



# SELF HELP MANUAL FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF HEALTHCARE WORKERS DURING COVID 19



Department of Psychiatry

ALL INDIA INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL SCIENCES  
(AIIMS), Patna

### **Contributors**

1. Meha Jain, Child Psychologist, Department of Paediatrics, AIIMS, Patna
2. Nidhi Joseph Varghese, Clinical Psychologist, Department of Psychiatry, AIIMS, Patna
3. Dr. Pankaj Kumar, Additional Professor & HOD, Department of Psychiatry, AIIMS, Patna
4. Dr. Rajeev Ranjan, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry, AIIMS, Patna
5. Dr. Sambhu Prasad, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry, AIIMS, Patna

### **Correspondence**

Department of Psychiatry,

Phulwarisharif, AIIMS, Patna- 801507

Ph.no.- 8544423407

Email id- aiimspatnapsychiatry@gmail.com

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अखिल भारतीय आयुर्विज्ञान संस्थान पटना  
ALL INDIA INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL SCIENCES PATNA



### Message from Director

*The second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about significant challenges for the health care system and the frontline workers. The health care workers (HCWs) have been working tirelessly while facing difficult and grim situations daily. It is understandable that with this second wave of the pandemic, there has been significant psychological distress amongst the frontline workers. In this scenario, it has become necessary, that we prioritize and strategize on improving the mental health conditions of the health care workers at the frontline.*

*I appreciate and congratulate the timely initiative taken by the Department of Psychiatry, AIIMS, Patna on understanding the current psychological need of the frontline workers and developing a practical and simple Self Help guide with helpful tips and techniques. I hope this manual will help all the HCWs in maintaining Their Mental & Psychological well-being in this pandemic.*

Dr(Prof.) PRABHAT KUMAR SINGH  
DIRECTOR, AIIMS PATNA

**Dr. Umesh Kumar Bhadani, MD**

Dean & Head of Department

Dept. of Anaesthesiology,

Phulwarisarif, AIIMS, Patna

Mob.No. : 8969169123

(O) - 0612-2451086

Email : drumeshb@aiimspatna.org



Date: 05 June, 2021



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### Message

*It gives me immense pleasure to write about "Self-help manual for Psychological well-being of healthcare workers during Covid-19" manual. This is very informative and of great use to health workers.*

*Psychological aspect is an important aspect of treatment for Covid-19, both for patients and health care workers. Health care workers are also human being with feelings and aspirations. This manual will act as a milestone in dealing with psychological aspect of Covid-19.*

*I wish Department of Psychiatry, AIIMS Patna a bright future and a comfortable road ahead.*

*U. Bhadani*

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## 1. Introduction: The Psychological Impact of COVID-19 Duty on Frontline Health Care Workers(HCWs)

COVID-19 is currently on its second wave in India. While the first wave came with quite a few challenges, the second wave has been overwhelming due to the sheer numbers of people affected, including healthcare workers (HCWs). There is a shortage and lack of resources experienced at various levels of care provided. It is natural then that in this scenario, the frontline healthcare worker which includes medical and non-medical staff are overtaxed and burdened.

The HCWs cannot do their jobs effectively unless they form emotional barriers to protect themselves from the stress and trauma. It is akin to soldiers arming up for battle so that they can continue to do their job despite the death and devastation around them. The HCWs may not be able to process the misery surrounding them while they are in intense environments and caring for patient but this can later on have a negative impact on their mental health.

Having to refuse or turn down people due to lack of resources, unable to give the best care due to the higher load of patients, getting caught into potential moral injury exposure (defined as profound psychological distress which results from actions, or the lack of them, which violate one's moral or ethical code) have a higher rate of mental stress and mental disorders and resorting to denial (defence mechanism) towards the current psychological impact of an outbreak resulting in heightened risk of persistent stress and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms. The prevalence of depression, anxiety and stress in the Hospital staff caring for the COVID-19 patients is high.

Thus, being aware about the symptoms. Managing them and seeking help at the right time becomes an utmost priority

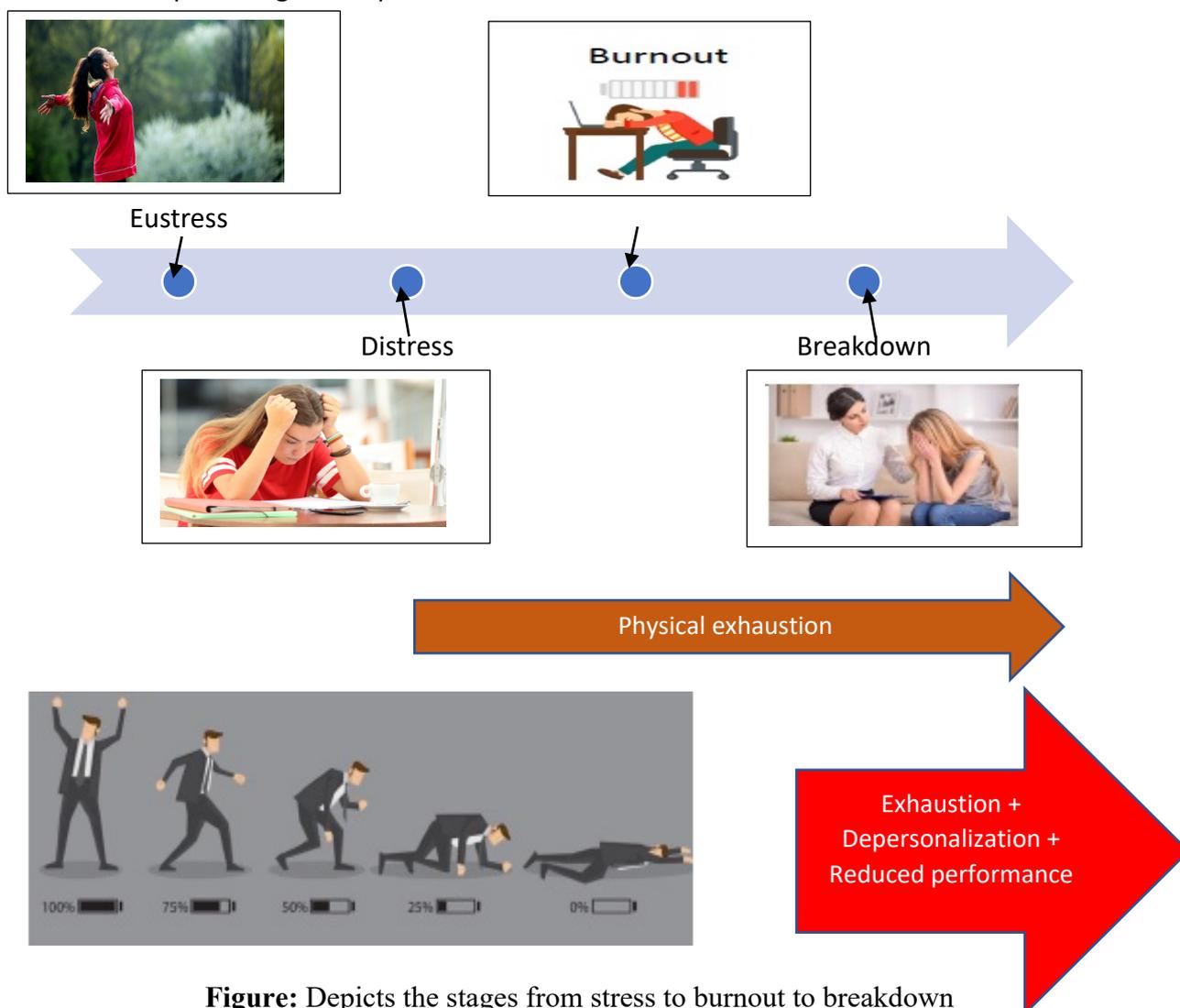
Here are a few signs and symptoms to look out for and steps to manage them effectively.



