

Strategies to Navigate Stress and Build Resilience During COVID-19

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If you are in an emergency situation, you should do one of the following:

Call 911.

Go directly to an emergency room.

Call your doctor or therapist for help

Today's presenter

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Ready and Resilient Subject Matter
Expert

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Objectives

Build optimism and positive emotions

Manage counterproductive thinking

Practice mindfulness

Rethink stress

When to you use these skills

When you're experiencing counter-productive thoughts

Your mind starts wandering to all the 'what ifs' with returning to work, being exposed to a COVID-19+ person or what will happen if the tension at home continues to rise.

When your thoughts are overly negative, causing you to think things are out of control or going to end in a worst-case scenario (e.g. "I can't do this anymore" or "I'm not ready to go back to work").

When your emotions are undermining your resilience

You are on the frontlines of the pandemic and you find you are so anxious and/or overwhelmed by the end of the day you feel completely helpless, distraught, or run down.

You notice you are more irritable and find yourself feeling angry on a daily basis or you are feeling disconnected from those you love.

When you notice your behaviors aren't in line with who you'd like to be

You find yourself more likely to get into an argument with a spouse or loved one.

Your fuse is significantly shorter with your children and you find yourself yelling on a daily basis.

You are having a hard time feeling motivated, getting out of bed or sticking with your normal routine.

Optimism & Positive Emotions

Build optimism and positive emotions

Barbara Fredrickson & Robert Emmons

OPTIMISM

Research shows optimists

- Are happier and have less depression
- Are healthier (fewer illnesses, faster recovery, live longer)
- Are seen as better leaders
- Have stronger relationships
- Perform better under pressure
- Are more successful in school and work

POSITIVE EMOTIONS

Research shows positive emotions

- Help us feel more calm (e.g. faster cardiovascular recovery)
- Help us think more creatively (e.g. diversify the types of thoughts we have and our ability to integrate diverse, complex material)
- Helps us build more personal resources (e.g. relationships, skills and knowledge)

Leverage positive emotions

Counterproductive response

Notice if your brain starts to runaway with 'what ifs' or if you start to experience high levels of worry, anxiety or stress.

Positive emotion strategy

Preplan a strategy to give your brain and body an intentional boost of these benefits.

Refocus on the problem

Think of what is most likely to occur and plan to deal with the outcomes. If you have no control over the problem, plan to deal with the emotions you are experiencing.

Three Good Things

Name, journal or discuss three good things that have happened each day. Don't stop there! Reflect on why each of these items made your list. Think about what the good thing means to you, why it happened or how someone in your life contributed to the good thing. For example:

My spouse brought me Starbucks on his way home.

Reflection: I'm really grateful my spouse took time to stop by Starbucks even though they had a long day at the office. They remembered my favorite drink and it was a sweet surprise. The coffee was delicious and gave me the boost I needed to get through the rest of the day.

The weather was great and I was able to take my dog out for a long walk.

Reflection: I felt so much more relaxed after spending some time outside in the fresh air. I also really proud of myself for taking an hour or so out of my day to ensure I'm still getting exercise. I also love being able to see my dog swim in the lake and it's been rewarding training her to walk next to me on the leash.

I spoke to my best friend on the phone for an hour.

Reflection: I am grateful that my friend took time to check in on me. She asked me about a couple of my work projects and how my preparation was going for the move. I got to hear about her work in the lab, as she is an engineer working on COVID-19 related efforts. It reminds me of how proud I am to be her friend and how grateful I am to all the essential employees on the frontlines.

Research benefits of naming three good things on a daily basis

Better health, better sleep and feeling calm | Lower depression and greater life satisfaction
More optimal performance | Better relationships

Managing Counterproductive Thinking

Air technique

AWARE

Identify triggers in advance; notice counterproductive thoughts in the moment

INTERRUPT

Physical cue, deep breath or positive emotion strategy

REPLACE

Pre-plan replacement thoughts or shift to a more productive thought in the moment

Practice Mindfulness

What is mindfulness?

