

THE PANDEMONIUM OF THE PANDEMIC

To a generation that feels the need to stay connected through every second of their existence, to a generation that thrives on communication and networking, to whom mobile dependency is of far greater importance than any other kinds of addictive tendencies, the pandemic of 2019-20 has been a watershed event.

In the last decade or so, the social media platforms had revolutionised communication channels and communication patterns. People were drifting



apart physically with reduced interpersonal relationships and face to face interaction, while the number of friends on the Facebook list continued to explode. Meaningful human relationships were given up or sacrificed at the altar of virtual relationships. Amidst all these structural and cultural changes in society, the pandemic struck and coerced us to rethink our strategies to cope with stress, anxiety, depression that are usually associated with the so called 'social distancing' propagated by governments across the world to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus.

It has been six months now that the WHO declared COVID-19 as a pandemic. The declaration triggered a series of unpredictable events across the world

leading to kneejerk reactions by the governments to declare a complete lockdown or shutdown of normal, mundane, day to day activities.

In these troubled times, is it normal to feel insecure, frustrated, detached, alienated, disillusioned with everything going around you? **The answer is YES.**

The online platform till the end of last year was the space for venting out individual frustrations, a space that gave privacy and anonymity, now has become the new normal. Today, it seems to stifle us, ruin our creativity, leading us to lose touch with reality.



How do we cope with such extraordinary stress?

At the outset, however, it is important to identify the areas of concern that trigger stress in our minds.

- **Immobilization-** After having been restricted to our homes to facilitate social distancing, we sometimes fail to motivate ourselves as we do not feel like taking an initiative to do anything constructive. We feel like running away from the bizarre circumstances that seem to envelope us.

Coping Strategy- The feeling of acute immobilization is primarily due to the significant alteration in our day to day activities. In this case, it is essential to restructure our day making either flexible or setting a definite goal for each day. Realistic goals must be set each day. Boundaries must be created between academics and leisure. It is necessary to make the study area comfortable so that it does not become stifling or suffocating.

- **Isolation-** The feeling of isolation is enhanced because of the stringent social distancing norms, when you are unable to go to school, meet your friends, teachers, share food from each other's tiffin boxes or even travel in buses together.

Coping Strategy- Time must be scheduled to communicate with friends, classmates, cousins, and other family members of the same age grade or otherwise. Emotional proximity is essential in all relationships. Video chatting, texting, telephone calls and emailing are some of the ways to stay connected with one another. It must be remembered that the pandemic should not be used as a justification to increase your screen time or the time spent on social media. However, we can always fall back on long lost habits of reading books, painting, listening to music, gardening etc.



- **Vulnerability-** The news channels tend to amplify the drama surrounding facts creating a mass hysteria. This might create a sense of insecurity and vulnerability among the young impressionable minds. Fears of losing a loved one or being infected by the virus may be augmented. The fear of the unknown can be all encompassing and overwhelming.



Coping Strategy- It is necessary to set boundaries for media content consumption. Be informed and updated but not overwhelmed. Obtain information from reliable sources and stay away from media sensationalism.

- **Negative thoughts-** The prolonged restrictions on mobility, the lack interest in day to day activities might trigger negative thoughts about life and the meaningfulness of existence.

Coping Strategy- Identify your thoughts and label them. Try to eliminate these thoughts through meditation, journaling your negative feelings and engaging in any activity that you think might soothe your nerves.

- **Recurrence of these negative feelings-** If the thoughts recur, please feel free to consult a psychologist, psychiatrist, or a counsellor. Talking about and expressing your darkest fears might help in channelling negative thoughts into positive outcomes.

REMEMBER: WE WILL BATTLE THE CRISIS TOGETHER



REFERENCE: COPING WITH THE STRESS OF THE PANDEMIC: A MENTAL HEALTH GUIDE FOR STUDENTS.

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