## 2. Identifying and Managing Stress and Burn out

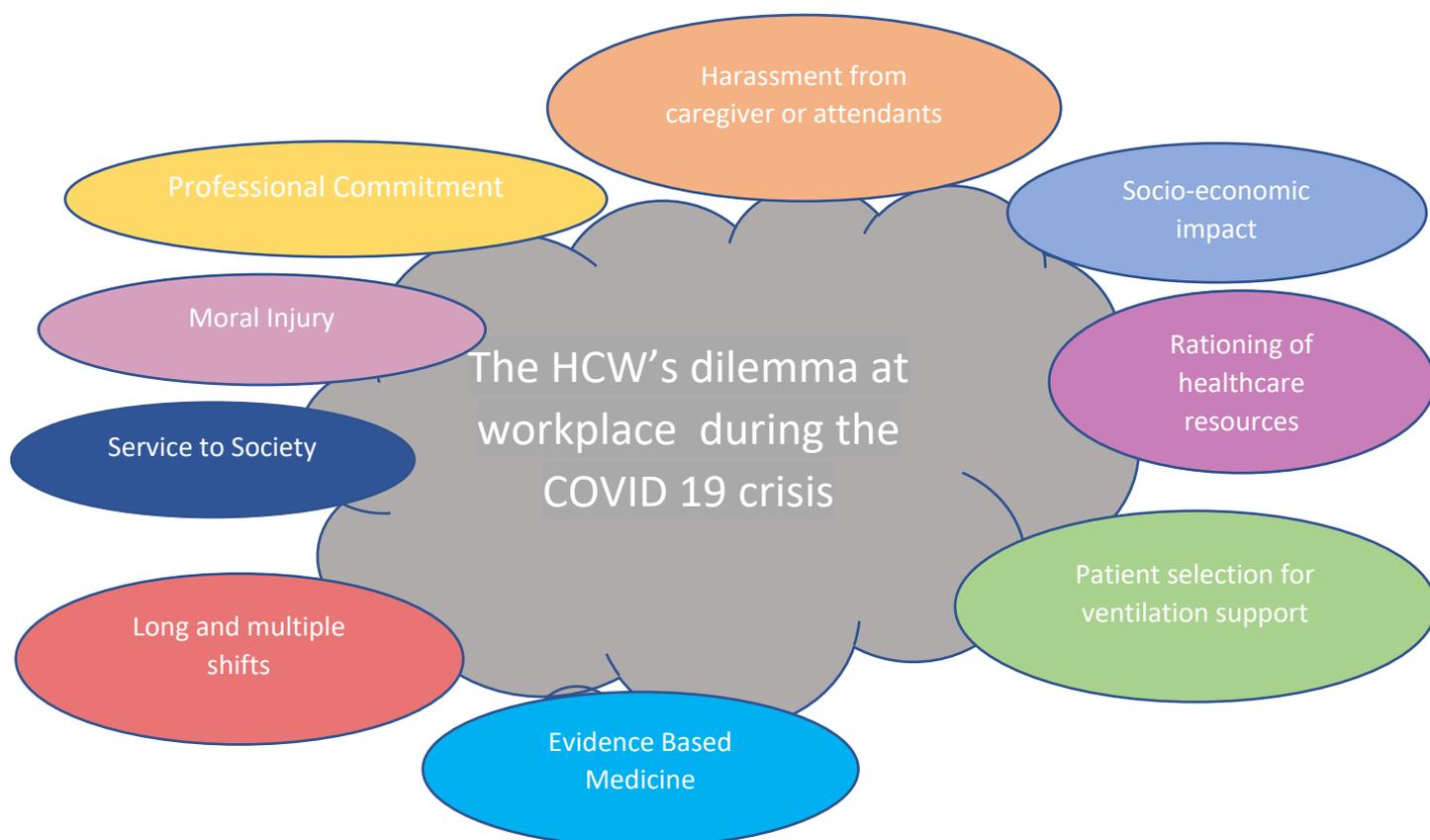
### Stress vs burnout

- **Hans Selye, 2009** defined stress as “a non-specific response of the body to any demand for change.”
- **Burnout** is when individuals view their jobs as increasingly stressful and frustrating. They may grow cynical about their working conditions and the people they work with. They may also emotionally distance themselves and begin to feel numb about their work.
- It mainly affects everyday tasks at work or in the home when someone's main job involves caring for family members. Individuals with burnout feel negative about tasks. They have difficulty concentrating and often lack creativity.
- Stress persisting over a period of time leads to burnout

