

COVID-19 Mental Care Manual, Keio University edition

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in cooperation with





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This manual was developed by Department of Neuropsychiatry, Keio University School of Medicine mainly for health care professionals who care for people with mental health problems caused by COVID-19 in areas where mental health professionals are not sufficiently available. After interviewing young mental health professionals in the Asia-Pacific region about their needs in the field, we have included specific techniques and procedures that can be used for self-care and care for the affected people.



Basics of mental care during infectious disease epidemics

1. Stay informed and correct any misinformation that you come across
2. Raise awareness of the necessary infection control measures that have been proven to be effective
3. Take precautions to protect mental health and provide advice on reducing stress



Stress management

1. Look back at the past week
2. Meet your basic needs
3. Ease your feelings through your behaviour
4. Identify relationships that support you
5. If you are feeling troubled, try to expand your perspective
6. Relieve tension



How to Relieve Tension

1. Autogenic training
2. Mindfulness
3. Relaxation breathing exercise
4. Progressive muscle relaxation
5. Stretching



Mental care for health-care professionals

1. Job performance infrastructure
2. Self-care for individuals
3. Support from family and colleagues
4. Support from the organization



Mental care for children and the elderly

1. Tell supporters for children to be aware of their slight changes, give them a sense of security, encourage them to practice infection control precautions, and teach them not to be prejudiced against people infected with COVID-19.
2. Tell the elderly to do regular moderate exercise, maintain a healthy eating lifestyle, maintain good oral hygiene, and keep socially engaged and cherish positive emotions.



Mental care for people with mental care problems

1. Support for people with sleep disorders
2. Support for people with Anxiety
3. Support for people with Aggression
4. Support for people at risk of suicide
5. Supports for people suffering from addiction such as excessive alcohol or tobacco consumption, or problems related to the Internet or gambling

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Introduction

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has caused serious health problems around the world. Many people are forced to live under excessive stress caused by various factors, such as fear of contracting illness and dying, unemployment, financial hardship and social isolation. Feeling isolated can cause many people to develop mental problems, such as loneliness, depression, sleep disorders, sense of helplessness, malaise, and increased use of alcohol and tobacco. For example, it was reported that one out of three persons in Asia has felt moderate to high levels of anxiety, depression and mental distress (Salari et al., 2020). Maintaining good mental health in the new normal is a pressing matter of concern globally. However, for many front-line medical service professionals, carers feel at a loss when faced with people's mental health needs due to the lack of specialist doctors and psychologists who can provide quality care for mental health problems caused by COVID-19.

In response to this epidemic situation, the Department of Neuropsychiatry, Keio University School of Medicine, has created a manual to assist health-care professionals (doctors in other specialties, nurses, pharmacists, etc.) in caring for people with mental health problems caused by COVID-19 in areas where there are insufficient mental health professionals.

In creating this manual, we referred to the manual prepared by the COVID-19-related Stress Care Team at the Department of Neuropsychiatry at Keio University, and related manuals and papers prepared by the World Health Organization (WHO) and other relevant organizations worldwide. Based on the findings obtained from such a literature review, we conducted a survey among young mental health professionals in the Asia-Pacific region to ask about their needs in the field. Furthermore, as part of the 27th Annual Conference of the Japanese Society of Transcultural Psychiatry held on 14–15 November 2020, Keio University, and the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific, and the Japanese Young Psychiatrists Organization (JYPO) jointly held a symposium entitled “Regional Youth Symposium on Mental Health Promotion in the COVID-19 Era”. During the symposium, young mental health specialists from various countries reported on their current situation. A feature of this manual is that it incorporates the needs and opinions presented at the symposium and provides easy-to-understand guidance that is relevant to the field. In particular, young mental health professionals in the Asia-Pacific region suggested that relaxation methods and mindfulness techniques would be useful in areas with limited medical resources. In the first half of this manual, we have included techniques and procedures that can be used by non-specialist health professionals for self-care and people with mental health problems.

With the development of COVID-19 vaccines, it is expected that the outbreak will sooner or later be

brought fairly under control. Still, it is hoped that the products produced through this exchange of ideas will remain effective in providing mental health care in response to similar disasters and emergencies in the future.

We would like to express our most profound respect for the health professionals and researchers who are currently battling the “invisible enemy” of COVID-19 day and night, typically at health and research institutions around the world, in their dedicated efforts related to vaccine development and early response to infected patients. We hope that this manual will help health-care professionals everywhere deal with COVID-19 while protecting their own health.

1 May 2021

The Authors

Reference:

Salari N, Hosseini-Far A, Jalali R, et al. Prevalence of stress, anxiety, depression among the general population during the COVID-19 pandemic: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Global Health*. 2020.

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Chapter 1. Basics of mental care during infectious disease epidemics

Reliable information helps increase the safety of your family, friends and patients during an infectious disease epidemic. In addition, health maintenance precautions are essential for at-risk populations, such as young children, the elderly and people with weakened immunity or poor health. Anxiety about whether or not you can protect yourself and your family from infections can increase your stress level. Here are some basic ways you can manage this stress.

