COVID-19: Supporting Students’ (and Our Own) Mental & Emotional Health & Well-Being

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What to Expect: Individual & Collective Grief

Acceptance  Denial

↑ GRIEF

Depression  Anger

Bargaining
What to Expect: Stages of Grief

Denial – Shock; Avoidance; Disorientation; “This is not really happening!”

Anger, Anxiety, & Fear

- Anger about imposed disruptions/restrictions and loss of agency/control
- Anger towards decision makers (politicians, health authorities, the university) & perceived source(s) of pandemic (China, Asians, Asian-Americans)
- Health & safety concerns for ourselves and others
- Worry about academics, internships, job market, finances, etc.

Bargaining – negotiating to change or circumvent the reality of the situation (“If I social distance for two weeks, this will all go away.”)

Depression

- Sadness about abrupt and unexpected losses (milestones, celebrations, future plans, relationships, sense of safety, money, etc.)
- Loneliness, Boredom, Hopelessness, and Helplessness

Acceptance – Reconciliation; Meaning Making; Pivoting; Planning; ➔ Resiliency/Growth
What to Expect: Anticipatory Grief

Uncertainty about duration and implications of pandemic.

Uncertainty about what the future holds.

Sense of foreboding & apprehension.

Loss of safety.
“The five stages of grief are tools to help us frame and identify what we may be feeling. But they are not stops on some linear timeline in grief. Not everyone goes through all of them or in a prescribed order.”

-Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler from *On grief and Grieving*
Students Who May be More Vulnerable

- Students with pre-existing mental and behavioral health concerns, such as anxiety, depression and substance abuse/dependence.
- Graduating seniors who are grieving the abrupt loss and disruption of their anticipated "senior experience."
- Asian and Asian-American students who may be experiencing sinophobic and anti-Asian bias, stigmatization, discrimination, prejudice, stereotyping, etc.
- International students due to travel-related restrictions and potentially extended separations from family and friends.
- Students who experience being in school and on campus as protective factors.
- Students who struggle with loneliness and social isolation.
- Students who are returning to family or home environments that may compromise their mental and emotional health.
- Low-income students who may not have secure housing, food, Wi-Fi, or other essential resources for online and remote instruction.
Strategies for Coping & Protecting Mental Health

**Practice Self-Compassion**

- Be kinder, gentler and more patient with ourselves rather than judgmental, punitive or harsh.
- Recognize and accept that imperfection and vulnerability are inevitable and part of the human experience.
- Be flexible with expectations and goals.
- Set reasonable boundaries for ourselves and with others.

**Limit & Monitor Social Media & News Consumption**

- Reduces risk for vicarious trauma.
- Increases likelihood that our emotional & behavioral responses are proportional to actual rather than hypothetical or sensationalized situations.
- Stay informed, but not be flooded or overwhelmed.

**Sustain Social & Relational Connections**

- “Social distancing” involves “physical distancing” not relational or emotional distancing.
Social Distancing ≠ Social Disconnection

NETFLIX PARTY
Watch Netflix in sync with friends
Strategies for Coping & Protecting Mental Health

- **Maintain Reasonable Structure & Routine**
- **Attend to Basic Needs** (sleep, nutrition, exercise, etc.)
- **Gratitude** – research demonstrates that practicing being thankful enhances resiliency, happiness and well-being; counterbalances negative news
- **Accept Vulnerability** - acknowledge, lean into and process negative emotions rather than denying, neglecting or suppressing them; healthy distractions, however, are ok as long as we return to the feelings; embrace uncertainty and impermanence
- **Get Outside** (while maintaining physical distancing)
- **Strengthen Self Care Practices** - exercise, yoga, reading, journaling, art, video games, movies, cooking, music, etc.
- **Internal Locus of Control** – focus on what you can control, rather than what you cannot control
Things I Can Control
(I will focus on these things)

My positive attitude
How I follow CDC recommendations
My own social distancing
My kindness and grace

Finding fun things to do at home
Turning off the news
Limiting my social media

Things I Can’t Control

If others follow the rules of social distancing
Predicting what will happen
Other people’s motives
The amount of toilet paper at the store
How long this will last
How others react
Mindfulness Meditation

- Reduces anxiety & “fight or flight” response by de-escalating autonomic nervous system arousal/activation.
- Promotes moment to moment awareness of internal experiences (feeling, thoughts, bodily sensations, etc.) while decreasing over-identification with those experiences.
- Cultivates equanimity or the mental capacity to relate to experiences non-reactively and with evenness, calmness and composure.
- Promotes living and being in the present moment.

Try a free audio meditation
Mindfulness Meditation

“If you are depressed, you are living in the past. If you are anxious, you are living in the future. If you are at peace, you are living in the present.”

-Lao Tzu
Recommended Mindfulness Resources

- **The Best Meditation Apps of 2019**: The Mindfulness App • Headspace • Calm • buddhify • Sattva • Stop, Breathe & Think • Insight Timer • 10% Happier • Breethe • Omvana • Simple Habit • Meditation & Relaxation Pro (https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/top-meditation-iphone-android-apps)

- **Koru Mindfulness for College Students**
When to Seek Professional Help, Support & Consultation

- **Persistent** sadness, anxiety, anger, hopelessness, worthlessness, loss of interest in pleasurable activities, and/or feelings of being overwhelmed.
- Significant impairments or changes in functioning, such as sleep, getting out of bed, appetite, concentration, and/or hygiene.
- Impulsive, reckless or risky behaviors (substance abuse, self-injury, etc.)
- Thoughts or expressions about death, dying and/or suicide
Loyola University Resources

- Counseling Center
- Academic Advisors/Mentors
- Campus Ministry
- Dean of Students Office
- Each Other

https://www.loyola.edu/department/counseling-center
Off Campus Resources

- **Grassroots Suicide Hotline**
  800-422-0009

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**
  800-273-TALK (8255)

- **Crisis Text Line**
  Text HOME to 741741