

Stewart Psych Services

www.stewartpsych.com

Offering HIPAA-Compliant Telehealth Services

**Offices in Ridgewood, NJ (225 Dayton Street, 2nd Floor)
& Manhattan, NY (115 E. 92nd Street, Suite 1A)**

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Life in the Age of COVID-19

MAINTAINING THE EMOTIONAL HEALTH OF YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

Life in the Age of COVID-19

1. Identify “normal” reactions during times of crisis.
2. Learn how to recognize stress reactions in children.
3. Provide a calming home environment for your family.
4. Develop your own emotional barometer.
5. Learn techniques for managing stress during a crisis.

Symptoms of Anxiety & Distress

(aka Normal
Reactions
at Times of
Crises)

Physical: rapid breathing, rapid heartbeat, tightness in the chest, sweating, trembling hands, feeling faint, feeling wobbly, GI distress, muscle tension, blushing, feeling hot, feeling numb, restlessness, loss of appetite, overeating, insomnia, hypersomnia, fatigue

Cognitive: racing thoughts, ruminating, difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, slowed thinking, difficulty making decisions, impulsivity, disorientation to time/place

Emotional: fear, anger, agitation, worry, feeling out-of-control, self-doubt, ambivalence, feeling guilt/blame, disbelief, feeling withdrawn, sadness, apathy

Behavioral: nightmares, interpersonal conflict, impulsive behavior, violence, return to addictive behaviors

Self-Care & Coping Strategies

General Well-Being

- Eat regularly, drink plenty of fluids
- Find a way to build exercise into your day
- Get plenty of rest
- Avoid over-indulging with alcohol & caffeine
- Spend time with family and friends (virtually)
- Decrease environmental noise & clutter (i.e. limit media exposure)

Self-Care & Coping Strategies

Work Attitude

- Create a routine
- Set realistic short-term goals
- Be extra patient with yourself
- Give yourself extra time
- Take breaks when you need to
- Ask for help, prioritize and delegate

Self-Care & Coping Strategies

Decision-Making

- Do not rush – we are accident-prone at times of crisis
- Avoid risky behaviors
- Avoid major life decisions
- Become knowledgeable about what to expect as a result of trauma
- Seek professional help if problems are severe or ongoing

Stress Reactions In Children

- Reverting to earlier behaviors
- Fears
- Stomache ache
- Withdrawal/Isolation
- Passive Behavior
- Guilt
- Sadness/Tearfulness
- An Increase in Fantasy Play
- Efforts to Understand the Crisis through Play (“Ring-a-Round-a-Rosy”)
- Stubbornness
- Irritability
- Temper Tantrums
- Aggression
- Refusing to Participate in School
- Difficulty Focusing Attention
- Decrease in School Performance
- Denial of impact
- Increased risk for substance abuse, risk-taking behaviors.

Trauma Response Across Childhood Stages: Birth to Two Years

- Responsive to the emotions of those around them
- Cannot describe their feelings
- Can retain emotional memories which can emerge in play
- May be more irritable
- May cry much more
- May seek physical contact

Trauma Response Across Childhood Stages: Pre-School-Kindergarten

- May feel insecure
- Do not understand the concept of permanent loss
- Believe consequences are reversible
- Play may demonstrate an attempt to understand crises
- Fear of abandonment becomes pronounced
- Play-acting, puppets, art and story-telling are helpful.

Trauma Response Across Childhood Stages: School-Age

- Understand permanent loss
- May become preoccupied with the crises
- May want to talk about crises constantly
- School performance may decline due to poor concentration leading to guilt, anger, self-criticism
- May also describe physical complaints (somatisization)
- May benefit from art, creative writing, music, shared reading and discussion.

Trauma Response Across Childhood Stages: Pre-Teen & Teenage

- Has a strong need to appear knowledgeable and experienced
- May need to feel that their anxieties and fears are shared by peers
- May have unrealistic feelings of invulnerability which can lead to reckless behavior
- Need reassurance and may fear that their world is unsafe
- May be unable to discuss their feelings with family members
- Helpful activities may include classroom activities, discussion with peers, creative writing, art and music.

Guidelines for Helping Children

- First help yourself
- Establish a routine for your children with specific tasks or activities
- Spend extra time with children, especially before bedtime.
- Show physical affection
- Relax rules but maintain family structure and responsibility.
- Increase patience with your children and yourself.