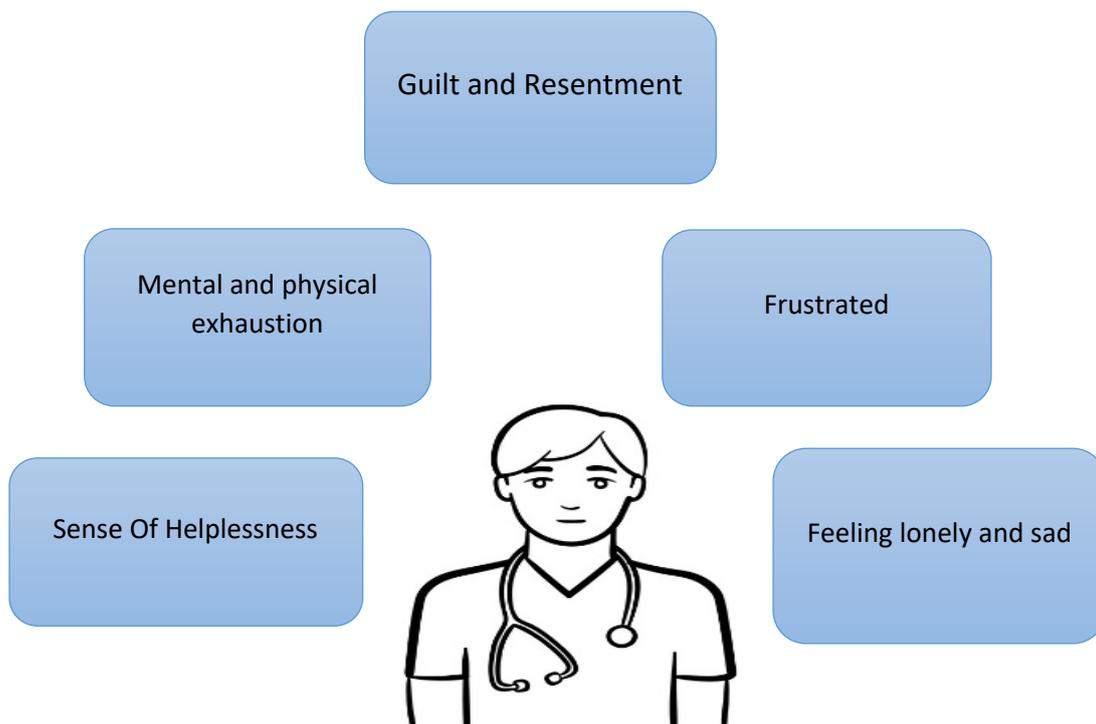


**Figure:** Depicts the stages from stress to burnout to breakdown

## Stress among healthcare workers during COVID times



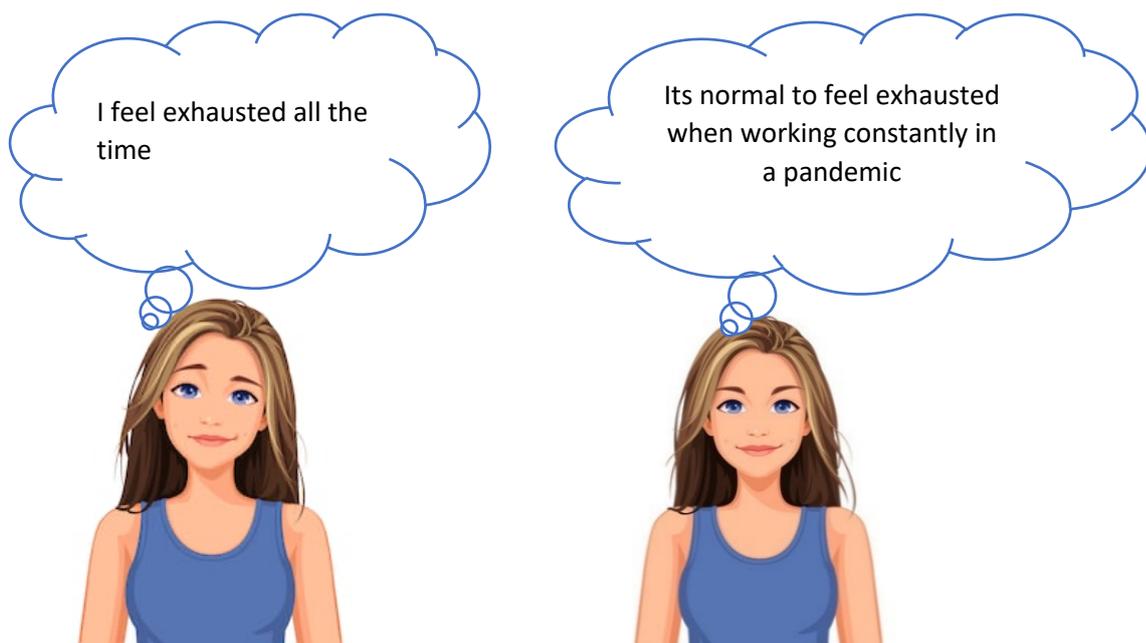
**Moral Injury-** Moral injury describes the challenge of simultaneously knowing what care patients need but being unable to provide it due to constraints that are beyond our control. (Wendy Dean et al., 2019)



**Figure:** Emotional outcome of moral injury

**Managing stress and burnout**

**Normalizing HCW's stress and reprioritizing mental health**



**Figure:** Stressful thought

Normalizing Stress

- Feeling under pressure is a likely experience for you and many of your colleagues.
- It is quite normal to be feeling this way in the current situation. Stress and the feelings associated with it are by no means a reflection that you cannot do your job or that you are weak.
- Managing your mental health and psychosocial well-being during this time is as important as managing your physical health.

### **Mindfulness practices:**

- Awareness that arises from being present in the here and now, non-judgementally
- It helps in reducing stress and anxiety and repetitive negative thoughts.
- Grounding is a useful technique to be present in the here and now. One such grounding technique is as follows.
- Practice 5-4-3-2-1 grounding techniques daily before starting your shift and when you feel overwhelmed through the day.



**5  
THINGS  
YOU  
CAN SEE**



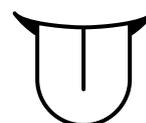
**4  
THINGS  
YOU  
CAN  
TOUCH**



**3  
THINGS  
YOU  
CAN  
HEAR**

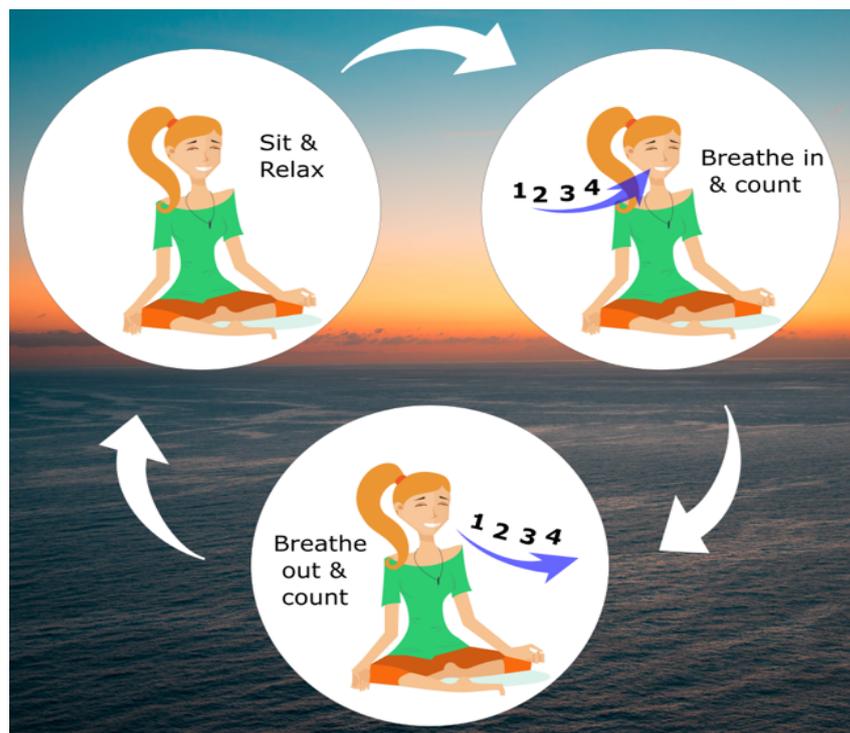


**2  
THINGS  
YOU  
CAN  
SMELL**



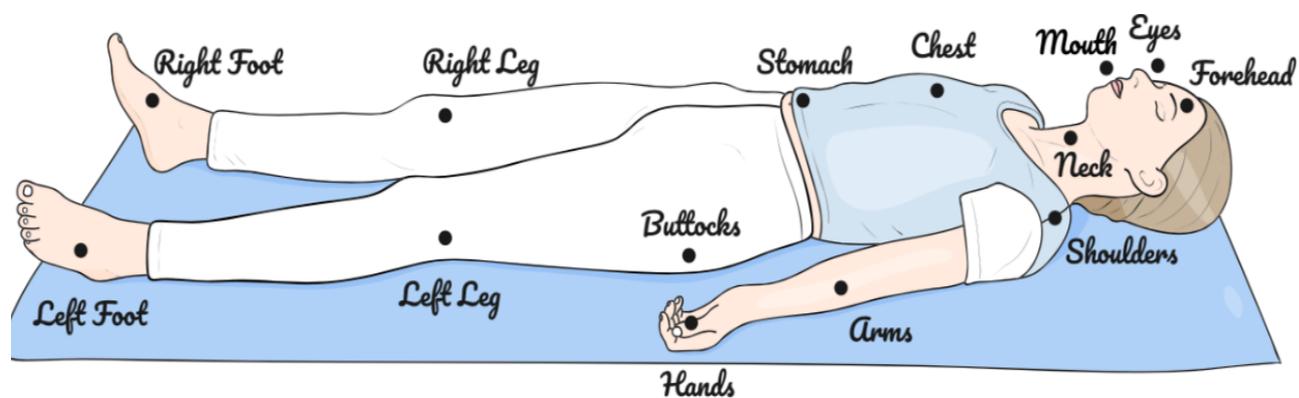
**1  
THING  
YOU  
CAN  
TASTE**

## Diaphragmatic Breathing



Breathe in with your belly and hold the breath for a few seconds then breathe out slowly and gently from your mouth. Practice this in a relaxed state of mind so that your body and mind becomes used to this exercise

## Whole body tension



- Lie down on the floor as shown in the picture above
- Tense every muscle in your whole body, stay with that tension as depicted in the picture

- Hold it as long as you can without feeling pain.
- Slowly release the tension and very gradually feel it leave your body.
- Repeat three times

**Be mindful of what you can control.**

- One of the only things you can control in a chaotic and unpredictable pandemic is how you choose to look at things.



