

Tips for Helping Manage Fear and Isolation:

Simple Guidance from Experts in the
Field - COVID-19 specific





COVID-19

Tips for Helping Manage Fear and Isolation

Simple Guidance from Experts in the Field

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COVID-19 driving us to 'shelter in place'

- This can get lonely for many!
- Risks of COVID-19 compel social-distancing and increasingly rigid, protective practices in retirement communities
- Some of the most at risk populations are experiencing some of the most extreme isolation
- At same time, families and friends are held to a distance as we work together to protect broader population health, ourselves and those we love
- The result? Many are feeling isolated, and often, more fearful.
- What can we do? We turned to experts to help us get some answers.

Thanks to our Subject Matter Experts

Dr. Bob Campbell
Psy.D., M.Div., MBA, M.A., LCP

- Founder and Co-Director Willow Wellness Center in Park Ridge, IL
- Chief, Mental Health for the Birmingham (Alabama) VA Medical Center



Thanks to our Subject Matter Experts

Sheryl Mullin MA, PC, MFT

- Founder In-Focus Counseling
- Co-Founder-FirstCall Home Health, Salem, Oregon
- Principal – accredited K-12 school, Salem Oregon



Tools: COVID-19 and Beyond

- Our collective goal is to provide you tools to help guide your approach to those who feel isolated, lonely, depressed.
- Some of the guidance you will hear is directed toward our behavioral health population of patients, however general themes can benefit us all.

Guidance From Experts in the Field (video Pt. 1)

- Goal in this presentation to provide you tools for
 - what to do and
 - what not to do
- Your approach should start with listening and being sure to follow up:
 - What, specifically, are they afraid of?
 - Be sure, if you say you will do something to follow up with them that you follow through
- Important, as you listen, to take time and know **what NOT to do** before you respond

Guidance From Experts in the Field (video Pt. 1)

What NOT to do – “Don’t try to fix it”

- DON’T try to ‘fix it’ (the reality of the fear or depression)
 - Can unintentionally negate the importance/reality of what they are feeling
- DON’T relay advice to ‘get this better’
 - Person may feel they are not being heard
 - Can create unintended consequences

Guidance From Experts in the Field (video Pt. 1)

General Guidance

- Please note, these are general guidelines for supporting a person who is feeling fearful and isolated (not specific to a home health or hospice patient)
- Themes can be adopted in our day to day support of our patients, as well as our ourselves, our families and friends

Guidance From Experts in the Field (video Pt. 1)

What To Do

CONNECT!

Can take many forms:

- phone calls
- emails
- cards

Simple things mean a lot

Guidance From Experts in the Field (video Pt. 2)

REMEMBER

- There is a difference in perception between being alone and feeling alone
 - Perceived isolation may exist when objectively, the person is not really by themselves
 - Perception can become reality for most of us

Guidance From Experts in the Field (video Pt. 2)

HELP PERSON GAIN SENSE OF CONTROL

- We know we cannot control COVID-19 beyond actions taken to help reduce transmission
- Where we *can* empower a sense of control, we should do it
- Empower person with simple, calming and centering breathing exercise:
 - Teach deep breathing, in through the nose, out through pursed lips, repeat.
 - Breathing exercise can interrupt pattern of anxiety, putting person back in control of the moment

Guidance From Experts in the Field (video Pt. 2)

DEPRESSION

- Watch for this on the rise in your patients
- Remember, there are a number of different types of depression which may require different interventions:
 - With or without anxiety?
 - Is this a Seasonal Affective Disorder?
 - Confer with an expert if exacerbating!

Guidance From Experts in the Field (video Pt. 2)

Behavioral Activation

- For someone stuck inside and isolated, what activities can you recommend?
- Set a goal to increase activities as they are able; make specific recommendations
- Remember, small things may make a big difference in helping someone FEEL MORE IN CONTROL

Guidance From Experts in the Field (video Pt. 3)

Cognitive Reframing – LISTEN and Reframe

“I am trapped – no one is letting me leave”

Vs.

