

Guidelines to Cope with Stress and Anxiety in the Present Situation

The novel corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic presently is a situation that calls for vigilance and all of us, including our teachers and students have been advised to remain at home so as to maintain social distancing and stop the chain of virus spread. It is affecting individuals not only physically but also psychologically. The corona virus (COVID-19) outbreak may result in stress for a lot of individuals including students, teachers and parents as the pandemic has caused strong emotions such as sadness, fear, anxiety, feeling of helplessness, uncertainty, loss of interest and hopelessness among others. Such changes are understandable in the face of this sudden outbreak as it has resulted in an unexpected change in their daily life activities (e.g., going to school, meeting friends, socialising, going out with family, disruption/uncertainty about examination, future admission, career, travel plans, etc.). The demand of the situation for social distancing and self-isolation also results in individuals becoming stressed.

Some emotions, feelings and reactions generally felt by people experiencing stress are:

- (1) Negative thoughts
- (2) Anxiety, worry, fear
- (3) Sadness, tearfulness, loss of interest in usual enjoyable activities
- (4) Frustration, irritability, or anger
- (5) Restlessness or agitation
- (6) Feeling helpless
- (7) Feeling disconnected from others
- (8) Difficulty in concentrating
- (9) Trouble relaxing or sleeping
- (10) Physical signs such as stomach upset, fatigue, uncomfortable sensations

It is therefore important to be mindful to the wellbeing of everybody around us and to take constructive action to help students, teachers and parents to cope, handle, and relieve stress and anxiety.

Strategies for Students to Cope with Stress and Anxiety

- **Try to have a routine:** Maintaining a routine is the first thing that is compromised in stressful situations. It may be simple enough; not having a fixed time to bathe, have food, sleep, etc. After all, it does not matter. Or does it? It must be remembered that maintaining a routine helps to create discipline and can have a positive effect on your thoughts and feelings. There are ways to stay healthy and develop new routines: create a list of activities which you want to do. These can relate to both studies and fun activities (e.g., try to give time to those areas of study which require more focus and time, playing/trying new indoor games, starting a new hobby, sharing daily household work, solving puzzles, develop puzzles/quizzes related to different subjects, general knowledge, etc., start reading a book, organising/cleaning/arranging clothes of yourself and helping your brothers and sisters to do the same, physical exercises, learn to cook new kinds of dishes and serve them to your parents and siblings, play an instrument, learn a language, learn how to sew, gardening, observing birds, trees, stars etc and relating them to the relevant subjects – geography, science, social science, etc.).

Prepare a plan for daily activities and attempt to be consistent in following it as much as possible

- **Focus on your ‘self’ and recognise your feelings:** We have been trying to fit so many things in the daily time schedule, such as, school, studies, homework, examinations, coaching, etc., that we are not able to take out time for ourselves. It is important to recognise your feelings and acknowledge that it is okay to feel what you are going through as everyone is feeling the same way. The present time at home needs to be seen as an opportunity to allow yourself time to *reflect* on what you have been doing in your life for yourself and for others, which aspects you would like to change, what kind of effort/thinking/action it would require from your side. Try to *observe*, i.e., become aware of your sensations and express what you are feeling. Write down your reflections about what you observed in yourself, did these help you to

understand yourself better? Try to maintain a daily chronicle of your activities and reflections.

Become aware of your thoughts, feelings and actions

- **Stay connected:** As social beings, connecting ourselves with friends and family brings a sense of comfort and stability. Receiving support and concern from others has a powerful impact on our emotional wellbeing and in helping us to cope with challenges. To deal with the present situation and resultant stress there is a need to create a sense of “we” feeling. We in present times have the advantage of technology that has made it possible to be connected globally through phones, mobiles, emails, face book; Skype, Zoom, Whatsapp, etc., are some ways to connect with people. Use these mediums to talk with others, know about their concerns, thoughts and feelings and share your feelings and viewpoints with others. There are many ways we can use technology to stay connected such as:
 - ❖ Call, text, or video-chat with friends and family
 - ❖ Share quick, easy and nutritious recipes
 - ❖ Start a virtual book or movie club
 - ❖ Schedule a workout together over video chat
 - ❖ Share your understanding of a topic, equation, experiment, etc., with others in an online group or peer forum.

Remember social distancing does not mean social disconnection. Its only absence of physical connect, you can still be connected with your friends and family—in your thoughts and emotions.