Jon Kabat-Zinn; Matt Killingsworth

- The practice of mindfulness is the ability to pay careful attention to what you are thinking, feeling and sensing in the present moment without judging those thoughts and feelings as good or bad.
- When you notice that your mind is wandering, instead of judging your thoughts, embrace uncomfortable thoughts/ emotions as a part of life and return to the present moment.
- Mind Wandering - 47% of the time, people are thinking about something other than what they are currently doing (e.g. worrying about the future, dwelling on the past). We are less happy when our mind wanders, even when we are thinking about something “positive.”
- Countless studies link mindfulness to benefits like better health, lower anxiety and greater resilience to stress.

The following techniques will help us re-focus a wandering mind back to the present moment. The more you practice these techniques, the easier it will be to remain present.

Practicing mindfulness: 3 strategies to try

THOUGHT LOG

When you notice your mind is wandering, write down the thoughts that keep you from staying present focused.

Journal the thoughts that are causing your mind to wander. No need to judge the thoughts, just get them on paper.

The log can help you become more aware of certain situations that really test your mindfulness.

BODY SCAN

Deliberately checking in with your body. Where is there tension? Where are you able to release tension? How shallow or deep are your breaths?

You can also incorporate mindful breathing into this exercise.

Take deep breaths and pay attention to how your lungs expand and contract, the temperature of the air as you inhale/exhale and any changes in tension in your body.

PRESENT FOCUS

Whatever you are doing, do it with awareness.

For example: cooking and stirring the pot, brushing your teeth, taking a shower, etc.

Learn to immerse yourself fully in the present moment (see activity on next slide).

Practice mindfulness: 3x3 Grounding exercise

3 THINGS I CAN SEE

I can see the tree outside the window

I can see the dog laying on the floor

I can see the coffee mug on my desk

3 THINGS I CAN HEAR

I can hear the television show music

I can hear my kids playing in the next room

I can hear the air conditioning humming

3 THINGS I CAN FEEL

I can feel the cold floor underneath my feet

I can feel the weight of my phone in my hands

I can feel my watch against my wrist

Rethink Stress

What is your current stress mindset?

Benefits of the Stress Response/ Dr. Kelly McGonigal

Stress is harmful

The effects of stress are negative and should be avoided

People with this mindset tend to:

Distract themselves from the stress instead of dealing with it

Focused on getting rid of stress (may turn to alcohol or other substances)

Withdraw their energy and attention from the stressor

More likely to become depressed over the following decade

Stress is helpful

The effects of stress are positive and should be utilized

People with this mindset tend to:

Accept the stressful event and plan a strategy to deal with the source

Be less depressed & have more energy

Be more satisfied with their lives

Have fewer health problems

Be happier and more productive at work

Have greater confidence in ability to cope with challenges

Find meaning in difficult setbacks

The benefits of the stress response

Dr. Kelly McGonigal

Challenge response

A boost in energy and increase in your ability to focus. You feel courageous, confident, motivated and are able to rise to the challenge.

Tend and befriend response

Increased empathy for others and a sharpened sense of intuition. You are more likely to trust others and courageously help or protect others you care about.

Learn and grow

After a stressful event, you experience strong emotions and/or mixed emotions with a desire to make sense of what happened. You replay/analyze the experience in your mind or talk to others about it.

Rethink your stress mindset

Bring to mind a recent experience you would describe as stressful.

E.g. a tough shift at work, a difficult conversation with a loved one, a financial set-back, etc.

Look at the different benefits of the stress response on the previous slide, were any of those elements present during or after the stressful event?

Take a moment to describe, in writing, what elements of the stress response you saw

Discuss your thoughts with a colleague, friend or loved one

The next time you experience stress

Acknowledge the stress when you experience it.

Welcome the stress - it is a natural response to something you care about.

Shift thoughts of “irritation” to thoughts of “meaning.”

Journal about how daily activities you may find stressful are meaningful to you/aligned with your values.

Resources

Magellan Healthcare COVID-19 Response

Web page: [Click here for Magellan Healthcare COVID 19 site/](#)

Continuously updated resources for our communities, clients, members and providers

- Trusted sources for COVID-19 information

- Videos, webinars and articles on coping with change, emotions, uncertainty stress, etc.

- Magellan Mind Your Mental Health resources for mental health awareness and education

- Virtual recovery meetings

- Magellan Crisis Resources

- Information on Magellan product and service solutions

- Magellan client and provider updates

Contact your medical or therapy provider for support

Reach out to your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for resources to enhance emotional wellness

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