of course physical, spiritual and mental health. Being at home a time like now is not exciting to many and I imagine to the students as well. For university students specifically, it was less expected that by now you would be at home in the company of your parents and siblings and not out there hassling for your daily bread or probably in campus continuing with studies. Staying at home, as this is one of the control measures of the spread of covid-19 has its own repercussions, some of which are positive and others negative.

Generally, the [uncertainty surrounding coronavirus](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/dealing-with-uncertainty.htm) has proved to be the hardest thing to handle by many. It is not known how exactly it will be impact on our future or how bad things might get with time. Consequently, this can take an emotional toll on us. Fear and worry are some of the common emotions that can leave one feeling stressed, anxious and powerless over our life contexts. It can drain you emotionally and trap you in a downward spiral of endless “what-ifs” and worst-case scenarios about what tomorrow may bring. When you find yourself a victim of this, just realize that you are not alone in this and also not powerless. As human beings we should endeavor to claim our security in order to feel safe and maintain a sense of control over our lives and our general well-being. Below are some tips that can help you go through this stressful moment successfully;

***Understand your anxiety***

It’s a frightening time. We’re in the midst of a worldwide pandemic, with cities and even entire countries shutting down. Some of us are in areas that have already been affected by coronavirus. Others are bracing for what may come. And all of us are watching the headlines and wondering, “What is going to happen next?”. Naming and understanding your source of anxiety will guide you as a person to manage it better.

***Stay informed***

It’s vital to stay informed, particularly about what’s happening in your community/country, so that you can follow the advices given to ensure you play your part in controlling the spread of the pandemic. However, be aware of the misinformation going around that end up fueling the anxiety. Critically discern what you read and watch.

***Focus on the things you can control***

There are so many things outside of our control, including how long the pandemic lasts, how other people behave, and what’s going to happen in our lives, families, communities etc. Driven by anxiety, people have responded to such by getting into an endless search mission of the Internet for answers and thinking over all the different scenarios that might happen. Remember these questions and circumstances have no definite answers and are outside of our personal control hence the strategy may not get us anywhere apart from leaving us emotionally drained, anxious and overwhelmed. Therefore, when you feel yourself getting caught up in fear of what might happen, try to shift your focus to things you can control. For example, you can’t control how severe the coronavirus outbreak is in your country or county, but you can take steps to reduce your own personal risk and those of your loved ones such as:

* *washing your hands frequently (for at least 20 seconds) with soap and water or a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.*
* *avoiding touching your face (particularly your eyes, nose, and mouth).*
* *staying home as much as possible, even if you don’t feel sick.*
* *avoiding crowds and gatherings.*
* *avoiding all non-essential shopping and travel.*
* *keeping 6 feet of distance between yourself and others when out.*
* [*getting plenty of sleep*](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/sleep/sleep-needs-get-the-sleep-you-need.htm)*, which helps support your immune system.*
* *following all recommendations from health authorities.*

***Plan for what you can***

It’s natural to be concerned about what may happen if your workplace closes, you have to stay home from school, you or someone you love gets sick, or you have to self-quarantine. While these possibilities can be scary to think about, being proactive can help relieve at least some of the anxiety. For example;

* *Write down specific worries you have about how coronavirus may disrupt your life. If you start feeling overwhelmed, take a break.*
* *Make a list of all the possible solutions you can think of. Try not to get too hung up on “perfect” options. Include whatever comes to mind that could help you get by.*
* *Focus on concrete things you can do to solve the problem or change, rather than circumstances beyond your control.*
* *After you’ve evaluated your options, draw up a plan of action. When you’re done, set it aside and resist the urge to go back to it until you need it or your circumstances significantly change.*

***Stay connected***

Remember, physical distancing is not social isolation*.*

Evidence shows that many people with coronavirus, particularly young and seemingly healthy people, don’t have symptoms but can still spread the virus. That’s why the biggest thing that most people can do right now to make a positive difference is to practice social distancing.