1. Stay informed and correct any misinformation that you come across.

- Obtain the latest accurate information related to prevention of the disease, self-care, family care and guidelines for travel from WHO and other reliable websites such as from the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific (<https://www.who.int/westernpacific/emergencies/covid-19/news-covid-19>).
- Collect information only from trusted media and sources. Be aware that social media can sometimes give wrong information.
- If people around you behave based on inaccurate information about the outbreak, correct their misconceptions and advise them to use reliable health sources.
- Use pamphlets or other materials to help people understand the information, in accordance with the nature of the respective target population (adults, children, elderly, etc.)
- Be aware that infection with COVID-19 can occur to anyone and finding out that someone has the virus should not lead to the stigmatization of a particular individual or a region.
- Refrain from making statements that violate the rights of patients, infected persons, their families, and those involved in treatments or countermeasures.

2. Raise awareness of the necessary infection control measures that have been proven to be effective.

- If you are not feeling well, refrain from going to work or school; avoid contact with other people.
- The virus spreads from person to person, mainly through air droplets from infected people; therefore, when coughing or sneezing, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue and dispose of it immediately. If you do not have a tissue, cover your nose and mouth with your elbows instead of your hands.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth. Viruses can enter the body from there.

- Wash your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, rub your hands with hand sanitizer containing alcohol.
- Frequently wipe down surfaces that are often touched with a disinfectant spray or a wet wipe containing alcohol.
- Maintain a healthy diet and get enough sleep regularly.
- Maintain your daily routine and try to exercise regularly while taking care to avoid the spread of infection.

3. Take precautions to protect mental health and provide advice on reducing stress.

- Acknowledge that stress exists and validate people’s feelings by telling them: “I see that you’re stressed, and that’s understandable. Many people feel the same as you do right now.” or “It doesn’t mean you’re a weak person.”
- Inform people that experiencing insomnia, difficulty concentrating, interpersonal problems, inability to face stressful situations at work or in daily life, unidentified physical symptoms, and increased alcohol and tobacco use are signs of stress.
- To relieve stress, try relaxation techniques, mindfulness, yoga, meditation, or trying a new activity for a change.
- Focus on positive aspects of your life and what you can control.
- If you or your family is experiencing severe emotional distress or is in a problematic situation, seek help from specialized mental health–care providers or religious leaders.

The first step in mental care is to realize that you and the people around you are feeling troubled or anxious. For example, you/they might think about or express the following:

- I’m worried all day long.
- I feel that no one understands me.
- I can’t sleep because I’m nervous.
- I can’t share much to my family.
- I don’t know how to behave at home.
- I have a headache, dizziness, or tiredness.
- I feel more irritated.
- I don’t have time to contact my friends.

Write down the signs that apply to you in the box next page.



References:

Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, Uniformed Services University [website]

(<https://www.cstsonline.org/covid-19/covid-19-fact-sheets-in-other-languages/japanese>).

Latest news on coronavirus disease (COVID-19). World Health Organization [website]

(<https://www.who.int/westernpacific/emergencies/covid-19/news-covid-19>).

Chapter 2. Stress management

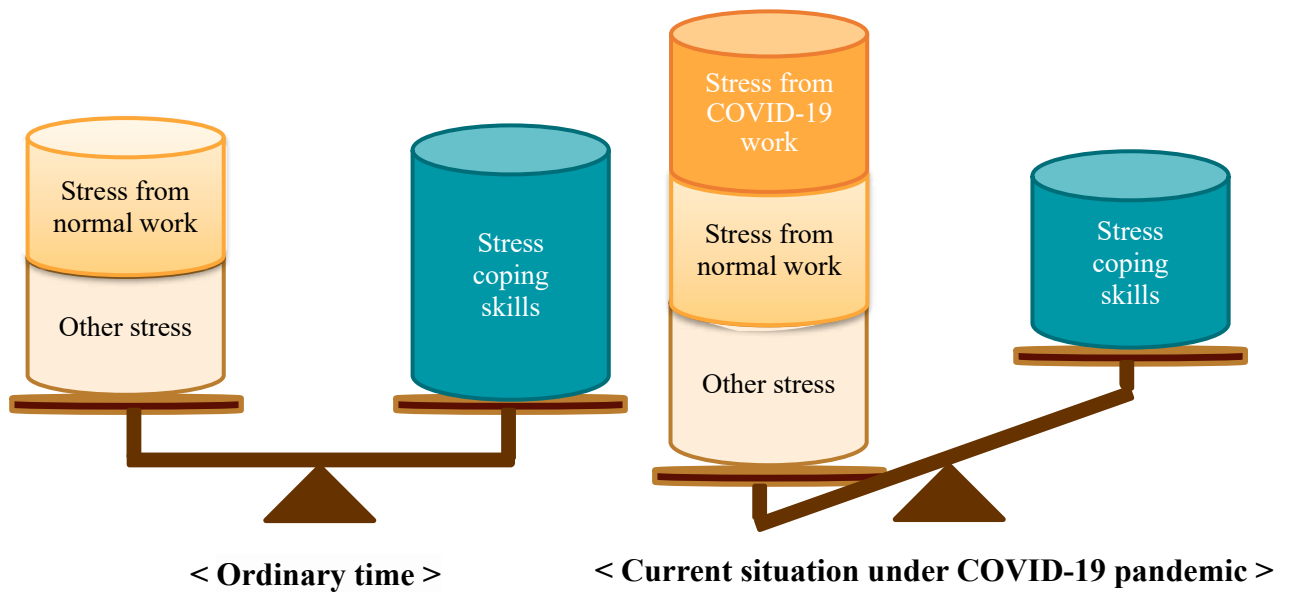
It is normal to feel anxiety and anger and to have various reactions under stressful situations. However, when the stress is prolonged or compounded, caution is required. Let's take mental care measures for ourselves and others to prepare for prolonged stress.

