

Taking care of self and others during challenging times

Access to mental health care in Greece remains limited even for Greek nationals while the modus operandi of state actors is not inclusive of latest scientific developments.

Access to quality and efficient MHPSS services is particularly compromised for the most vulnerable: for the refugees and asylum seekers in Greece, exposure to ongoing post-migration and COVID-19 related stressors is rising.

In general, there is little knowledge on instrumental concepts and practices -such as e.g. community-based care- between front-line professionals working with vulnerable populations in emergency frameworks, when the suffering of people increases.

With these in mind, MdM-Greece aims to create and enhance a set of minimum models of response, procedures and tools to protect and im-

prove people's mental health and psychosocial well-being, especially during unpredicted, emergency situations. Identifying useful practices while also flagging potentially harmful practices upgrades efforts towards people's protection and facilitates an integrated approach to address the most urgent mental health and psychosocial issues in situations like the one currently developing in Greece.

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Selected Resources

- **Doctors of the World -UK: Six Ways to Improve your Well-being**
- **American Psychological Association (2019).** *The Great Unknown: 10 tips for dealing with the stress of uncertainty.*
- **Hatzichristou, C., Yfanti, T., Lampropoulou, A., Lianos.P.,Georgouleas, G., Mihou, S., Fragiadaki, D., &Athanasioiu, D. (2020).** *WE stay at home... WE stay connected.* Athens: Laboratory of School Psychology, Department of Psychology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (translated into English).
- **Hatzichristou, C., Yfanti, T., Lampropoulou, A., Lianos.P.,Georgouleas, G., Mihou, S., Fragiadaki, D., &Athanasioiu, D. (2020).** *Supporting and discussing with children and adolescents about COVID -19. Useful tips for parents.* Athens: Laboratory of School Psychology, Department of Psychology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (translated into English).
- **Hatzichristou, C., Yfanti, T., Lampropoulou, A., Lianos.P.,Georgouleas, G., Mihou, S., Fragiadaki, D., &Athanasioiu, D. (2020).***Supporting and discussing with children and adolescents about COVID -19. Useful tips for parents.* Athens: Laboratory of School Psychology, Department of Psychology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (translated into English).
- **Hellenic National Public Health Organization. (2020).** *Odigies gia paramoni paidion kai efivon sto spiti. [Guidance for children and teenagers during this stay-at-home period].*
- **National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. (2020).** *Enimerosi schetika me Covid-19. [Update on Covid-19].*
- **National Association of School Psychologists. (2020).** *Talking to children about COVID-19 (Coronavirus): A Parent Resource.*

☎ **10 306**

24-hour Psychosocial Support Line
from the Ministry of Health and UOA

☎ **1135**

Hellenic National Public Health Organization
phone number for the coronavirus

Responding to COVID-19

Taking care of self and others during challenging times

Useful tips for the psychological support of families, children and youth and vulnerable groups of population.



 **LABORATORY
OF SCHOOL
PSYCHOLOGY**



**HELLENIC REPUBLIC
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Taking care of self and others during challenging times

Lots of people are feeling anxious about the current situation and may be worried about friends and family in other parts of the world. These are challenging and uncertain times for everyone, but some people are finding it harder than others to cope because of their personal and contextual circumstances.

Some of us are feeling confused and uncertain about our future and many of us are feeling lonely and finding it difficult being far away from our loved ones. It's normal to feel like this since we are facing a crisis. Now, more than ever, regardless of where you were born or what language you speak, please know that help is available for whatever you are going through. Remember, you're not alone – we're all in this together. Feeling worried or stressed is normal but it's really

important that we take care of our health and wellbeing as much as possible. This document includes basic practices to keep yourself well and some useful ways to get support. It is a collaborative document created by Doctors of the World UK, MDM-Greece and the Laboratory of School Psychology of the National Kapodistrian University of Athens that proposes useful tips for the psychological support of families, children, youth and vulnerable population.

1 Be kind to yourself, find time to do something you enjoy. It's OK to treat yourself and do things that make you smile and feel good.

- ⚠ Make the most of the moments you stay confined by engaging in neglected activities & habits or discover new ones (e.g., reading, listening to music, etc.)
- ⚠ Don't be hard on yourself.
- ⚠ It is important to recognize your successes and the things you are grateful for, no matter how small or insignificant they may seem.

2 Move around and find different ways of staying active. Being active reduces stress and helps us sleep better. If you have access to a park or it is safe for you to leave your place of accommodation for exercise, then get some fresh air, go for a walk or a run. If getting out and moving around is not easy or possible for you, keep moving about indoors as often or as much as you can.