But social distancing comes with its own risks. Humans are social animals. We’re hardwired for connection. Isolation and loneliness can exacerbate anxiety and depression, and even impact our physical health. That’s why it’s important to stay connected the best we can and reach out for support when we need it, even as we cut back on in-person socializing. For instance;

* *Make it a priority to stay in touch with friends and family. If you tend to withdraw when depressed or anxious, think about scheduling regular phone, chat, or Skype dates to counteract that tendency.*
* *While in-person visits are limited, substitute video chatting if you’re able. Face-to-face contact is like a “vitamin” for your mental health, reducing your risk of depression and helping ease stress and anxiety.*
* *Social media can be a powerful tool, not only for connecting with friends, family, and acquaintances but for feeling connected in a greater sense to our communities, country, and the world. It reminds us we’re not alone.*
* *That said, be mindful of how*[*social media is making you feel*](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/social-media-and-mental-health.htm)*. Don’t hesitate to mute keywords or people who are exacerbating your anxiety. And log off if it’s making you feel worse.*
* *Don’t let coronavirus dominate every conversation. It’s important to take breaks from stressful thoughts about the pandemic to simply enjoy each other’s company to laugh, share stories, and focus on other things going on in our lives.*

***Take care of your body and spirit***

This is an extraordinarily trying time, and all the tried-and-true [stress management strategies](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/stress-management.htm) apply, such as eating healthy meals, getting plenty of sleep, and meditating. Beyond that, here are some tips for practicing self-care in the face of the unique disruptions caused by the coronavirus.

* ***Be kind to yourself****. Go easy on yourself if you’re experiencing more depression or anxiety than usual. You’re not alone in your struggles.*
* ***Maintain a routine as best you can****. Even if you’re stuck at home, try to stick to your regular sleep, study, meal, or work schedule. This can help you maintain a sense of normalcy.*
* ***Take time out for activities you enjoy****. Read a good book, watch a comedy, play a fun board or video game, make something new whether it’s a new recipe, a craft, or a piece of art, or even prepare a small kitchen garden for vegetables. It doesn’t matter what you do, as long as it takes you out of your worries.*
* ***Get out in nature, if possible****. Sunshine and fresh air will do you good. Even a walk around your neighborhood can make you feel better. Just be sure to avoid crowds, keep your distance from people you encounter, and obey restrictions in your area.*
* [***Find ways to exercise***](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/healthy-living/exercise-during-coronavirus.htm)*. Staying active will help you release anxiety, relieve stress, and manage your mood. While the gym and group classes are out, you can still cycle, hike, or walk. Or if you’re stuck at home, look online for exercise videos you can follow. There are many things you can do even without equipment, such as yoga and exercises that use your own bodyweight.*
* ***Avoid self-medicating****. Be careful that you’re not using alcohol or other substances to deal with anxiety or depression. If you tend to overdo it in the best of times, it may be a good idea to avoid for now.*
* [***Take up a relaxation practice***](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/relaxation-techniques-for-stress-relief.htm)*. When stressors throw your nervous system out of balance, relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, and yoga can bring you back into a state of equilibrium. Regular practice delivers the greatest benefits, so see if you can set aside even a little time every day*.

***Help others (it will make you feel better)***

At times like this, it’s easy to get caught up in your own fears and concerns. But amid all the stories of people fighting over rolls of toilet paper or lining up outside gun stores to arm themselves, it’s important to take a breath and remember that we’re all in this together. As a quote circulating in Italy reminds us: “***We’re standing far apart now so we can embrace each other later.”***

It’s no coincidence that those who focus on others in need and support their communities, especially during times of crises, tend to be happier and healthier than those who act selfishly. Helping others not only makes a difference to your community and even to the wider world at this time, it can also support your own mental health and well-being. Much of the anguish accompanying this pandemic stem from feeling powerless. Doing kind and helpful acts for others can help you regain a sense of control over your life, as well as adding meaning and purpose to it.

Above all, let us cry to our Higher Power (God) for an end to this disabling pandemic.

As a department, we have established a Telegram link to enable us reach out to the students and Staff who might be having issues that need our attention as Psychologists/counselors. (<https://t.me/joinchat/AAAAAFbwyh3PamDOK-pr7w>). You are invited to click the link and join at your pleasure. For further information, call 0722552996 (Assistant Dean of Students, LKC) or 0721754706 (Student Counsellor, LKC)

**Dean of Students Department, LKC- 5/5/2020**