Guidelines for Helping Children

- Be honest and open about the crisis
- Talk about event when your children raise the topic; let them describe their feelings, thoughts, observations
- Provide factual information— discussion with an adult is critical to them understanding events
- Maintain a consistent manner when discussing/playing with your children
- Talk about their thoughts/feelings by using the same time reference they use (i.e. children usually worry about today and tomorrow but not the future)
- Encourage them to draw pictures and discuss their work
- Let children know that anxiety & fear is normal

Guidelines for Helping Children

- Monitor media viewing at home. Avoid exposing your child to reminders of the crisis. Watch your conversations.
- Let children know they're safe. Let them see you take steps to secure their safety (i.e. cleaning high touch and traffic areas in the house, washing clothes, removing shoes when you enter the home). When appropriate, let them help.
- Recognize and praise responsible behavior

Guidelines for Helping Children

- Allow teenagers time alone or communicating virtually with their friends
- Allow older children to be involved in safe volunteer efforts
- Encourage your teen to delay making big decisions

Guidelines for Helping Children

- Alert teachers to problems
- Keep alert to how your children are doing by keeping a record
- Seek professional help when needed

Guidelines for Helping Children

Consider getting professional help if the following behaviors are persistent:

- *Behavior or academic problems at school*
- *Frequent angry outbursts*
- *Nightmares or sleep problem*
- *Withdrawal*
- *Physical problems*
- *Depression*
- *Excessive Worry*
- *Alcohol/drug use*
- *Dangerous or Self-injurious behavior or threats of such*

Why are Teachers & Counselors So Critical at this Time?

Children need to feel that they can discuss their concerns with people

- who listen
- who respect their opinions
- who are open to their ideas
- who empathize
- who will respect their privacy & confidentiality

Teachers are in a unique position to fulfill this role

Ideas for Teachers and Counselors

- Treat all questions with respect and seriousness
- Clarify questions and what led to them
- Answer clearly & honestly as possible in age-appropriate language
- Correct yourself if you give a wrong or incomplete answer
- Don't be afraid to make mistakes
- Be alert to signs of upset (see stress reactions in children)
- Understand that students' school performance may temporarily decline
- Maintain communication with other teachers, school personnel, and parents

Ideas for Teachers and Counselors

- Be aware of and patient with your own reactions to trauma. They can show up in the classroom as
 - increased irritability with students/staff
 - difficulty planning lessons
 - decreased concentration
 - worries about how to respond to children
 - discomfort with intense emotions
 - denial that events are impacting students

Ideas for Teachers and Counselors

- Discuss perceptions of media
- Gently help students develop a realistic understanding
- Recognize that children may need to hear information multiple times in understand
- Try to deal with questions in a calm manner
- Reinforce ideas of safety and security
- End discussions with calming events such as a moment of reflection
- Point out when someone or a group of people are being blamed or stereotyped
- In helping children deal with anger and discrimination as a societal response to fear, engage children in group activities:
 - To develop an understanding and respect for their own feelings
 - To understand the relationship between generalizations and stereotypes
 - To examine ways that people take action against bigotry

STRESS MANAGEMENT



Why is lowering stress levels so important?

Reduces anxiety, fear, and panic

Decreases chronic tension

Lowers pain and need for medication

Reduces stress-related hypertension (high blood pressure)

Speeds healing

Boosts immune system

Eases sleep disorders

Improves management of chronic illnesses such as diabetes, asthma, lung and heart disease

Improves comfort during medical procedures and reduces length of recovery

While the following techniques can be helpful, they are not intended to replace talking to a professional, nor do they constitute treatment.

Breathing Techniques

- Using your diaphragm
- Slowing down your breathing – count of 4 or 5 for each inhalation/exhalation
 - (Inhale to a count of 4, hold for 4, exhale to a count of 4, rest for 4)
- It can be helpful to add a mantra during the rest (e.g. “We’ll get through this”)
- Stop after a round of 10 breaths (or earlier if you are becoming dizzy).
- Variations
 - Imagine breathing in a color and letting it travel through your body
 - Imagine your breath travelling down one side of your body and up the other side

Inner Focus

Think of this as a stress inventory

This is also a grounding exercise

It is designed to help you become more aware of the areas of your body that tend to “hold” physical tension and stress

It includes a brief review of your current thoughts and emotions to help you detect both negative and positive patterns

In this exercise, you are not trying to change anything

You are simply an observer

Mindful Meditation

Nonjudgmental Awareness of the Present Moment, including Thoughts, Feelings and Sensations

Goal is to Increase Awareness and Acceptance

Not an Effort to Clear Your Mind or Stop Yourself

Examples Include:

- Focus on Breathing
- Focus on the Attributes of the Things Around You
- Observing Your Thoughts but Allowing Them to Pass Through Your Awareness (like a cloud)

Practice for 10-15 Minutes, eventually working up to 30 Minutes

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

- This is a centering and grounding technique
- It is also designed to teach your muscle groups the contrast between tension and relaxation so that you can more easily learn a relaxation response
- In this exercise, we will be systematically focusing on different muscle groups in the body, tightening the muscle group for a count of 4 and then releasing those muscles.
- If you have an injury in an area of the body or if you lack conscious control over that part due to a disability, just skip over that muscle group.

Guided Visualization/Imagery Exercise

Finding a Personal Place Where You Feel Calm

Natural Settings Are Ideal

Starting Exercise By Finding a Comfortable Seat, Closing Your Eyes, and Slowing Down Your Breathing

Mentally Conjure Up Images of the Place You Are In

- Focus on the Five Senses – what do you see, what colors, what textures, what do you hear, what do you feel, what do you smell, what do you taste
- Include Personal Details – a person, an animal, a song, a thought, a time in your life

Make This a Memory You Can Return To

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