- ⚠ Explore different ways of adding physical movement and activity to your day and try to find what works best for you.

3 Connect with others... either by phone, text, social media, write a letter or smile at your neighbours. Many of us miss seeing family and friends and taking part in our usual activities, remember that this is temporary. It's important that we stay connected. Get in touch with family and friends to share your thoughts & feeling and have a chat.

- ⚠ Communicating and sharing negative emotions and feelings we may experience (e.g., distress, worry, anger, anxiety) during this period is a helpful response to the intense and distressful situation that impacts our everyday life.
- ⚠ Seek professional help if you believe that your feelings are greatly interfering with your ability to cope with everyday activities and are negatively impacting your physical health (e.g., symptoms of insomnia, persistent headaches etc.).

5 Take a break from reading or listening to negative news. It is normal to feel anxious about what is happening in Greece and in your country of origin during this time.

- ⚠ Reducing the impact of information overload will help you stay well so make sure you limit your intake of daily news as too much coverage can make you stressed or anxious.
- ⚠ Do not blindly trust any information coming from the media. First assess the reliability and integrity of the news source.

WE ACCEPT THAT FOR THE TIME BEING OUR LIVES HAVE DRASTICALLY CHANGED; DURING CHALLENGING TIMES, WE HAVE EACH OTHER AND WE STAY CONNECTED, RESPONSIBLE AND READY TO ACT IN SOLIDARITY.

4 Stay calm, things will get better. It's normal to feel anxious and worried about things that feel out of control. Try to relax, take deep breaths, this could help lighten negative feelings. Identifying our own strengths (e.g., organizational skills, humor, creativity) and the strengths of those around us (significant others and loved ones) that have helped us in the past may also be helpful.

- ⚠ Try to adjust your daily live and be flexible.
- ⚠ If you feel that you are not coping well, do take into consideration that more time may be needed to effectively respond to this new situation
- ⚠ Reconsider your goals to make them more attainable and realistic, just like you would do in every other challenging situation.

6 Help is available. Things can feel very hard at times, but remember that support may be found, there is hope and you are not alone.

- ⚠ React as calmly as possible if you, a family member, or a loved one gets sick. Follow the guidelines prescribed and the national public health protocols.
- ⚠ You can support others and receive support by staying connected (e.g. calling family members or friends); however, do not forget to maintain a social distancing approach and use long-distance communication methods when possible (e.g., voice or video calling, online communication modalities).
- ⚠ Recognize the significant contribution of the individuals that need to work these days (e.g., doctors, nurses, hospital employees, pharmacists, people who work at food supply and sanitation agencies). Be patient and tolerant with them.

Parents and Children

Taking care of our physical and mental health is necessary in order to be able to support and help our children too. We are role models for them and we may become positive role models in this difficult period by remaining calm and responsible following the official guidance provided by the public health institutes. It's important to stay up to date by using reliable and valid sources of information. At the same time, it's also wise that we avoid spending too much time on mass media or the Internet. Our children may not be always productively kept busy. We may have yet to figure out how to organize our daily lives or we may lack the necessary mental and emotional strength to do it. We are experiencing challenging times when we test and learn our limits. We think that a crisis can be a steppingstone and we can come out of this stronger. It can be a relief for children to recognize that it is normal to experience various and negative emotions due to the special circumstances and to understand that gradually we will return to our previous lifestyle.



- 1 Listen respectfully and compassionately the negative emotions and feelings your children may be experiencing. Provide them with factual information without exaggerating.
- 1 Use positive reinforcement and address behaviors and situations where "WE made it."
- 1 Refrain from having conversations that their content stigmatizes individuals, cultures, and circumstances; Refrain from overgeneralizations.
- 1 Tell our children that nobody is responsible for his/her/their life challenges, such as being sick or having a disease. Nonetheless, each of us needs to stay strong to overcome adversity.

WE DISCUSS WITH OUR CHILDREN how they could organize their daily schedule and alternating activities (e.g., educational activities, home-based physical exercise, chatting with friends, leisure time, etc.). **WE PROVIDE THE OPPORTUNITY** to our children to express themselves and decide how to structure their day, so they feel empowered; a feeling that is necessary when they are experiencing uncertainty. **WE ARE ENDURING DIFFICULT MOMENTS** and situations within our family. It is important to inspire children to incorporate education as a resource in their daily lives by being flexible and adaptive; Explain to them that when they will return to their regular schooling these exceptional circumstances will be considered and adjustments will be provided.