- **Inculcating positive thinking:** In a situation like the present one, where there is uncertainty, it is normal for students to feel anxious and have negative thoughts. The key to avoid, manage and reduce stress is positive attitude. Never lose hope, begin from your own self and pass it on to all around you. Be persistent in keeping positive thoughts by asking yourself some questions, such as:

- (1) What are the things which I am supposed to do to control the situation?
- (2) Am I over-thinking about the pandemic?
- (3) What strategies have helped me in the past to cope with challenging situations?
- (4) What is the helpful or positive action that I can take now at home?
- (5) How are others (particularly elders – parents, teachers) dealing with the present situation?

Exercise caution on negative thoughts and indulge in more and regular physical movements within home

- **Take care of your body:** Eating healthy and well-balanced diet is important for our body and mind. As students you might have received training in school on meditation and yoga. Now is the best time to start practicing it daily for building better mental and physical health. Fix a time to do it regularly once a day. Do some form of physical activity like aerobics, stretch exercises, yoga *asanas*, deep breathing, dance, etc. Also drink plenty of water and get enough (6-7 hours) sleep every day. This will give energy, boost up the immune system and keep spirits high. This in turn will help to release the stress and anxiety.

Healthy mind is in a healthy body. This is the mantra of well-being.

- **Be informed and updated:** Do not act in a manner that you become an agent in spreading rumours. Take appropriate caution to pass on messages as sometimes these are not based on authentic information. It is vital to stay informed and updated and listen to trustworthy media sources. Constant monitoring of news and social media updates may lead to anxiety. To help reduce fear and anxiety, limit your media consumption to a specific time to listen to news.

Set restriction around news and social media

- **Contribute towards wellbeing of all:** The interdependence and existence of all living beings need to be acknowledged and respected. Helping people who are old, vulnerable and in need of care and help can promote a sense of hope and meaning in life. Showing love and care towards your family and friends can boost up your sense of purpose in life. Some ideas could include; ensuring that people who are providing essential services are respected, delivering a food items, etc. to old, needy people in your neighbourhood, feeding birds, stray dogs, sending message of encouragement, positivity, etc.

Become an active member of the ecosystem to ensure existence of all beings

Guidelines for Teachers to Cope with Stress and Anxiety

The present situation of outbreak of the corona virus has led to restrictions on our social life and put a stop on our daily routine. To handle the situation the suggested measures; self-isolation and distancing ourselves from others are to be practiced, which is not our natural or normal behaviour. Therefore, this has several consequences. We may experience a lack of control over life; feel helpless, worried, angry, sad, restless or irritated through the days. This can be emotionally exhausting leading to feeling weak emotionally (which may not be our normal emotional self).

As teachers we are responsible not just for ourselves but are role models for our students and for society at large. Therefore, we need to know how to deal with the stressful times and help ourselves and others in the process. Some of the ways to cope with the feelings associated with such forced social isolation during a pandemic are:

- **Take a proactive approach:** Accept and help others (students, parents, colleagues) to accept that the present times are difficult. Also, it is necessary to control the emotional thoughts of despair and reassure that since medical and research measures are being taken,

hence times will change for better. Create a plan for yourself. This will help give you a sense of purpose and progress both in your personal and professional life. Prepare a daily timetable or routine. Ensure variety in the schedule such as work, leisure, exercise, learning, etc. Learn something new that sparks your intrinsic motivation and curiosity.

- **Stay connected:** Advances in mobile technology will help to stay connected through calls, text, Whatsapp, email, etc. Use this time to connect with people, whom you have not been able to connect due to distance, lack of time, etc. Sharing concerns with trusted others have significant positive psychological benefits. Therefore, try to contribute to a sense of togetherness by sharing your feelings and helping others to cope with similar emotions that you too are experiencing. Utilise the additional time available at home to reconnect and strengthen relationships within the family.
- **Focus on your health:** Quarantine and isolation are stressful, and stress weakens our immune system. Hence, being proactive about staying healthy becomes even more important. Stick to regular meals with the correct nutritional variety and avoid snacking. Anxiety can sometimes prompt us to comfort eat, so we need to manage these urges. Daily exercise will help regularise sleep patterns. All these boost our psychological health. Maintain healthy sleep habits. The negative impact of sleep disruption on mood is already well-known. Without the structure of having to get to school, college or the workplace, it can be easy to fall into unhealthy sleep habits like going to bed late and getting up late. However, this may be detrimental in later days. So, it will be useful to scheduling a balanced range of activities in our everyday by including physical exercise and engaging in pleasant and relaxing activities. This will help with getting quality sleep. Preparing balanced and nourishing meals for yourself and family members is an important aspect for maintaining good health.
- **Reflect and connect to yourself:** Take time to engage in observing your surroundings (at home and immediate nature) by identifying the smells, textures and visuals. This will help to sooth our anxious minds. Self-care also means maintaining boundaries such as refusing visitors, reducing unnecessary demands, and saying “no”. In our

otherwise hectic everyday schedule, we had difficulty in maintaining self-care schedule. Take the opportunity to take up any such activity which will help you to connect with your own self - meditation, yoga, walking, baking, reading, etc. Think of the small changes which you can bring in your life.

