

# Coping with uncertainty & leveraging resilience during COVID-19

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## AGENDA

- COVID-19: the psychology of the challenge
- Uncertainty: why it is challenging and how people respond
- Resilience: how to thrive in the face of adversity

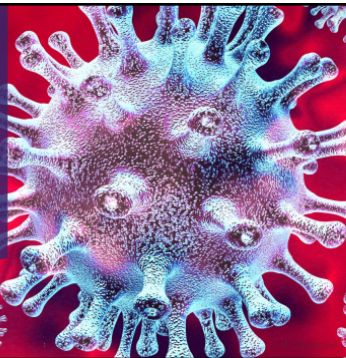
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## COVID-19

- An infectious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)
- Now classified as a pandemic (global outbreak of a disease)



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## COVID-19

### Why is this so difficult?

- Unknown
- Uncontrolled
- Poorly understood
- Threatens wellbeing (life/death, but also our way of life, ability to make a living, etc.)
- Feeling out of control = ↑ distress
- Threatened safety/wellbeing = ↑ distress
- Both are present here = ↑ ↑ distress
- This is normal, should be expected, can neither be avoided, nor eliminated

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**UNCERTAINTY**

- The quality of your life is in direct proportion to the amount of uncertainty you can comfortably deal with.

~ Tony Robbins



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**Coping with uncertainty**

**The challenge of uncertainty**

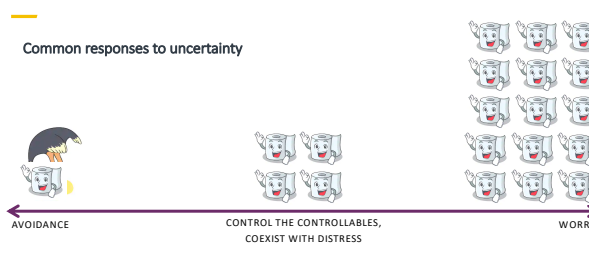
- Nobody likes uncertainty
- When we have something in our lives we do not like, we try to make it stop
  - We approach this with varying levels of urgency – “intolerance of uncertainty”
- Instinctual response:
  - “uncertainty is causing me distress; therefore, I must eliminate uncertainty”

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**Coping with uncertainty**

**Common responses to uncertainty**



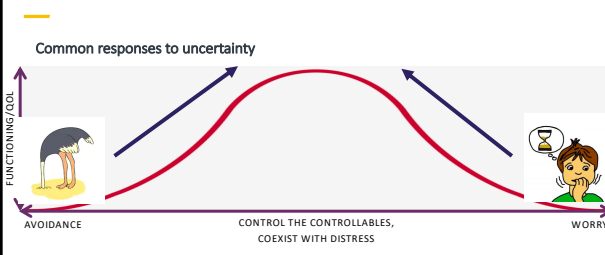
AVOIDANCE      CONTROL THE CONTROLLABLES, COEXIST WITH DISTRESS      WORRY

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**Coping with uncertainty**

**Common responses to uncertainty**



FUNCTIONING/QOL

AVOIDANCE      CONTROL THE CONTROLLABLES, COEXIST WITH DISTRESS      WORRY

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**RESILIENCE**

- *Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it.*

~Helen Keller

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**Resilience**

**Definition**

- "Human capacity to persist, bounce back and flourish when faced with stressors"

~ Bonanno, 2004, *Am Psychol*

- Resilience is not any one thing – it is a combination of many behaviors
- People who are most resilient maximize "resilience behaviors"

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**Resilience**

**Three important domains of resilience in response to COVID-19**

- Acknowledgement of distress
- Controlling the controllables (within reason)
- Co-existing with the uncontrollable/unknown

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**Resilience**

**Acknowledgement of distress**

- People are more likely to react to distress than acknowledge its presence
- When we acknowledge distress, we become more likely to work with it
- When we do not acknowledge distress, our reactionary response kicks in
- This step cannot be skipped!

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## Resilience

**Controlling the controllables**

- Difficult to know if you have done too much or too little
- Follow trusted guidelines – CDC, health department, state and local government
- Do not rely on your gut feeling – it will pull you to do too much or too little

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## Resilience

**Co-existing with the uncontrollable/unknown**

- Requires changing mindset:
  - From “eliminating” distress
  - To “tolerating” or “co-existing” with distress ↖ This is hard!
- In practical sense, it requires having strategies to manage the stress/distress response

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## Resilience

Response	Effect of distress	Preferred response
Physiological	↑ fight or flight response (HR, BP, etc.)	Use strategies that lessen fight/flight
Cognitive	↑ attention to “threats”, ↓ attention to all other factors	Attend to the present
Behavioral	↑ threat mitigation behaviors (e.g., internet checking), ↓ engagement in valued activities	Engage in valued activities
Social	↑ isolation	Be socially engaged

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## Resilience

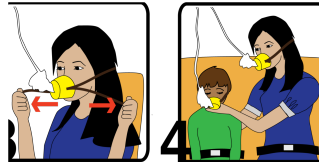
Response	Preferred response	Resource
Physiological	Use strategies that lessen fight/flight	Apps: Headspace, Calm Or: Sit outside, take a warm bath, go for a walk
Cognitive	Attend to the present	Anchor on something in the present (breathing, touch/feel) and redirect to a present task
Behavioral	Engage in valued activities	Schedule “worry time” and then plan for the rest of your time to be spent on activities you enjoy/find meaningful
Social	Be socially engaged	Face to face interaction is difficult now, but make a concerted effort to be in touch with your community (use technology!)

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## Promoting Resilience in Yourself and Others

- Are you taking care of yourself so that you are able to help others?
- Modeling your own self-care is a great model for other people you work with.
- Are you offering to be someone others check-in with?



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## Resources

- Care4U
  - <https://uwmc.uwmedicine.org/BU/Care4U/Pages/default.aspx>
- Peer to Peer Program
  - <https://faculty.uwmedicine.org/p2p/>
- CareLink
  - <https://hr.uw.edu/benefits/uw-carelink/>

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QUESTIONS?

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