1. First, let's look back at the past week:

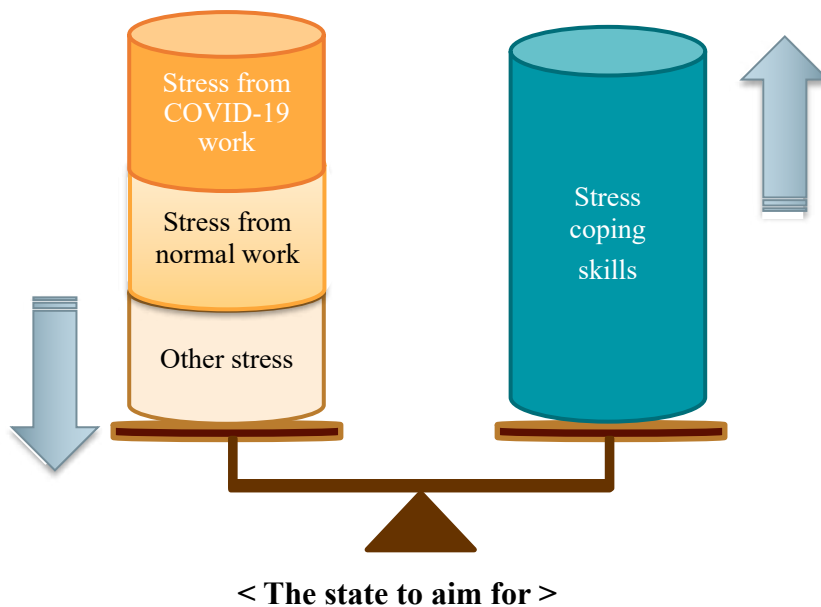
- Did you eat a well-balanced diet?
- Did you get enough sleep?
- Were you in contact with your family and friends?
- Did you have enough opportunities to talk to your family and friends?
- Did you take a walk?
- Did you have opportunities to spend time in nature?
- Did you listen to music?
- Did you take a bath for relaxation?
- Did you read books, magazines and other reading materials?



Listed above are ways to take care of your mental health and relieve stress in your daily life, which can improve your stress management. If you have other ways to alleviate stress in your life, write them down in the box below.



As shown in the left figure above, in normal times, the balance between stress and the ability to cope with stress is usually well maintained. However, as shown in the figure on the right, in the current COVID-19 epidemic period, people's stress levels are increasing while their stress coping ability is decreasing due to restrictions in daily life and a psychological state that leaves little room for improvement. Under such a stressful situation, various symptoms may appear both psychologically and physically.



In order to achieve the balanced state shown in the diagram above, here are some self-care skills in the form of self-work to reduce stress and improve stress management skills.

2. Meet your basic needs

During the COVID-19 pandemic, you may not be able to engage in the normal activities that you usually do to de-stress. In such cases, focusing on fulfilling basic needs such as eating, sleeping and resting can help your mental state – this may sound obvious but they are essential.

How has your week been? Let's take a look back.

2-1. Sleep

- How many hours of sleep did you get each day?

() hours



- Was the duration sufficient for you?

Sufficient

Fairly sufficient

Slightly insufficient

Insufficient

2-2. Food and water

- Did you eat and drink regularly?

Sufficient

Fairly sufficient

Slightly insufficient

Insufficient



When you are too busy, stuck at home, or your routine has been disrupted, you may start to neglect eating right. Write down some ways you can make improve your appetite, such as eating delicious food, drinking your favourite (non-alcoholic) beverage along with the food, or sharing the meal with someone.

3. Ease your feelings through your behaviour

It is important to sometimes take breaks from work and obligations. Try to find something you enjoy doing. It is said that stress and emotional distress can be decreased through activities that engage or calm the mind. Take a look at the following examples of actions and select and write down some actions you can apply right away in the box below.

Actions to invigorate your mind	Actions to calm your mind
<p>(Examples)</p> <p>Taking a walk.</p> <p>Cleaning.</p> <p>Contacting friends and family.</p> <p>Talking to co-workers.</p> <p>Listening to music.</p> <p>Watching a favourite movie.</p> <p>Reading a book.</p>	<p>(Examples)</p> <p>Stargazing.</p> <p>Listening to the sounds of nature.</p> <p>Smelling your favourite scent.</p> <p>Breathing slowly.</p> <p>Massaging your hands.</p> <p>Taking a bath.</p> <p>Praising yourself for your work.</p>



4. Identify relationships that support you

Sharing your anxiety with people you trust can help reduce stress. Keep in touch with what is going on around you and talk with your colleagues, friends, family members and relatives. The ability to receive support from those around you, including family, co-workers and your workplace, can make a big difference to your current stressors. What are some of your support resources? Write them down in the spaces below.

