

SUPPORTS FOR STRESS AND COPING

Dr. Bob Phillips , Devin Stroman
and the ENMU-Roswell Behavior Intervention Team

April 21, 2020

A Normal Response to an Abnormal Situation

- Throughout human history, we have lived and adapted to conditions of hardship and danger.
- We've also evolved an amazing array of effective means for coping, and even thriving in the face of adversity.
- These include our physical and psychological resiliencies such as the well known "Fight, Flight or Flow" mechanisms; and our enduring ability to give and receive emotional and tangible supports through our Social Connections.
- Stress, anxiety, fear, depression, anger, grief and even dread are not abnormal in times like these; but for many, are in fact **normal responses** in abnormal circumstances.

Why have these negative feelings and responses?

- In themselves, stress and related reactions mobilize our attention and motivate action to reduce risks; prompt recognition of what we need; and drive behaviors towards meeting them.
- When we touch a hot stove, the pain we experience elicits a beneficial action: *We move our hand away from danger.* In a similar way, even the pains of isolation or loneliness create a powerful urge to seek connection to others; *and they signal others to care for us.*
- Over the short run, these negative but normal reactions to temporary situations are adaptive, even while being distressing. It is over the long run, and when adverse circumstances and reactions **persist** that we can experience damage from them.
- These consequences can include changes in mood, sleep, appetite, substance use, physical symptoms, and effects on social and worklife or academic performance.
- Such is the case in the current COVID-19 Pandemic, where there was no clear-cut beginning, and so far, no certain end.

What provides support for coping in times of on-going stress?

- We are the fortunate beneficiaries of several decades of research from the fields of medicine and the social sciences that address this question. From a large body of evidence-based practice, this Presentation will focus briefly on only a few of these. Please return to this Website for additional information and resources we'll make available in the weeks ahead.
- **For now, we will discuss:**
 1. Things that can help support yourself...
 2. Ways that you can help support others...
 3. Access to Internet/information resources you may find helpful...
 4. Access to local and state-wide professional resources available to each of us...

Supporting yourself...

- It's important that you place self-care high on your list of priorities. As they say on the Airlines, "put your oxygen mask on first, before you help others with theirs".
- Some of the most effective means of coping are the common-sense things we should all remember to practice, including:
 - Getting enough rest
 - Eating well
 - Being physically active (see the following slide)
 - Engagement in mindful activities, such as reading, meditation, prayer and art-making
 - Remaining *socially* connected, even while we practice *physical* distancing

A Simple, Proven Way to Help Manage Stress

- One of the best ways to manage stress is to figure out a way to move your body every day.
- You are a physical being, built for walking, bending, and stretching.
- This is a natural way for your body and mind to discharge stress and tension. You don't need to be an athlete to get the benefits of physical movement; you only need to remember to walk or dance or do some physical work every day to change your brain chemistry, your nervous system and immune function, and the way your body feels—all for the better.

From *10 Simple Solutions to Stress*
by *Claire Michaels Wheeler, MD, PhD*

The vital role of Social Connections

- Above all else, humans are social creatures. Our safety, survival and happiness have always depended on our relationships to individuals, groups and the larger society.
- Loneliness and isolation are strongly associated with risks to physical health; impairments with sleep, appetite and mood; increase in alcohol and other drug misuse; and lower immune functions.
- Remaining socially and emotionally connected to others is certainly a challenge in a time that requires physical distancing, but it's vital that we do so!
- A little connectivity can go a long way. Studies have shown that as little as **40 seconds** of high-quality interaction with another results in improved immune response, and psychological well-being. So write letters and make phone calls.

Supporting others in stressful times...

- In general the recommendations noted above for self-care are equally useful in supporting others. Feel free to share this Presentation and any of the resources mentioned here with others. However, there may be situations where you may be especially concerned about someone; including concerns about depression and suicide.
- Mental Health First Aid USA has trained millions of ordinary people to respond to persons in extraordinarily helpful ways. MHFA teaches the following steps in being helpful, using the acronym **ALGEE**:
 - **A**ssess for risk of suicide or harm
 - **L**isten non-judgmentally
 - **G**ive reassurance and information
 - **E**ncourage appropriate professional help
 - **E**ncourage self-help and other support strategies



Details about these steps can be found at: <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2018/12/how-to-help-someone-who-is-suicidal/>

Recognizing Depression...

It's important to recognize the signs and symptoms of depression so you can take action and get support, or support others before it's too late. Here are 10 signs that may indicate someone has depression:

- An unusually sad mood.
- Loss of enjoyment and interest in activities that used to be enjoyable.
- Lack of energy and tiredness.
- Feeling worthless or feeling guilty though not really at fault.
- Thinking often about death or wishing to be dead.
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions.
- Moving more slowly or sometimes becoming agitated and unable to settle.
- Having sleeping difficulties or sometimes sleeping too much.
- Loss of interest in food or sometimes eating too much.
- Changes in eating habits that may lead to either loss of weight or weight gain.