**Figure:** Realistic way to look at the uncertainty of outcome in patients

- **Find ways to connect to your purpose or calling.** Remind yourself the purpose of your profession and refocus on the people you are helping.



I am doing service for the  
mankind

- **Self Compassion-** Be mindful of critical and harsh statements and turn them into compassionate thoughts.

Self-Critical Thought	Compassionate thoughts
'I have failed'	I did everything I could with limited resources and personnel'
'I cant do this'	'I need a break and some support before I get back at it' '
' I could have tried harder'	This is a difficult situation, even with my best efforts I am bound to lose patients' '
'I <b>am</b> angry and hurt, I want to take my anger out on someone right now'	I <b>feel</b> angry and hurt, taking my anger out on others will only make me feel worse later'

**Social support:**

- Dealing with anger and resentment can be difficult. Although it may seem intimidating, reaching out to a friend or family member can help you process what you've been through. They may not fully understand the complexities of your experience and the choices that you were forced to make, but you might find great relief and compassion in their willingness to listen.
- **Remind yourself you are not alone.** "It may mean partnering with a coworker and telling each other, 'I've got your back,' 'I am with you'"
- **Provide psychological first aid to someone.** Your interest in a colleague's situation can help mitigate acute distress and instill hope.
- **Seek and offer peer support opportunities.** Create moral resilience(dealing with difficult emotions rounds amongst your health care team, which is a Zoom(online) session for health care workers amongst themselves to get together to talk about ethically challenging situations.

### 3. Identifying and managing Anxiety



Anxiety is commonly described as having both mental and physical symptoms.

Anxiety is best described as the unhelpful thinking patterns we experience when our mind fixates on threat, uncertainty and negativity. Anxiety can occur on its own, as a response to stress, or it can trigger stress. When it occurs as a response to stress, it can intensify the stress, and, in worst cases, lead to panic attacks. It's important to understand that you cannot control anxiety from occurring – this is your brain's automatic survival mechanism. What matters is learning how to respond to anxiety helpfully, so that you don't get carried away by it.

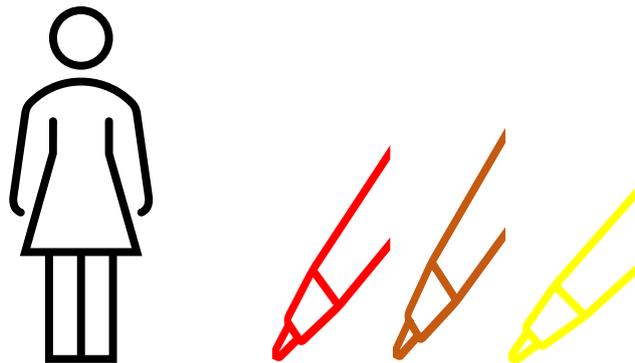
#### Signs and Symptoms to note for Anxiety.

- |   |
|---|
| • Chest tightness and feeling like you can't breathe                                  |
| • Anticipatory worry and threat scanning- being worried about ' what ifs?' constantly |
| • Muscle tension, aches and pains   |
| • Restlessness and an inability to relax  |
| • Heart palpitations  |
| • Headaches   |
| • Difficulty sleeping   |
| • Digestive issues  |

## Steps to Manage Anxiety

**Draw your Anxiety:** Draw just the outline of the human body. In the space within the outline with colours red, orange and yellow show where you feel anxiety in your body.

- **Red** - showing high levels of anxiety
- **Orange** - showing moderate level of anxiety
- **Yellow** - shows mild levels of anxiety



## **Relaxation**

- Practice mindfulness and breathing exercises as mentioned earlier.

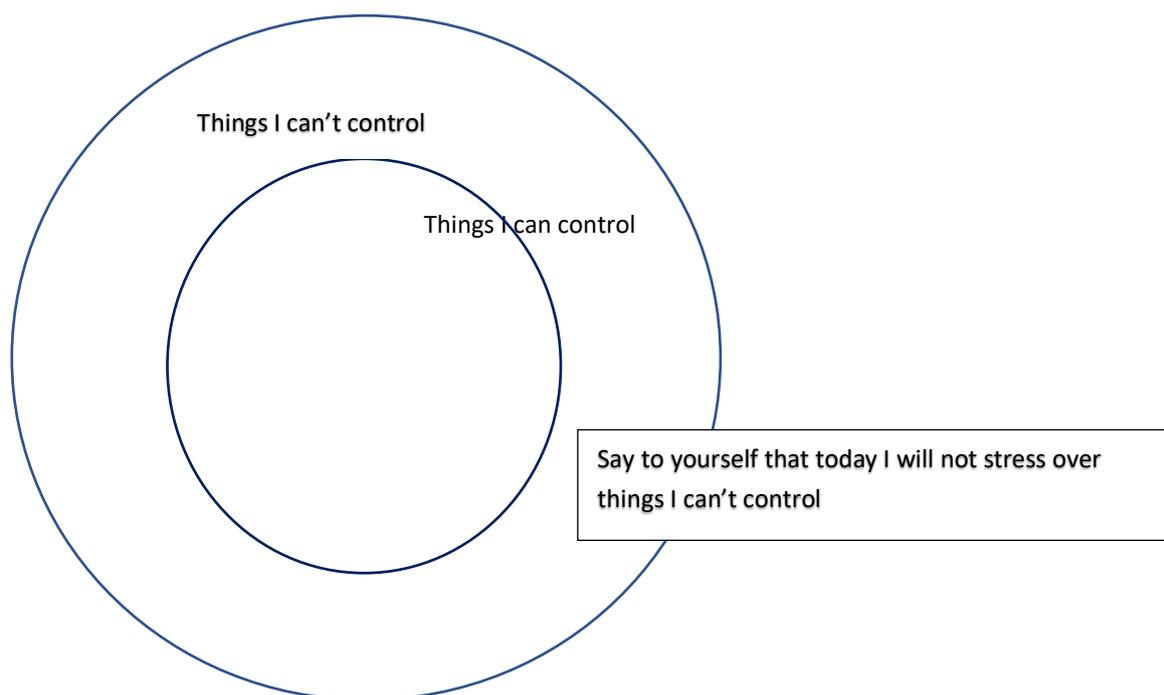
## **Spheres of Influence Worksheet**

If you're prone to hypothetical worry (i.e., the 'what if?' thoughts), you may find it helpful to practice noticing these thoughts and then redirecting your attention to things within your control. So, write down what you have control over inside the table below. Then, note the things you cannot control outside, using the table below as inspiration. Remember: You cannot stop hypothetical worries from occurring, but you can control your response to them

Within My Control	Outside My Control
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building resilience</li> <li>• Following the latest information and advice</li> <li>• Focusing on what's important to me</li> <li>• My information diet( where I am getting my news from)</li> <li>• My routine</li> <li>• Relaxation</li> <li>• Cultivating connection</li> <li>• Eating well</li> <li>• Exercising</li> <li>• Seeking and offering support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other people's decisions</li> <li>• Other people's health</li> <li>• The news</li> <li>• The government's actions</li> <li>• Schools opening or closing</li> <li>• The state of the healthcare system</li> <li>• Flights and holidays being cancelled</li> <li>• Traffic</li> <li>• Public transport</li> <li>• Aging</li> <li>• The weather</li> </ul>