Workplace (e.g. identifying and utilizing resources inside and outside the facility, interacting with co-workers in the same situation)

[]

Friends (e.g. keeping in touch with your friends)

[]

Family (e.g. communicating with your family)

[]

Others

[]

Don't think of your worries and need for support as being insignificant. Stay connected to around you and don't turn down support. If necessary, consider consulting with professionals.

5. If you are feeling troubled, try to expand your perspective.

When you feel anxious or tense, you may become overly focused on one thing and become distracted or narrow-minded. Whenever you have a problem at work or in your daily life, you should reflect on the following points to see if you have fallen into such a situation.

- **Collect information correctly**

When you have a narrow perspective, the information you gather tends to be biased. It is essential to gather appropriate information from reliable sources and act based on accurate information about infectious diseases and its impact on your daily life. In some cases, it may be useful to limit the use of media and listen only to people you trust.

- **Respect differences with others and try to communicate constructively**

It is helpful to maintain positive and clear communication with your family members and co-workers in the workplace. Share your feelings about things that make you anxious or frustrated and look for ways to resolve them. It is also important to respect each other's ideas and experiences.

- **Identify what will help you from your previous experience of overcoming adversity**

What have you done to overcome adversity in the past? The skills that helped you then may help you again.

Write down what you can try to broaden your perspective below.



6. Relieve tension.

In this section we will introduce you to mindfulness, autogenic training, relaxation breathing, progressive relaxation and stretching techniques that you can do on your own. Please try different methods in order to find a method that works for you.

Chapter 3. How to relieve tension

Particularly in geographical areas or facilities with limited medical resources, there will be a need for non-mental health professionals to provide clients with mental health care. In such situations, information in this section can be useful. All of the methods described below can be practiced in person or online, without special equipment. For example, it has been reported that daily mindfulness practice can reduce anxiety and depressive mood. It is useful not only for patients but also for self-care and improving relationships with family members and colleagues. We encourage you to do these exercises on a daily basis.

1. Autogenic training

Autogenic training is a technique of relaxing the body and mind by chanting certain words in your head. It is useful to repeat these mantras for about 10 minutes two or three times a day.

- **Opening exercise: “I feel calm.”**

First, adopt a comfortable and relaxing posture. You can sit on a chair or lie on your back on a bed or mat. Close your eyes lightly. In this state, repeat the words “I feel calm” in your head. Some thoughts may come up, but don’t let them distract you. Just let them float away and keep repeating this script.

- **First exercise: “Both arms and both legs are heavy.”**

We will begin by practicing with the dominant arm. Here, we assume that the right arm is the dominant arm. Follow the three steps below. In each step, insert the words “I feel calm” repeatedly.

Step 1: While repeating the words “My right arm is heavy” slowly in your mind, direct your attention to your entire right arm, from the fingertips of your right hand to the base of your right shoulder.

Step 2: After you start feeling heaviness in your right arm, move your attention to your left arm and repeat the words “My left arm is heavy” in your mind.

Step 3: Finally, move your attention to both legs and repeat in your mind again, “Both of my legs are heavy.”

- **Second exercise: “Both arms and legs are warm.”**

Once you complete the first exercise, you can start the second exercise. The second exercise is similar to the first and begins with the dominant arm. Don’t forget to repeat the words “I feel calm” in your mind as you go through the exercise.

Step 1: Slowly repeat the words “My right arm is warm” over and over as you focus your attention on your right arm.

Step 2: When your right arm starts to feel warm, move your attention to your left arm and repeat the words “My left arm is warm.”

Step 3: Finally, once you observe your left arm feeling warmer, shift your attention to your legs and repeat the words “Both of my legs are warm.”

- **Closing exercise**

When you finish autogenic training, do several movements such as opening and closing your hands tightly, turning your neck and shoulders from side to side, and stretching up with your hands clasped together. Do not forget to do this as it is necessary to bring your consciousness and muscles back to their resting state.

References:

Sasaki Y. Autogenic training in practice for mental and physical health. Osaka: Sogensha; 1976 (in Japanese).

2. Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a technique of sensing what is happening in the present moment and accepting it as it is. The goal of mindfulness is to control one's attention, as people can suffer from mental health problems caused by excessive regret for what happened in the past or extreme anxiety about what could happen in the future. The techniques described here can be conducted in person or online. Audio instructions can also be used (in Japanese and English only).

Instructions (Japanese): <https://csr.keio.ac.jp/instruction/>

Instructions (English): <https://csr.keio.ac.jp/meditation-english/>



2-1. 3-minute breathing space method

This method consists of a 3-minute meditation. Please prepare a timer.