Recognizing Risks for Suicide

- It's critical that everyone can recognize the signs and symptoms of suicide and are able to talk about it and ask people what they're going through. **Use these tips from the Mental Health First Aid curriculum to talk to someone about suicide.**
- **Look for signs and symptoms.** Some people considering suicide will exhibit multiple signs, while others won't exhibit any. It's important to know the [signs and symptoms of suicide](#) and be on alert when talking to those around you.
- **Ask them directly.** If you suspect someone might be at risk of suicide, it's important to directly ask about suicidal thoughts. Do not avoid using the word suicide. You can say things like, "Are you having thoughts of suicide?" or "Are you thinking about killing yourself?"
- **Listen nonjudgmentally.** If you believe the person is not in a crisis that needs immediate attention, you can engage them in conversation to see how they are feeling and how long they have been feeling this way. Listen in a kind and respectful way so the person feels comfortable to talk openly without being judged.
- **Let the person know you are concerned and willing to help.** Offer the person kindness and attention and let them know you are willing to help them find the support they need. Offer the person resources for professional help, such as through a community leader, therapist, physician or family member. **If you are concerned for the person's immediate safety, call 911.**
- For more information on how to help someone who is suicidal, read this [Mental Health First Aid Guide](#). You can also call the NM Crisis & Access Line 24/7: **855-662-7474**

A few, but very useful Online resources...

- **ULifeline** is a comprehensive, confidential, online resource center where students can feel comfortable searching for information they need regarding mental and emotional health.
 - It offers ways to screen for emotional and behavioral difficulties, and great tips for self-care and helping others. *We will soon have our own ENMU-Roswell page linked here as well.* **Take a look around and explore what ULifeline has to offer!**
 - <http://www.ulifeline.org/>
- **Here-To-Help** is a major Canadian Health Organization that offers a very comprehensive array of mental health resources for screening, self-care and helping others. Explore these at:
 - <https://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/>
- Here is where to get the **latest information from the CDC on COVID-19:**
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Local and Statewide Resources

La Casa Behavioral Health - Roswell

Is ENMU-Roswell's official community partner for providing student assistance with counseling and behavioral health issues. Counseling Services are now available by Phone and tele-health. Call (575) 356-6695



New Mexico Crisis & Access Line

The New Mexico Crisis and Access Line is here to support individuals and communities during this time. As a professional mental health line, they maintain a solution focused approach built on validation, normalization, and access to resources. This model has prepared them to appropriately respond not only to mental health concerns, but also the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) outbreak. The New Mexico Crisis and Access Line (NMCAL) has established business continuity plans to ensure that their services continue to operate as normal.

Counselors are available and here to hear you 24/7 at 855-662-7474. See their website at: <https://www.nmcrisisline.com/>



More from the New Mexico Crisis and Access Line

The NMConnect App is available now on both iOS and Android!

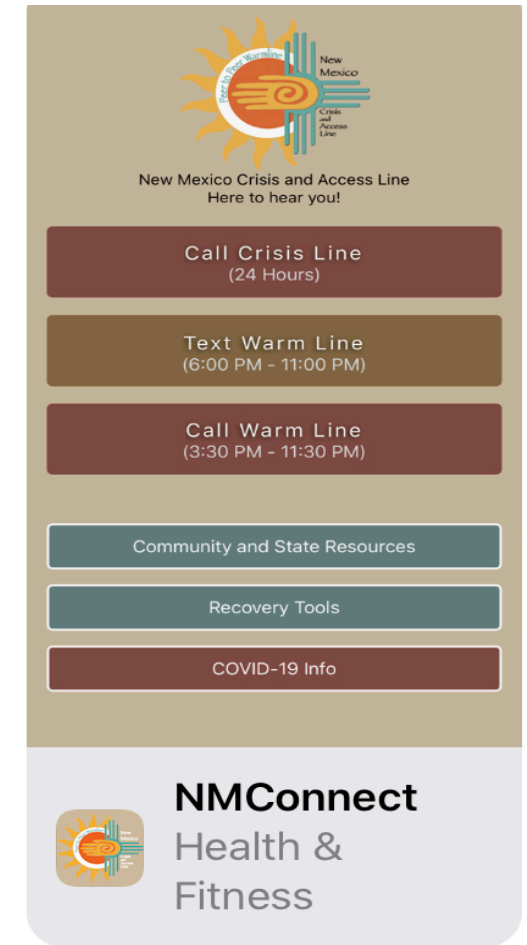
- Directly connect to a counselor or peer support worker
- Directly text a peer support worker
- Access up to date resources for substance use, mental health services, and other community resources
- Information on the state response to COVID-19



<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/nmconnect/id1505881354>



<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.nmcrisisline.app>



Thanks for your kind attention. Stay safe and we hope to see you soon...

...In a world where the troubles are big and many, there is no such thing as a small kindness.

JOHN GORKA