- **Manage your media time:** The information received through various social media may make you feel overwhelmed and confused. Hence, even though staying digitally active in present times is almost a necessity, yet it is important to carefully choose news and media sources. Choose one or two well-informed sources such as the Government of India's Corona virus (Covid-19) Helpdesk and WHO and set times during the day to check for updates. Restrict consumption of news, particularly on social media. Depend on traditional national media with direct lines to the trustworthy medical decision-makers when accessing news. Use social media platforms meaningfully to connect with people (friends, family, students, colleagues, etc.) rather than passing on messages.

Guidelines for Parents to Cope with Stress and Anxiety

The primary role of parents now is to keep their children well and that means looking after their emotional well-being as well as their physical health. Rather than worrying that children are not doing enough school work, parents should view the enforced break as an opportunity for some student-led, individualised learning, which most schools struggle to offer. Parents can ask their children to write down all the different things that they could do during this time to learn, do and experience. It can be anything-watering plants, developing a reading habit, leaning to cook, painting, playing music, etc.

- **Help your children to develop life skills:** One way in which parents can help even young children to develop life skills while they are at home is to empower them to help with housework or cooking. It is not necessary that everything around their life should be based on academics only. Now, parents have an opportunity to connect with their children and developing in them a sensibility to understand the

curriculum of life. From learning to make a cup of tea to help in doing daily chores, a student would be able to feel that connection even in the moment of isolation.

- **Understand your anxiety:** As a parent, the uncertainty surrounding corona virus can be the hardest thing to handle. One doesn't know how exactly one would be impacted. Instead of remaining in confusion, parents can note down in points as to what are the exact things that are making them anxious. It can be study loss of your child, academic worries, etc. After contemplating about them, parents can have a clearer idea to understand their source of anxiety.
- **Avoid fake news and superstitions:** Parents can adhere to dependable sources such as Government of India's Corona virus (COVID-19) Helpdesk and World health Organisation (WHO). They can move away from checking the news if they feel overwhelmed and should also be careful about what they share through social media platforms.
- **Focus on the things they can control:** In this scenario of global pandemic, many things are outside our control like how long the pandemic would last and what is going to happen in our community, etc. Focusing on things which are out of control can make one feeling drained, overwhelmed, and anxious. As a parent, one can help in reducing the personal risk by asking their student to wash their hands and doing it themselves too at least for 20 seconds or using a sanitizer with alcohol content not exceeding 60 per cent. Apart from maintaining hand hygiene, avoid touching your face especially your eyes, nose, and mouth. Stay at home, avoid crowds, and maintain six feet distance between yourself and others when out. Most importantly, get deep sleep.
- **Physical exercise:** Our body is meant for movement. There are innumerable benefits by doing physical exercises such as release of endorphins (feel good hormones), proper blood circulation, and feeling light, etc. Stretching, alternate toe-touching along with jumping jacks for 10 minutes can have a drastic effect in reducing stress and anxiety.
- **Yoga and meditation:** The word Yoga means union. When body and mind is balanced, when one reaches a state of unwavering attention,

one has reached a state of yoga. This is the time which can be utilised to performing yoga yourself and also to teach your children. Grounding yourself in the present moment can help to reach that union. One effective technique is to pay attention to your breath. *Prana* is the key here. Paying attention to inhaling and exhaling can help in attaining the state of *Dhyana*—getting in touch with the inner stillness.

- **Paying attention to diet:** One of the ways to cope with stress and anxiety can be stress eating and taking in excess of calories by indulging in deep fried, carbohydrate rich and sweet foods. This can make one feel anxious as nourishing aspect of food is eliminated through such indulgence. As a result, your immunity can take a toll. This is the right time to understand and to make your children understand that immunity is maintained not from the outside-it is not that using sanitizers will keep your immunity in check. To have a stronger immunity means to eat healthy, i.e., eating fruits and vegetables and having right proportion of carbohydrates, proteins and fats.
- **Take care of your body and spirit:** Apart from eating healthy meals, getting plenty sleep and meditating, one should not forget to practice self-care in this situation. Be kind to yourself, maintain a routine, wake up early in the morning, and take time out for activities you enjoy, avoid self-medicating, and be a calming influence in the life of your children and those around you.

In stressful times such as the present one, as a parent or teacher do remember that the social distancing and isolating of self is not only for our own good but also for all those around us and for everyone who is closely or remotely connected with our life and living. Help your children and students to understand this and encourage them to feel in the same way.