- Sit comfortably in a straight-backed chair with your back upright, and close your eyes or keep them slightly open.
- Breathe in a natural rhythm and feel the airflow as it moves in and out of your body. Then pay attention to different parts of your body and how your breathing affects it. For example, notice how your lungs press against your stomach or abdomen with each breath. Focus your attention on the sensation without trying to evaluate or analyze it in any way.
- If your attention wanders away from your breathing, that is Ok. Recognize where your attention has wandered, and slowly bring it back to your breathing. It doesn't matter how many times your attention wanders. It is important to be able to notice where your attention is now.
- After three minutes of this practice, gently open your eyes and bring your attention back to your surroundings.

2-2. Body scan meditation

- Lie down on a mat or bed. If lying down is difficult, you can sit down.
- Close your eyes or keep them slightly open. First, pay attention to your breathing, as in the 3-minute breathing exercise. Afterwards, focus your attention to the tips of your feet and pay attention to what sensations you are experiencing there now. Take 20 to 30 seconds to explore and pay close attention to the sensations you can feel through your toes.
- When you feel the sensation directly, move your attention to your heel and perform the same action. Then move your attention to the soles of your feet, the top of your feet, your ankles, knees, thighs, lower back (pelvis, tailbone, base of the feet), upper back, stomach, chest, shoulders, elbows, wrists, fingers, collarbone, neck, back of the head, ears, face (cheek, throat, chin, tongue) and scalp.

- Sometimes, your attention may be drawn to a thought, a feeling of impatience, boredom, or restlessness. Recognize where your attention has wandered, and slowly bring it back to where you intend it to be.
- After bringing your attention to your breathing, gently open your eyes and bring your attention back to your surroundings.

References:

Williams M, Penman D. Mindfulness: a practical guide to finding peace in a frantic world. London: Piatkus Books; 2011.

Mindfulness. In: Keio Center for Stress Research [website] (<https://csr.keio.ac.jp/mindfulness/>).

3. Relaxation breathing exercise

Try to exhale slowly in order to relax.



Inhale lightly.



Exhale for 6 seconds.
One, two, three, four, five, six.



After you finish exhaling, hold
your breath for 3 seconds.
One, two, three.

Practice for about 10 minutes if you can!

References:

National Information Center of Stress and Disaster Mental Health [website] (<https://saigai-kokoro.ncnp.go.jp/care/index.html>).

4. Progressive muscle relaxation

Relax your body and mind by progressively activating the muscles.

Basic movement

- Tense the target muscle for 10 seconds, then relax it and feel the release for about 20 seconds.

4-1. Both hands

- Extend both arms with palms facing upward.
- Clench your fingers to make a fist and squeeze hard.
- Slowly open your hands and relax them.

4-2. Upper arms

- Make a clenched fist using both hands, bend your elbows and bring the fists close to your shoulders.
- Tighten the muscles in both arms.
- Lower your arms and relax them.

Do the same for the muscles in your back, shoulders, neck and face, and finally, tense and relax all the muscles at once.

Take your time to savour the sensation of being alternately tensed up and relaxed.

The feeling of loosening up and becoming warm is essential!

References:

The Association of Japanese Clinical Psychology [website] (<https://www.ajcp.info/en/>).

5. Stretching

Stretching improves blood circulation, eases muscle tension, and has a relaxing effect.

Basic movement

- Slowly stretch until you feel comfortable.
- Keep stretching for 10 to 30 seconds.
- Do not stop breathing; breathe naturally.



5-1. Back and shoulder stretch

- Sit on a chair with your feet flat on the floor.
- Cross your arms and bend forward.
- Round your back as if looking into your navel.
- Raise your shoulders upward.
- Exhale, relax and drop your shoulders.

5-2. Stretch the neck and neck muscles

- Relax your neck and shoulders.
- Slowly rotate your neck clockwise and then counter clockwise.
- Turn your head from side to side.
- Grasp the back of your head with all four fingers except your thumb.
- Massage the back of your neck with your thumb.

References:

Mental health for workers. In: Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare [website]
(https://kokoro.mhlw.go.jp/ps/tokyo_stretch_effect.html).

Chapter 4. Mental care for health-care professionals

Health-care professionals are both caregivers and care receivers. In order to provide appropriate care to others, health-care professionals need must be physically and mentally healthy themselves.

During an infectious disease pandemic, however, there are stresses particular to health-care professionals, such as anxiety about exposure to contagious diseases, fear of being discriminated by the public, and concern for the safety of family members and roommates. In this section, we will introduce mental health care techniques for health-care workers.

The elements necessary for COVID-19 responders to maintain mental health can be broadly classified into four categories: (a) job performance infrastructure (skills, knowledge, safety), (b) individual self-care, (c) support from family and colleagues, and (d) support from the organization.

1. Job performance infrastructure (skills, knowledge, safety)

- Make sure employees follow standard precautions (handwashing, wearing masks, using hand sanitizer, etc.).
- Provide a mechanism for employees to acquire knowledge and skills related to infection prevention and patient care.
- Explain job descriptions and confirm employees' readiness for their tasks.
- Establish clear rules and procedures for infection prevention.
- Promote awareness of stress management and self-care methods.