**Activity:**

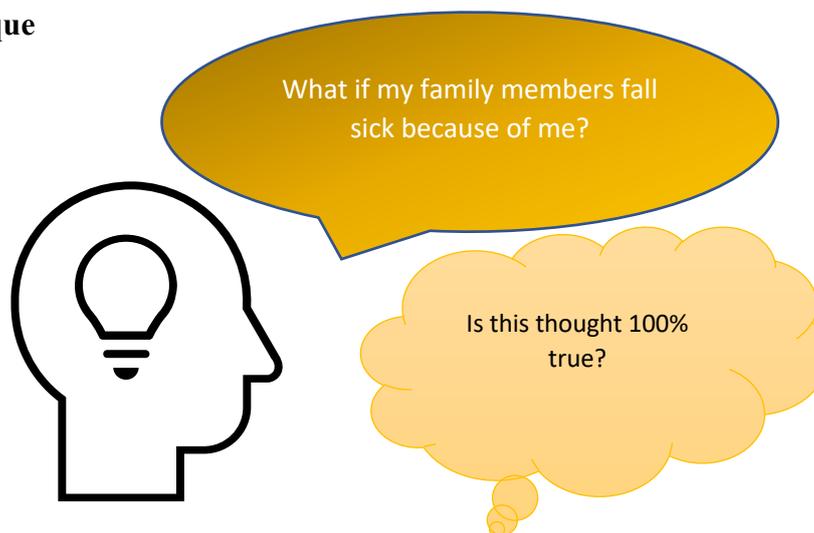
On a sheet of paper draw two circles. On the outside circle write things you cannot control and on the inside circle write things you can control.



## Reducing Anxiety With Thought Challenging

Thought challenging is a simple yet powerful cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) technique for reducing anxiety. Thought challenging helps by broadening your focus to include the bigger picture. Below are two thought challenging techniques you can experiment with. Keep practicing and discover what works best for you.

### The THINK Technique



If not, what are the facts, and what is opinion?

Helpful? – Is paying attention to the thought useful to me or others?

Inspiring? – Does the thought inspire me or does it have the opposite effect?

Necessary? – Is it important for me to focus on the thought? Is it necessary to act on it?

Kind? – Is the thought kind? If not, what would be a kinder thought?

**If the answer to any one of the questions is ‘NO’ then use the below technique to replace the anxious thought**

### The ABCDE Technique



Attention – When you feel distressed, stop what you’re doing and pay attention to your inner dialogue. What is your mind telling you?

Believe? – Do not automatically believe your thoughts!

Challenge – Defuse anxiety by broadening your focus. What's the bigger picture? Is the thought fact or opinion? What might you think if you were feeling calmer?

Discount – Acknowledge that anxiety has been dominating your thinking and let the unhelpful thoughts go.

Explore options – What would be helpful to focus on right now? What options do I have available?

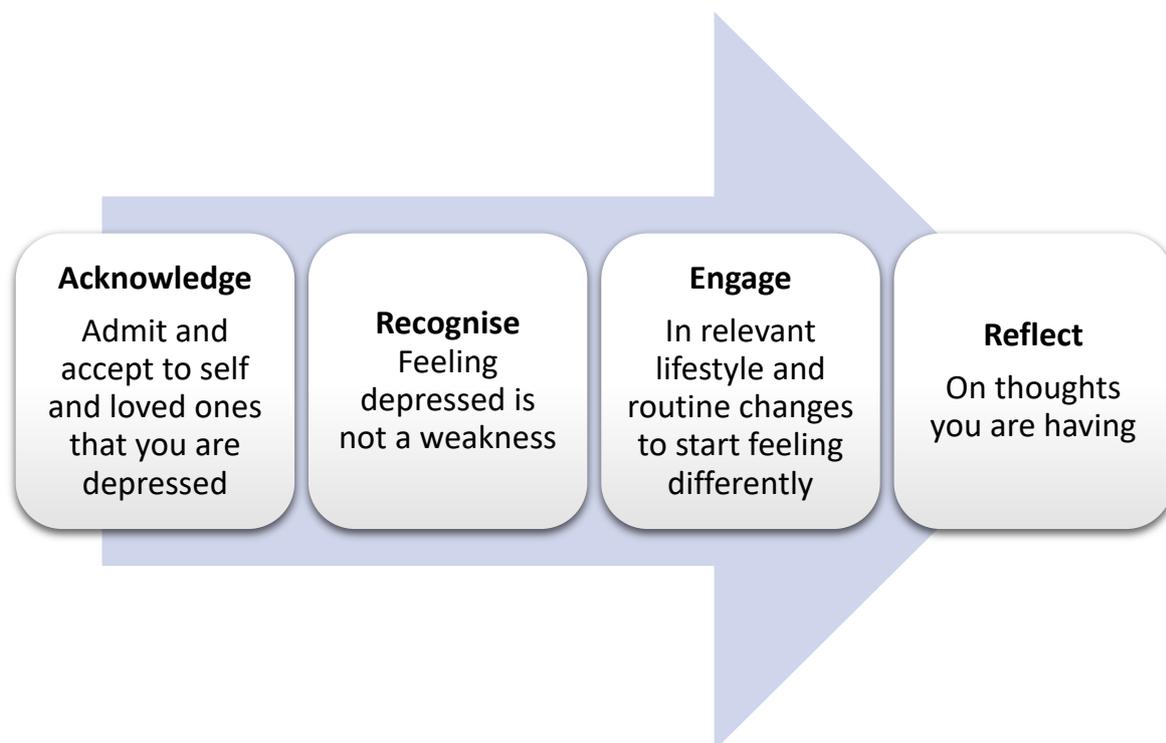
#### 4. Identifying and managing Depression

There is no single cause for depression, rather a combination of stress and a person's vulnerability factors contribute to depression. Health care workers are in a unique situation, unexpectedly, experiencing high levels of satisfaction from their roles caring for others, while simultaneously experiencing elevated stress associated with their roles, and higher levels of depression than the general population.

##### Signs and symptoms of depression

- |  |
|--|
| • Feeling low, pessimistic and/or hopeless   |
| • Lack of motivation to go to work, and/or unenthusiastic to return home after work  |
| • Lack of interest in the activities that usually give you pleasure or give you a feeling of accomplishment  |
| • High levels of anger and irritability that lead you into frequent conflict with family, friends and/or colleagues  |
| • Feeling alone and isolated   |
| • Withdrawing from others  |
| • Notable changes in your sleep, appetite and/or libido  |
| • Thinking negatively and critically about yourself  |
| • Significant, inexplicable physical changes such as headaches and gastro-intestinal pains   |
| • Unusual difficulties creating/maintaining personal attachments, and an unusual feeling of numbness and 'not caring' about the welfare of your family or patients |
| • Thoughts of self-harm or suicide   |

