

Understanding and Managing Emotions elicited by the COVID-19 Pandemic

Emotions and COVID-19

- The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting people in a lot of different ways, which can elicit a range of strong emotions
- As we cope with COVID-19, it is crucial to remember that *emotions are our allies*
- Emotions help us communicate (with ourselves and other people) and they also help guide behavior. Different emotions provide different information

What Can We Learn from ANXIETY?

- Anxiety alerts us to unexpected changes or potential threats, like the disruption COVID-19 is bringing to our lives, and it helps us prepare to manage change or threats
- *Feeling anxious right now makes a lot of sense* and is quite helpful
- Anxiety occurs when our brain notices something new and possibly dangerous. Right now, a lot of things are changing and we are not always sure if we're safe
- Anxiety can motivate people to stay home and follow guidelines recommended by experts to protect personal and public health
- Not feeling or attending to anxiety in the current COVID-19 situation is actually more concerning because it can lead people to ignore important recommendations which puts themselves and others at risk (e.g., gathering in crowded places)

What Can We Learn from SADNESS?

- Sadness can signify the loss of something important, and it helps us slow down to recover
- *Feeling sad right now makes sense*, especially if you've lost a job, cannot engage in activities that are meaningful to you, or cannot connect with other people (like friends/family)
- Noticing you feel sad can help you take a step back, think about what is important to you, and find new, creative ways to meet your needs (e.g., setting up video calls with people you care about)

What Can We Learn from ANGER?

- Anger occurs when our goals are blocked, or when something seems unfair
- *Feeling angry right now makes sense* if you cannot do things you like to do or obtain supplies you need
- Anger can inspire us to find new solutions to problems (like exercising inside), or to advocate for ourselves and others to ensure that needs are being met and people are being treated fairly

What Can We Learn from GUILT?

- Guilt lets us know we may have done something wrong and alerts us to question our behavior
- Right now, people are *feeling guilty about a lot of things they may not have felt guilty about before* (like leaving home and risking spreading the new coronavirus to others), which can be confusing
- This guilt can be helpful because it tells us to slow down and ask ourselves whether we did something wrong. If we did, guilt motivates us to change our behavior. For example, we might begin following the recommendations of public health experts in order to protect the safety and wellbeing of others

What if emotions feel too strong or overwhelming? (See other side)



What Can You Do if Your Emotions Become Overwhelming?

Although emotions provide helpful information and it makes sense to be experiencing some or all of them in the context of a public health threat like COVID-19, they might also become overpowering and make it difficult to think about anything else, or do what we need or want to be doing.

If this happens, consider using a quick mindfulness tool:

Step 1

- Take a breath.

Step 2

- Observe what you are thinking, feeling physically, and doing right now. Be as specific as possible. Write it down.
- *What am I thinking right now?* _____
- *What do I feel in my body right now?* _____
- *What am I doing right now/what do I have the urge to do?* _____

Step 3

- Ask yourself what would be effective for you to do right now.
- *What would be most effective/helpful to do right now?* _____

Step 4

- Turn your attention to what you need to be doing. Make a list of steps that will help you do what you need to do and take the first step.

****BONUS TIP: If you are finding that these steps are extra hard to do, pause and try to get distance from your thoughts by starting every sentence with "I am having the thought..."**

How do you feel?



That makes sense! Each emotion gives us important information and helps us act in a way that meets our needs, or the demands of a situation.



- *What information is anxiety giving you?*
- Alerts to threat
- Motivates us to wash our hands or stay home and follow expert guidelines

- *What information is sadness giving you?*
- Loss of something important
- Helps us step back and find new ways to meet our needs (e.g., video calls to friends)

- *What information is anger giving you?*
- Goals are blocked or something is unfair
- Helps us find creative solutions (e.g., exercise inside) or advocate for self/others

- *What information is guilt giving you?*
- We may have done something wrong that may have hurt others
- Helps us evaluate our behavior and change it if needed so we can protect others

Although emotions are helpful, they also can become overwhelming.
Are your emotions getting in the way of you doing what you need or want to do?

No

I am doing things I need/want to do, and/or my emotions are not bothering me

Keep listening to your emotions and allow them to help guide your behavior

Yes

It's hard to focus and/or I'm stuck or really upset

Try this exercise

- Step 1: Take a breath
- Step 2: Observe what you are thinking, feeling physically, and doing right now. Be as specific as possible
- Step 3: Ask yourself what you need to be doing right now
- Step 4: Turn your attention to what you need to be doing. Take the first step towards what you need to be doing