2. Self-care for individuals

- Learn to identify your stress reactions (irritability, anxiety, lack of sleep, etc.) and how to cope with them (light exercise, chatting, watching videos, etc.).
- Try to incorporate relaxation, yoga, mindfulness and other techniques into your life.
- Recognize that dealing with an outbreak of infectious disease can take time, it is important to pace yourself to prevent burn out.
- Avoid labeling yourself negatively.
- Avoid excessive exposure to news reports about COVID-19 (TV, social media, newspapers, magazines, etc.), as they may increase your psychological burden.
- Be aware of the fact that you are under stress and try to take frequent rests.
- Take care of your daily routine and make time for your favourite activities.
- Maintain close communication with your family, loved ones and friends.

3. Support from family and colleagues

- Take opportunities to have casual chats with co-workers.
- Be aware that responders who deal with patients who have COVID-19 tend to feel isolated. Try to communicate via telephone or social networking sites, even if you cannot meet in person.
- Treat people as you normally would and talk to them in a friendly manner.
- Use respectful and considerate language when talking to people who deal with patients who have COVID-19 and listen to them when they want to speak.
- Avoid labeling people as “COVID-19 patients’ caregivers”.
- Recognize that anyone can get infected and don’t become prejudiced out of insecurity or fear.

4. Support from the organization

- In the workplace as a whole, offer praise and encouragement to the department and staff who take care of patients with COVID-19.
- Acknowledge, appreciate and emphasize the importance of their work to society.
- Set aside time for reporting to and discussing work with supervisors and colleagues, and providing mutual support.
- Consider creating a system in which those with high-stress jobs are regularly rotated with those with other jobs. When less experienced workers are assigned to work, consider partnering them with more experienced colleagues.
- Provide information in the form of leaflets and other materials with easy-to-understand images for various audiences, such as doctors, other medical staff and office workers.
- Provide information about COVID-19, stress management, suicide prevention, how to reduce anxiety and anger, positive thinking, how to spend a day with children, relaxation methods and exercises at home, etc., based on reliable sources through flyers, posters, websites, etc.
- Establish consultation services to mental health professionals for people suspected of having depression or anxiety disorder.
- Clearly indicate on flyers, posters, etc., where people can go for consultation when they feel they have a mental problem. Even if a consultation service has been established, its value will become less meaningful if it is not well known to people who need them.
- Provide opportunities for those who have cared for patients with COVID-19 to express their feelings, even if it is only for a short time, as a post-work review. However, “psychological debriefing” – which involves remembering and analysing painful memories – is not recommended. A post-work review should be conducted based on the principles of psychological first aid.
- Psychological first aid is based on the principle of listening, reassuring and helping the person calm down without force.

References:

Epidemic and Pandemic Alert and Response. Standard precautions in health care. Geneva: WHO; 2007 (<https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/health-topics/standard-precautions-in-health-care.pdf>).

Psychological first aid: guide for field workers. Geneva: WHO; 2011 (https://www.who.int/mental_health/publications/guide_field_workers/en/).

World Health Organization, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. mhGAP Humanitarian Intervention Guide (mhGAP-HIG): clinical management of mental, neurological and substance use conditions in humanitarian emergencies. Geneva: WHO; 2015 (https://www.who.int/mental_health/publications/mhgap_hig/en/).

Maintaining the mental health of people involved in the response to new coronavirus infections [in Japanese]. March 30, 2020. In: Japanese Red Cross Society [website] (http://www.jrc.or.jp/activity/saigai/news/200330_006139.html).

Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak. Interim guidance. Geneva: WHO; 2020 (<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/mental-health-and-psychosocial-considerations-during-the-covid-19-outbreak>).

Chapter 5. Mental care for children and the elderly

Children and the elderly are more vulnerable in the event of an emerging infectious disease or other disaster. Nevertheless, it may not be easy to reach them with necessary support. This section makes some suggestions that may be of help when caring for these vulnerable populations during outbreaks of COVID-19 and other emergencies.

1. Support for children

It is essential to guide children based on accurate information to protect them and those close to them. Some children might become overly fearful and anxious in the face of a serious situation, endangering their physical and mental health as a result. Try to have calm conversations and explain facts in clear and easy language. It is also important to understand that parents' attitudes greatly impact their children.

1-1. Be aware of slight changes in children

Examples include:

- Frequent crying or mood swings.
- Regression (e.g. wetting themselves or bedwetting).
- Being overly worried, sad, or frustrated.
- Going to bed late.
- Unidentified complaints such as headache or body pain.
- Being unwilling to do activities they used to enjoy.



1-2. Give children a sense of security

- Provide appropriate information, rather than avoiding the topic of COVID-19.
- Protect children from spending too much time hearing news about COVID-19, such as from TV, newspapers and social media. They may misunderstand or not realize what is going on, causing them to panic.
- Tell them that it is natural to feel stressed or restless in such a situation.
- Encourage them to pay attention to even the smallest positive events in their daily lives, such as having a nice meal or wearing their favourite clothes.
- You may have them try relaxation techniques and mindfulness as a way to deal with stress.

