

Coping with Uncertainty

“Strategies for managing overwhelming stress
in the COVID-19 Era”

Hanover Public Schools

May 12-13, 2020

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Riverside Trauma Center

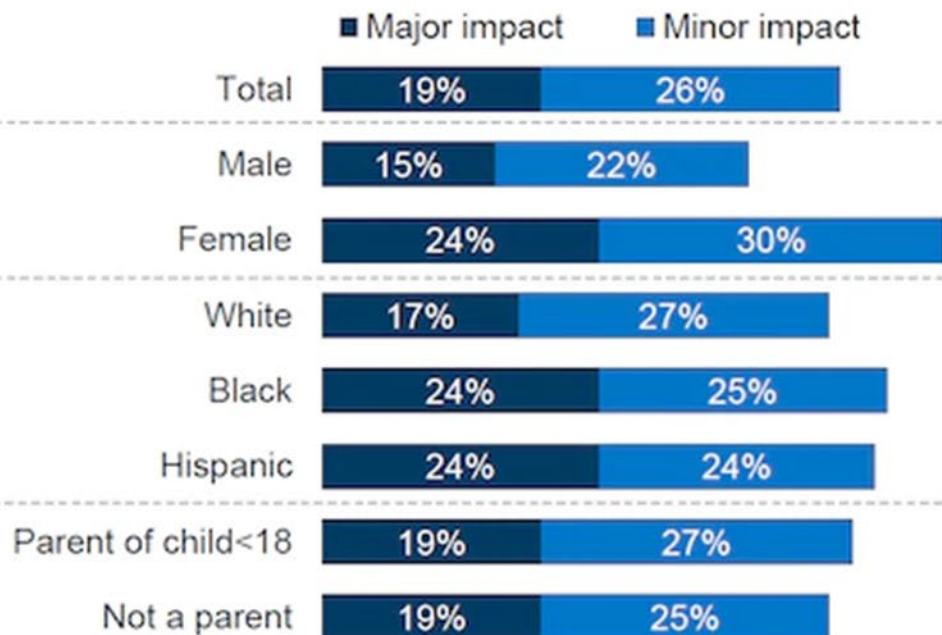
Riverside Trauma Center

A program of Riverside Community Care
Funded by the Department of Public Health and
the Department of Mental Health
Provide “critical incident response”
For example:
Sudden, unexpected deaths, hurricanes, Boston
Marathon Bombings..... And now
Covid-19

Figure 8

Significant Shares Say The Coronavirus Has Had A Negative Impact On Their Mental Health

Percent who say they feel that worry or stress related to coronavirus has had a negative impact on their mental health:



SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted March 25-30, 2020). See topline for full question wording.



Domains Affected by Trauma/Acute Grief

Domain	Symptoms
Cognitive	Confusion, intrusive thoughts, concentration
Emotional	Shock, sorrow, anger, guilt, irritability
Social/Behavioral	Withdrawal, fighting
Physiological	Fatigue, stomachache, startle response, sleep
Spiritual/ Meaning-Making	"Nothing matters." "Why would God do this?" "Why do I bother to do this kind of work?"

Ambiguous Grief

- We associate grief with the death of a loved one but other kinds of losses can result in a strong grief reaction:
 - - loss of a job
 - -loss of safety
 - -loss of social connections
 - -loss of “anniversaries” – graduations, proms...
 - loss of privacy
 - loss of future dreams

“Interrupted Grief”

- When death is sudden, unexpected, or traumatic our grief is magnified exponentially
- Added layer of pain when our loved one dies alone or we don't have access to our support network, our rituals, our funerals
- Grief is cumulative. Any loss reminds us of all previous losses and that includes ambiguous grief

Managing “Interrupted Grief”

- Consult clergy or funeral directors. They can help:
- Modify traditions or rituals
- “Dose” your grief
- Write about your grief
- Identify your best support networks
- Experiment: There is no right or wrong way to grieve. No timelines.

Trauma vs. Grief

Grief	Trauma
Sadness is the most common emotion.	Terror/Fear is the most common emotion.
Acute grief generally runs its course over time.	With Post-Traumatic Stress lack of treatment can worsen the condition.
Pain is an acknowledgement of the loss.	Pain can trigger terror and powerlessness
Generally does not attack nor “disfigure” the self-image of the bereaved.	Generally attacks, distorts and “disfigures” the self-image of the bereaved.
Generally does not involve trauma reactions like flashbacks, startle reactions, hypervigilance, numbing, etc.	Involves grief reactions in addition to trauma specific reactions like flashbacks, startle reactions, hypervigilance, numbing, etc.