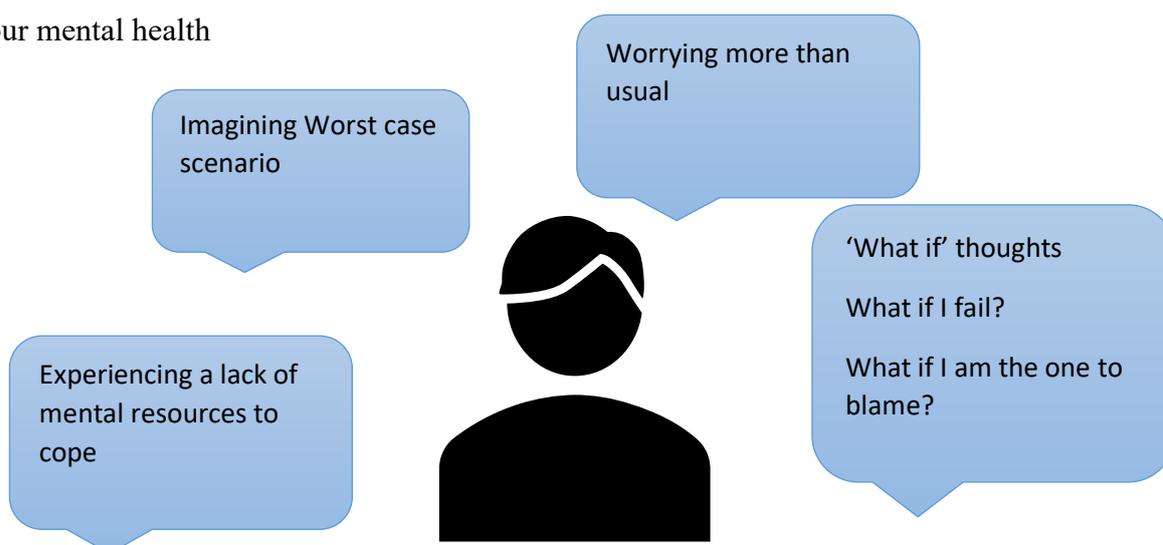
## Steps to Manage Depression



**Figure:** Steps to manage depression

### **Thoughts:**

**Reflect** on the thoughts you've been having lately. If you notice you've been having many more negative or worrisome thoughts than usual, it could be a sign to focus more on optimising your mental health



**Figure:** Negative thoughts experienced during depression

**Notice and adjust your thinking patterns** Every day brings new challenges. However, it is how you think about these challenges that will influence how you behave in response to them. Try and notice when you're thinking in unhelpful, negative ways. Ask yourself (or your buddy): 'Are there other, more helpful and positive ways that I could think about this situation?' Once you begin to change your thoughts, you can change how you respond to challenging situations, then it's likely that you'll generate positive interactions with colleagues and find fulfillment in the work. Changing your thinking changes your behaviours - and this leads to different experiences.



**Figure:** Noticing and adjusting negative thoughts

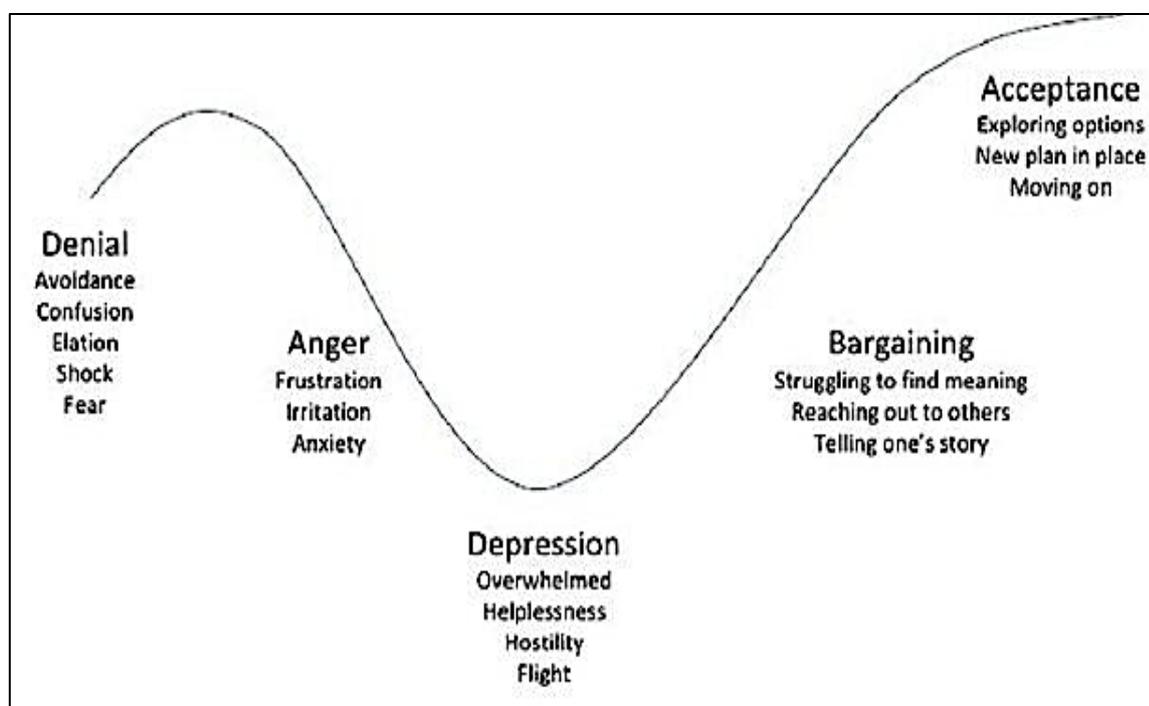
**Activity:** Daily maintain a diary of thoughts

Situation	Negative thought	Feeling	Alternative thoughts that will be helpful

**Figure:** Notice your thoughts and then reframe it daily based on the above example

## 5. Understanding and Managing Grief

People who experience any kind of loss go through grief. It's a natural reaction to loss and every individual processes it differently. The agony caused by grief can be overwhelming at times and it can lead to different types of emotional reaction ranging from shock, denial to anger and depression.



**(Kubler Ross, 1969)**

### **Denial:**

Denial is the stage that helps you in dealing with the loss of a loved one, initially. You are shocked or numbed to the reality of the situation. You cling to the 'false hope' that the news might not be real. In short, in this stage you will not be living in the actual reality, you're living in 'preferable reality'. Not being in reality helps in dealing with the initial shock.

**Anger:**

In this stage you move from the 'preferred reality' to 'actual reality'. You might have questions like 'why me?' 'life's unfair'. You look to blame someone and take your anger out on someone. Researchers and mental health professionals believe this stage is important to process grief.

**Bargaining:**

In this stage, you find the helplessness and the sadness intolerable so you resort to bargaining with God, people or yourself. Eg: 'Please God, If you cure my father...I will be the best daughter.' Guilt is an often companion in this situations. Many 'what if' scenarios start coming up in your mind. It makes you believe that if you do something differently you can avoid the grief.

**Depression:**

This is the stage that is usually accepted as grief reaction. In here, the reality that the person or situation is gone from your life is realised and this brings about overwhelming sadness in the individuals life. You might not feel like getting out of bed, meeting anyone, you might withdraw from life or feel sluggish in your mind.

**Acceptance:**

In this stage you accept that what you have been through is a difficult experience. You finally start accepting the reality of living without the individual or the situation in your life. You have both good days and bad days, you learn how to cope during the bad days and you learn to appreciate the good days.