1-3. Encourage children to practice infection control precautions

- Be aware that children who are infected may only have minimal symptoms.
- Limit the time children spend with the elderly and those with severe illnesses.

- Teach children over 2 years old to wear masks.
- Teach them daily infection control measures such as handwashing and gargling. For example, washing hands while singing a short 20- to 30-second song (e.g. singing “Happy Birthday”) may help them make a habit of the right washing technique.
- Let them keep daily routine activities.

1-4. Teach children not to be prejudiced against people infected with COVID-19

- Children may develop prejudices against people who are from or living in regions or cities where the virus originated or against people infected with COVID-19. Let them know that people infected with COVID-19 are not bad people and that anyone can get the virus.

References:

Keeping children healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic. 17 September 2020. In: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [website] (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/children.html>).

Coping with stress. 22 January 2021. In: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [website] (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html#parents>),

Guidance for mental health and psychosocial support for COVID-19. Addis Ababa: African Union; 2020 (<https://africacdc.org/download/guidance-for-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-for-covid-19/>).

Save the Children psychological first aid training manual for child practitioners. Copenhagen: Save the Children; 2013 (<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/save-children-psychological-first-aid-training-manual-child-practitioners>).

2. Support for the elderly

It is essential to for elders to use standard infection control precautions such as handwashing or gargling. However, excessive withholding of going out and becoming inactive out of fear of infection may affect their physical and mental well-being. Of particular importance to the mental health of the elderly is to maintain their daily routine.

2-1. Do regular moderate exercise

- WHO recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic exercise per week.
- Exercise (calisthenics, stretching, etc.) at home, in the garden, or on the balcony is recommended.
- Participation in household chores or farming (tidying up the house, gardening, etc.) are also forms of exercise.
- Encourage regular physical activity to reduce prolonged sitting.

2-2. Maintain a healthy eating lifestyle

- Avoid skipping meals.
- Eat a well-balanced diet to keep your immune system healthy.



2-3. Maintain good oral hygiene

- Brush your teeth after every meal and before going to bed.
- Chew your food well.
- Exercise your oral/facial muscles by talking with someone, singing a song, or saying a tongue twister.

2-4. Keep socially engaged and cherish positive emotions.

- Social isolation harms your physical and mental health. With a mask on, try to socialize in small groups regularly.
- When unable to meet in person, talk regularly with family and friends via telephone or video calls.
- Make sure someone can help you if you need assistance with shopping, transportation, etc.
- Cherish any positive emotions in daily life, such as sensations like “this meal is nice” or “the weather is good”.

References:

Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare [in Japanese] [website]

(https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/hukushi_kaigo/kaigo_koureisha/yobou/index_00013.html).

Indian Psychiatric Society & Department of Psychiatry, National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences. Mental health challenges during COVID-19 pandemic: guidance for psychiatrists. Gurugram: Indian Psychiatric Society; 2020 (<https://indianpsychiatricsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/IPS-NIMHANS-COVID-19-Final.pdf>).

Guidance for mental health and psychosocial support for COVID-19. Addis Ababa: African Union; 2020 (<https://africacdc.org/download/guidance-for-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-for-covid-19/>).

Global recommendations on physical activity for health: 65 years and above. Geneva: WHO; 2011 (<https://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/physical-activity-recommendations-65years.pdf>).

Chapter 6. Mental care for people with mental care problems

As various kinds of information surround people in society, they may become confused by too much information or even suffer disadvantages from receiving the wrong information. Health-care professionals need to provide information that is appropriate and based on objective facts, and relieve people's anxiety. It is important for health-care professionals to be clear, factual and empathetic when talking about COVID-19. Moreover, do not hesitate to consult and cooperate with mental health-care professionals if needed.

1. Provide support for people with sleep disorders

During the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work and online classes have been rapidly introduced, thus changing our lifestyles dramatically. Consequently, an increasing number of people suffer from sleep disorders because of maladaptation to those changes in lifestyle. The following suggestions are offered to maintain healthy sleep:

- Regardless of whether it is a weekend or weekday, try to keep your waking hours consistent even if you go to bed at different times.
- Do not set a goal to sleep for a certain number of hours. There are individual differences in optimal sleeping time. Go to bed after you get sleepy. If you do not feel drowsy, give yourself some time to begin to feel sleepy and avoid unnecessary distractions from mobile phones and other devices.
- When you take a nap, it should take place before 15:00 and duration should be 30 minutes or less.
- Make it a habit of soaking in the sun in the morning. It has been suggested that this can help maintain a regular sleep-wake cycle.
- Try to exercise during the daytime.
- Do not drink alcohol in bed or consume caffeine three to four hours before bedtime, as these will reduce the quality of your sleep.
- Calm down before going to bed by stretching or doing your relaxation methods (e.g. taking a bath, drinking herbal tea, listening to music, and so on).
- Before falling asleep, avoid exposure to blue light from a smartphone or tablet, as this will lower the quality of your sleep.
- Prepare a comfortable sleeping environment. Choose the pillows, bedclothes, bed mats and lighting that suit you. Additionally, you should adjust the bedroom environment, including room temperature, humidity and sound.
- If the recommendations stated above are insufficient to relieve the symptoms of sleep disorders, consult a health professional.