“I am staying inside to protect everyone outside”

-OR-

“ The world will end because of this virus”

Vs.

“Your thoughts and imagination are leading you to think the world will end because of this”

Work to **increase the distance between thoughts and truth**

Guidance From Experts in the Field (video Pt. 3)

Actions which help people 'reframe' their thinking

- 'Mindfulness-Meditation'
 - Loving kindness, given a platform of regular activity
- Allows us to focus on something positive - 'reframing' our thinking
- Example:
 - "I am going to do deep breathing exercises twice a day (meditation) and send positive thoughts to my sister in Georgia and all those impacted (mindfulness)"

Guidance From Experts in the Field (video Pt. 3)

Have them identify a few things they can do, just once a week, to help someone else

- Simple actions to help them feel better about themselves and help someone else
- Call someone else who may be lonely
- Send a card
- Have them write it down – a guide for their actions they can check off a list
- Write an email
- Share a picture
- Share a smile

Guidance From Experts in the Field (video Pt. 4)

Ask the person to share a time when they were at their best

- This action reminds a person of their strengths, which may help them feel more in control

Guidance From Experts in the Field (video Pt. 4)

FEAR! Don't ignore it!

- Face fear, don't avoid it
- The only way out of it is to go through it
- Thinking through fear can help us process, making it more normal to work through it
- Help redirect to FACTS
- Don't forget to BREATHE! Pausing and taking those few cleansing breaths can help 'interrupt' fear cascade

Guidance From Experts in the Field (video Pt. 4)

Dr. Campbell's summary

- Listen to hear
- Follow up
- Don't give advice or try to make it go away
- Communicate and give control over small and achievable things
- Teach simple meditation
- Tell the truth
- Practice kindness

Sheryl Mullin:

Fear – a common word, a big feeling

“Fear is like an armed robber: forcing us to empty our emotional bank accounts while staring down the barrel of impending doom”



Sheryl Mullin Reminds Us

- Fear stress and anxiety compromises our immune system, which is what we are trying to make stronger!
- Viktor Frankl, neurologist and Holocaust survivor:
 - People will bear up under pain if they can see 'meaning' in it.
- Capture some of the many good stories in how folks are helping people, finding meaning in the crisis
 - for older folks it may mean writing notes for grandchildren, or calling a neighbor
- In times of crisis everything we think we have control of crumbles. State the obvious – we are not in control of this – recognize it
- Remember - fear takes our strength away

Good Advice is Consistent

- Steps to take: Realize fear can immobilize you
- Stay focused on the source of your strength- what in the past has been helpful to you? When have you had fear before – what did you do?
- Help people see examples of using their strengths to do good for themselves and others
 - Example: thank you note left on a garbage can for the people who drive the garbage truck
- Commit to press on – are you going to be someone who will press on, or will you be stuck?
 - Being stuck means your're not moving – this will build fear
 - Being committed means you have decided to press on
 - Keep doing small things – they add up
 - Keep the main thing going – staying focused, keep putting one foot in front of the other

Practice Courage and Feed it With Laughter

- Practice developing courage (courage is practicing our actions in the face of fear)
- Laugh and help make opportunities to want to! Laughing boosts our immune system
- Watch favorite movies or anything that may help make you laugh
- Find purpose in this – maybe call your neighbor and share the smile
 - Write down some funny stories we have from the past – then call a neighbor and share them.
 - Help others laugh!
- Write down your plan.
- If this is something that you feel needs support – ask for help if you need it

Final Tips and Thoughts

- If having a hard time finding source of strength –
 - Plan your work and work your plan....this feeds the 'commit'
 - For example:
 - I am going to open the blinds and get some fresh air in
 - I am going to figure out my plan for my food
 - I am going to get exercise by doing
 - Get an accountability partner – someone to check up on me
 - We need each other
 - Remember, EVERYONE has something to bring.
 - We need your contributions to commit to all of us getting though this!
- NOTHING Is too small!

THANK YOU!

Questions?
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