**People don't move through the 5 stages of grief linearly. The processing of grief can be non-linear with every individual's reaction being different and the time required to deal with grief being different.**

### Steps to Manage Grief

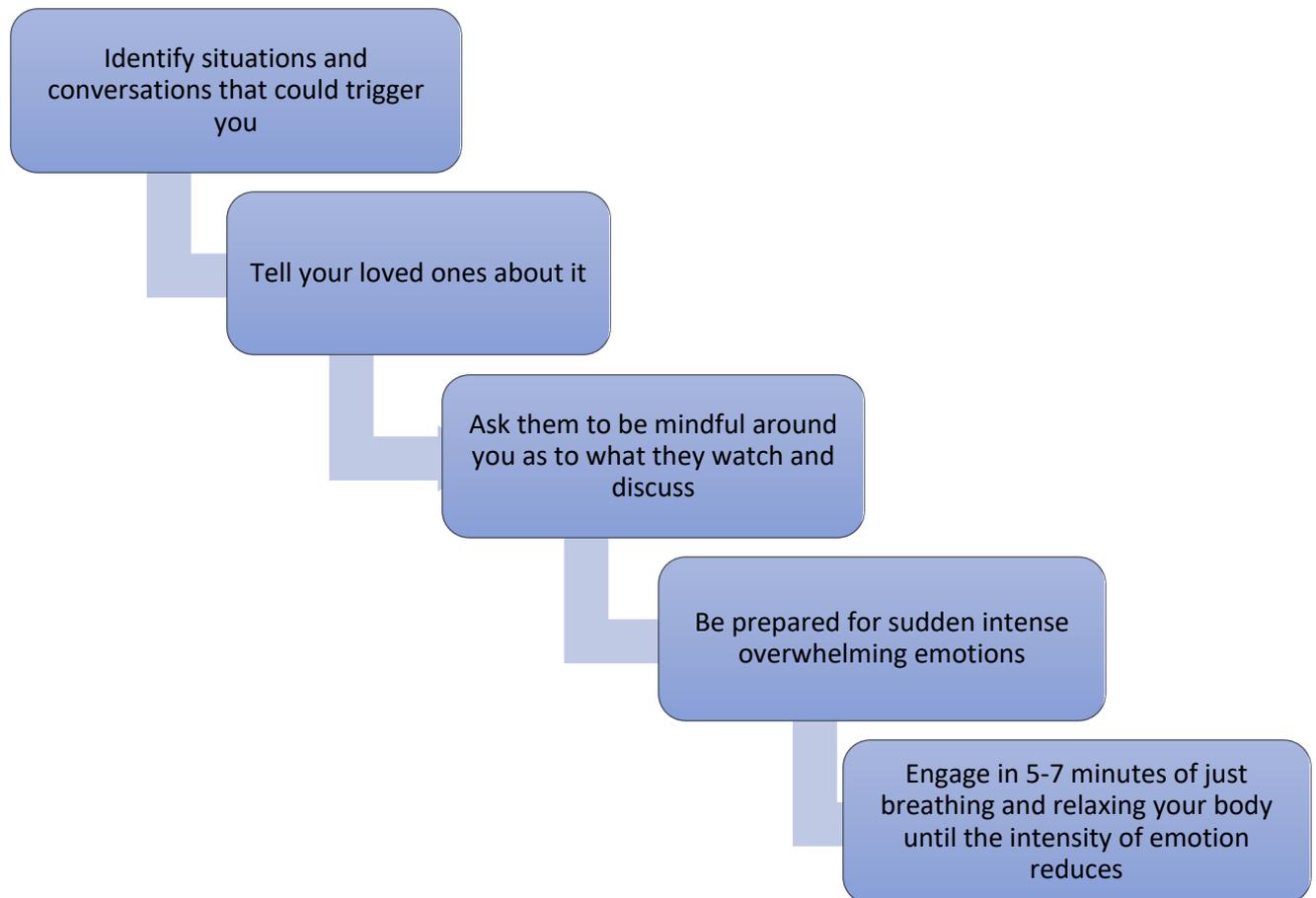
**Accepting your feelings- Acknowledge what you are feeling and validate (let yourself feel that its normal to have these emotions) them instead of ignoring or avoiding**



**Figure:** Normalizing the emotional reactions to grief.

**Express your feelings in a concrete or creative way.** Write about your loss in a journal. If you've lost a loved one, write a letter saying the things you never got to say.

## Managing reactions to grief

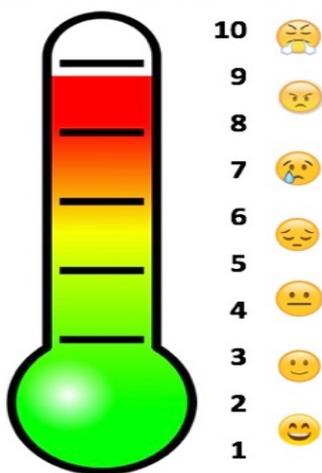


**Relying on faith:** The faith based rituals in religion and spirituality can be helpful in dealing with grief. Meditating and praying can be helpful to help process the grief



## 6. Self-Care tips to manage your mental health at Home

- **Mental health monitoring:** Once in a week carry out mental health monitoring
- **Feelings**



Set a phone alarm or a calendar reminder for a set time each week and do a quick check-in with yourself. On a scale from 0 ('not at all') to 10 ('extremely'), write down how stressed, anxious or down you're feeling. It's normal for these scores to fluctuate throughout the day and week, but if your scores are increasing and remaining high, then it's time to prioritize your mental health.

- **Body scan**



If you are experiencing stress or anxiety, it can show up as physical symptoms. Take a moment each day to notice any tension in your body, such as tight shoulders, chest, or jaw. Other common physical signs to look out for are dry mouth, difficulty breathing, racing heart and gastro- intestinal disturbances.

- **Sleep** Take note of changes to your sleeping patterns, such as difficulty falling asleep, waking during the night or waking earlier than normal with difficulty getting back to sleep. Sleep disturbance can be a sign that your mind is unable to switch off and relax.

## Take care of yourself at this time.

Try and use **helpful coping strategies** such as

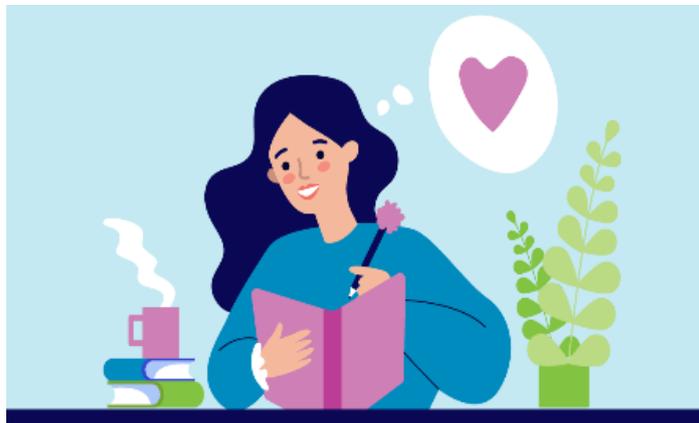


**Giving positive affirmations to self-** Affirmations are positive phrases or statements used to challenge negative or unhelpful thoughts which has shown to decrease health related stress. Some of the affirmations-

- I am expecting bad things before they have happened. I'm just uncomfortable. I'll make it through this.
- The picture in my head isn't healthy. That's just me being negative.
- I feel anxious, but so what? I know what that feels like and I'll get through it.
- I'm going to focus on things I love to get me through this.
- I will be OK.
- This is a very difficult phase but this too shall pass



- Eg: 'I am grateful I could have a good sleep'
- 'I am grateful that I could have a warm cup of tea in the morning'
- 'I am grateful that I could have a 5 minute break to relax'



### **Don'ts**

Avoid using unhelpful coping strategies such as use of tobacco, alcohol or other drugs.

**Practice Relaxation techniques as mentioned in above anxiety and burnout section.**

### **How to keep your mental health in check during and after work**

**Providers can engage in following behaviors during duty hours:**

- Monitoring yourself (how you are feeling and thinking)
- Taking small breaks for few seconds and practicing grounding techniques or breathing exercise for eg: When performing hand hygiene, while donning PPE.
- Talking to self in a more positive way and avoiding overgeneralizing fears
- Focus your efforts on what is within your control
- Keep in touch with colleagues

**The providers should also avoid the following behaviors:**

- Continuously working for too long and not checking with colleagues
- Drinking too much of caffeine or eating sweets
- Talking critical of themselves-
  - "It would be selfish to take time to rest."

- "Others are working around the clock, so should I."
- "The needs of survivors are more important than the needs of helpers."
- "I can contribute the most by working all the time."
- "Only I can do. . ."