Two stages of grief

Who I was before my loved one died

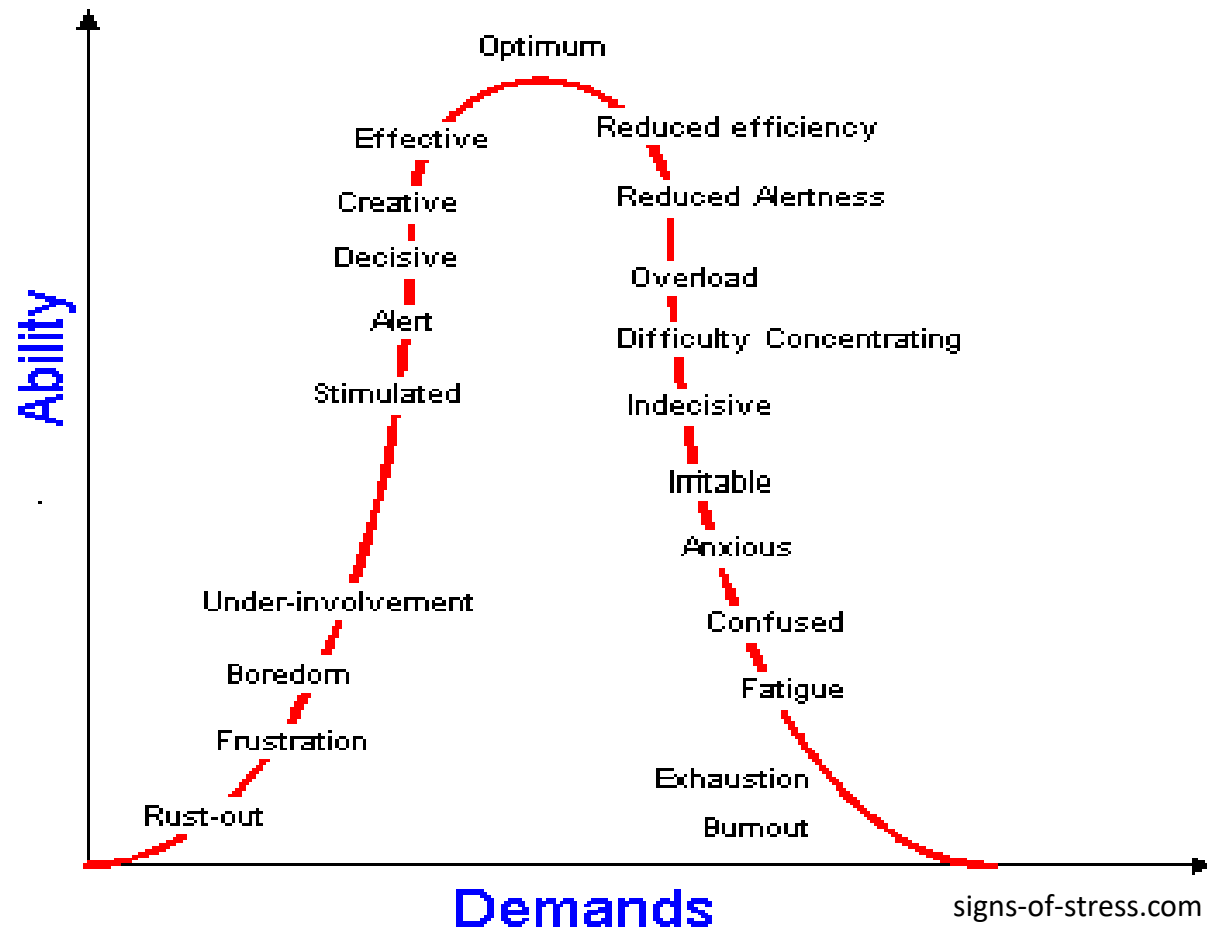
And

Who I am now

What is Stress?

- Stress is a normal physical response to perceived threats.
- The stress response is the body's way of protecting us.

The Stress Response



Fatigue

- Physical Fatigue
- Mental Fatigue
- Compassion Fatigue
- Gratitude Fatigue

Three Kinds of Responses to Stress

Positive

Brief increases in heart rate,
mild elevations in stress hormone levels.

Tolerable

Serious, temporary stress responses,
buffered by supportive relationships.

Toxic

Prolonged activation of stress response systems
in the absence of protective relationships.

The Brain and Stress

Cortisol causes the brain to be cloudy

But....

You don't know your thinking is cloudy
because your thinking is cloudy

Parts of your brain shut-down

Okay, I know you already tried these ways to support your child

Keep your kids moving

Manage screen time

Offer choices

Provide structure and routine

Maintain social connections

Remind your children they are contributing to the solution

And yes, you already tried these ways to support yourselves

- Be kind to yourself
- Remember your coping strategies
- Set small, achievable goals
- Remind yourself you have good parenting skills
- Find time for yourself, even in small chunks
- Maintain your social connections

You can't think yourself out of this dilemma

Good self-regulatory skills – especially for learning, start from the bottom of the brain and work their way up:

- 1) Regulate – music, walking, stretching, breathing.... Move 5 minutes for every 30 minutes of sitting. Patterns, repetition.. “dosing” throughout the day
- 2) Relate – good, two way communication
- 3) Reason – now you can learn

If you only do 3 things

- Sleep
- Move
- Stop watching the news

Different Framework for Resilience

“Resilient people don’t bounce back from hard experiences; they find healthy ways to integrate them into their lives..... “

“They move through... find ways to grow wiser and stronger”

“ If we limit our understanding of resilience to this idea of bouncing back , we miss much of what hardship, pain, and suffering offer us. We also misunderstand our basic human capacity to change and improve.”

Greitens, Eric. Resilience. Boston: Houghton Mifflin (2015)

The Resilience Prescription

- 1. Positive Attitude**
- 2. Cognitive Flexibility Through Cognitive Reappraisal**
- 3. Embrace a Personal Moral Compass**
- 4. Find a Resilient Role Model**
- 5. Face Your Fears**
- 6. Develop Active Coping Skills**
- 7. Establish and Nurture a Supportive Social Network**
- 8. Attend to Physical Well-Being**
- 9. Train Regularly and Rigorously in Multiple Areas**
- 10. Recognize, Utilize and Foster Signature Strengths**

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www.riversidetraumacenter.org

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