References:

Insomnia. In: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare [e-healthnet] (<https://www.e-healthnet.mhlw.go.jp/information/heart/k-02-001.html>).

Techniques for a good night's sleep. In: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare [e-healthnet] (<https://www.e-healthnet.mhlw.go.jp/information/heart/k-01-003.html>).

2. Provide support for people with anxiety

More and more people are anxious about their jobs, futures, daily lives, or the pandemic. Chapter 3: “How to relieve tension” in this manual describes relaxation and breathing techniques, mindfulness and autogenic training, which can be useful in relieving tension. Provide information about these methods to people with anxiety if needed.

3. Provide support for people with aggression

The COVID-19 pandemic is stressful to a majority of people, and some may become aggressive regardless of whether they suffer from psychiatric disorders or not. In particular, pay attention to people experiencing alcohol withdrawal syndrome or drug overdose. The following suggestions can help nonprofessionals manage people with aggression:

- Keep your distance from the person who shows signs of aggression.
- Try to look calm.
- Check whether the person has access to anything that could be turned into a weapon, including their hands. Keep monitoring whether the aggression level is increasing.
- Try not to be confused by the person's ways of expression, but try to figure out what they mean by communicating repeatedly with them. Avoid using language that implies criticism or judgment.
- After the person has calmed down, consult psychiatric specialists and introduce treatments accordingly.

References:

Indian Psychiatric Society & Department of Psychiatry, National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences. Mental health challenges during COVID-19 pandemic: guidance for psychiatrists. Gurugram: Indian Psychiatric Society; 2020 (<https://indianpsychiatricsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/IPS-NIMHANS-COVID-19-Final.pdf>).

4. Provide support for people at risk of suicide

Suicide risk is increasing during the COVID-19 pandemic; for instance, the Japanese Metropolitan Police Department has provided data showing that the number of suicide victims in October 2020 increased by about 22% in males and 83% in females compared to the previous year. Here are the steps to take when confronted with someone who may be at risk of suicide:

4-1. Assess the risk of suicide

It is essential to ask the following questions clearly:

- Do you have specific plans to commit suicide?
- Do you have specific methods to commit suicide?
- Have you ever attempted suicide before?
- Do you feel like dying?
- Have you experienced any stressful events such as being in debt, unemployment, overwork, or grief?

4-2. Listen to the person's feelings without criticism

- Do not assume the person in front of you is mentally weak. Listen to them with respect.
- Listen actively and avoid saying words that would make them feel dismissed or invalidated.
- When the person finishes telling you their story, show your appreciation through thoughtful statements, such as, "Thank you for your courage in telling me about your pain."

4-3. Consult psychiatric specialists soon

- If necessary, recommend that the person consult with psychiatric specialists.
- Encourage the person to be proactive about seeking help and suggest, "Why don't you talk to a specialist about what you are struggling with?"

References:

The monthly number of suicides in 2020. In: Japanese Metropolitan Police Department [website] (https://www.npa.go.jp/safetylife/seianki/jisatsu/R03/R02_jisatuno_joukyou.pdf).

A handbook to be a gatekeeper. In: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare [website] (<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/mamorouyokokoro/gatekeeper/techo/>).

5. Provide support for people suffering from addiction such as excessive alcohol or tobacco consumption, or problems related to the Internet or gambling

5-1. Have an insight into addictive symptoms

- Has the person spent more time playing games, being on social media, or using the Internet during the pandemic than before the pandemic?
- Does the person display an emotional or irritated attitude to others more frequently when they are not taking alcohol or drugs or playing games?
- Are any activities interfering with the person's work or housework?
- Does the person repeatedly give up soon after setting a goal to stop drinking or gambling only to come back for "one more" time?

5-2. If you are concerned about your risk of addiction, take these steps to reduce the harmful use of alcohol or drugs, or excessive Internet use or gambling

- Do not consume alcohol or tobacco at home.
- Avoid going to places where other people are drinking alcohol, such as bars and pubs.
- Ask for help from family and friends to help you limit your use.
- When it comes to alcohol, abstinence is preferable, but if you cannot stop drinking immediately, start by reducing the amount you drink.
- Rather than relying on willpower, take concrete actions such as not having alcohol or tobacco in the house or limiting your social networking time by using the functions of your smartphone itself.
- Discuss with those close to you why you are addicted to drinking alcohol, using drugs, or playing games.
- Think about whether you can replace the time you spend preoccupied with alcohol/drugs and games with other activities.
- If the addiction worsens and interferes with your life or work, consult a specialist.

References:

National Center for Addiction Services Administration [website] (<https://www.ncasa-japan.jp/you-do/supporter/for-medical/when-recommend>).

World Health Organization. mhGAP Intervention Guide for mental, neurological and substance use disorders in non-specialized health settings. Nagasaki: Nagasaki University; 2010 (in Japanese) (https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/44406/9784904561898_jpn.pdf).