**Providers can engage in following behaviors after duty hours to de-stress-**

- Debriefing or sharing your emotions and feelings with your friends and family members
- Get enough sleep
- Eat proper and healthy diet
- Giving positive affirmations to self-
  - It is OK to feel exhausted and tired
  - I'm going to focus on things I love to get me through this.
- Giving gratitude to self- I have done service to mankind

**Spirituality:** Unexpected life events challenges the world view. India is rich in spiritual resources. This is true in all religions. Most people in India, use various forms of spiritual resources to address difficult situations. The pandemic can be utilized for spiritual growth



**Meaningful rituals**



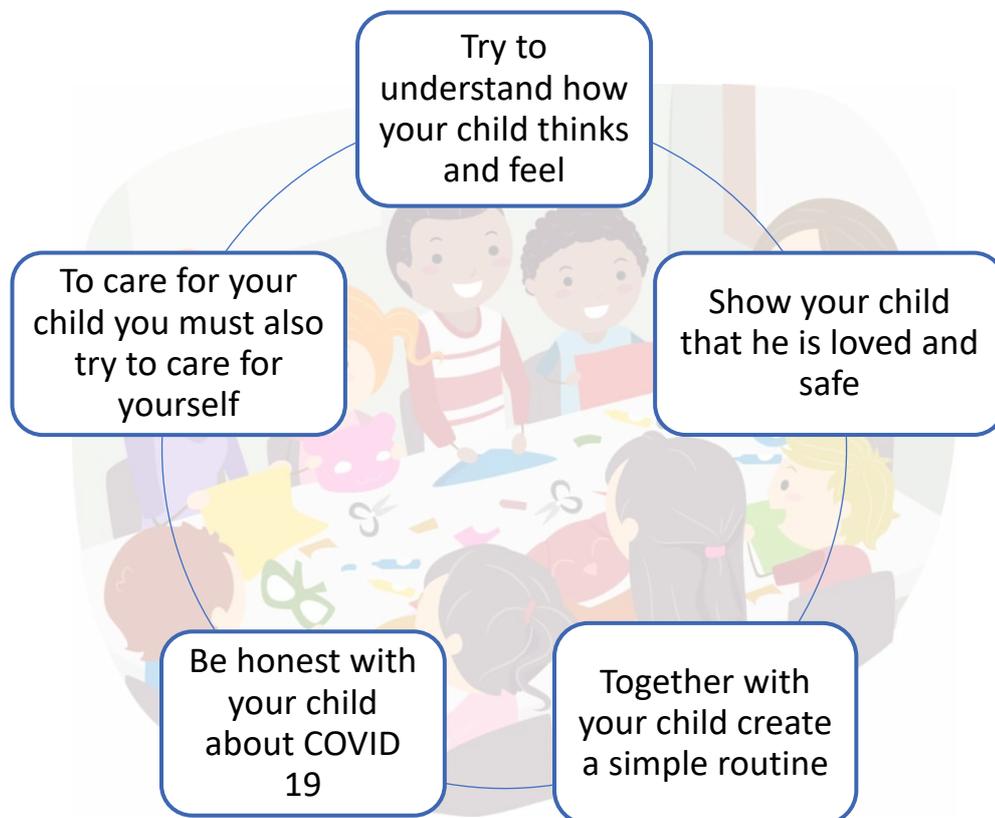
**Reading religious text**



**Discussing the meaning of existence**

## 1. Dealing with family members at home

### a. Children



- b. Older adults**, especially in isolation and those with cognitive decline/dementia, may become more anxious, angry, stressed, agitated, and withdrawn during the outbreak/while in quarantine. Provide practical and emotional support through informal networks (families) and health professionals. **Share simple facts about what is going on and give clear information** about how to reduce risk of infection in words older people with/without cognitive impairment can understand

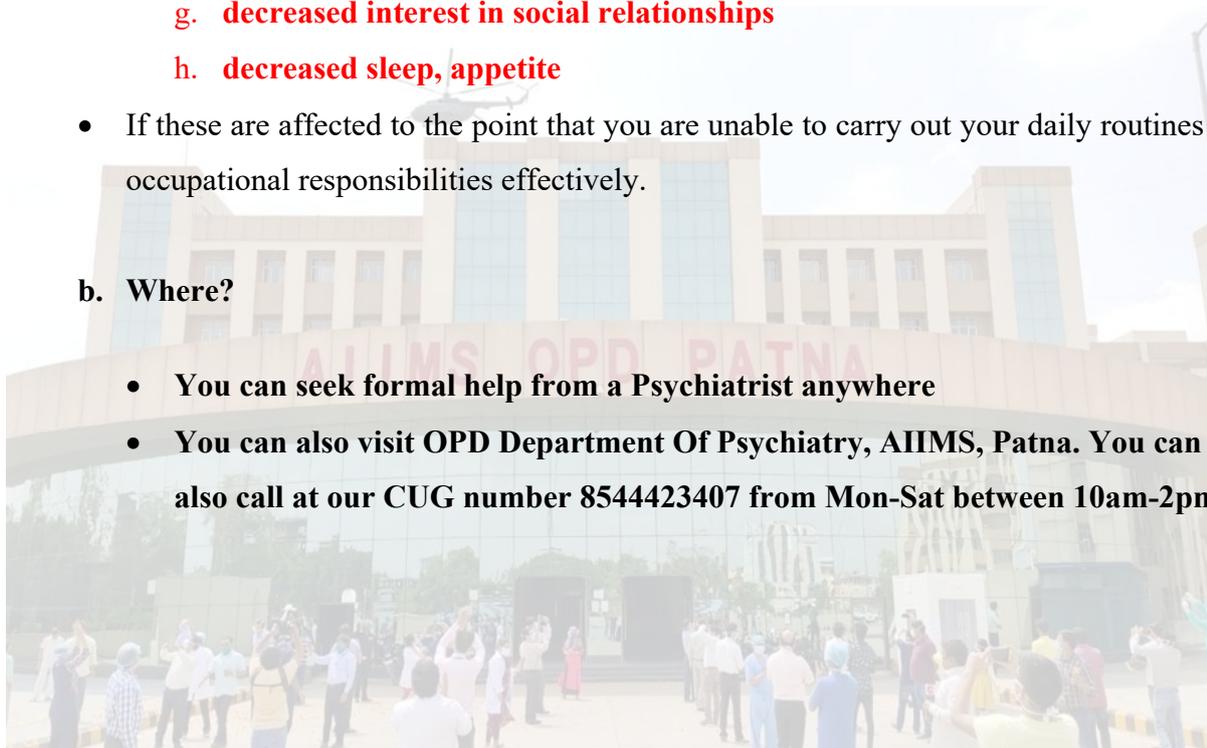
## 7. Seeking Help from a professional

### a. When?

- If stress persists for longer than two to three weeks and interferes with functioning,
- If you are having
  - a. **continuous low mood**
  - b. **anxiety**
  - c. **restlessness**
  - d. **fatigue**
  - e. **negative thoughts**
  - f. **suicidal thoughts or thoughts of self harm**
  - g. **decreased interest in social relationships**
  - h. **decreased sleep, appetite**
- If these are affected to the point that you are unable to carry out your daily routines or occupational responsibilities effectively.

### b. Where?

- You can seek formal help from a Psychiatrist anywhere
- You can also visit OPD Department Of Psychiatry, AIIMS, Patna. You can also call at our CUG number 8544423407 from Mon-Sat between 10am-2pm



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*“The best way to find yourself is to  
loose yourself in the service of  
others”*

*-Mahatma Gandhi*

*“They may forget your name but not  
how you make them feel”*

*-Maya Angelou*