

## Ways to reduce the emotional stress of the Coronavirus pandemic

At the moment, the entire world, including Israel, is facing a variety of consequences that have affected our lives as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. The fear for our own health and the health of our loved ones, as well as the fear of an unknown future, are cause for concern.

In order to deal with the stress as best as possible, it is important that we look at and define the reasons for the increase in stress. It should be remembered that anxiety is a response designed to create the individual's readiness for a potentially threatening situation. Hence, the rise in anxiety in such a period is a normal response to an abnormal reality. Therefore, acknowledging and accepting the fear and anxiety of the people around you is not only not harmful, but is also vital and helpful.

Stress may be expressed in emotional ways (anxiety, depression, restlessness, etc.), in physiological ways (muscle tension, accelerated heartbeat, lack of appetite, weight increase, etc.), and in cognitive ways (difficulties with attention and concentration, confusion, etc.).

### What causes anxiety?

A sense of security is a derivative of physical protection alongside a sense of control, knowing and being able to anticipate the future. In addition, emergencies can threaten the continuity of life, and as such, they can trigger anxiety. Hence, maintaining continuity in the routine of life can be a very relaxing factor. An environment where discontinuity and uncertainty are present will inherently be alarming.

In order to strengthen and maintain a sense of security, we recommend the following:

1. **Physical protection:** Obey the guidelines of the Ministry of Health, maintain hygiene, reduce unnecessary contact to a minimum, and avoid staying in multi-participant gatherings.
2. **Information:** Try to expose yourself to qualified and well-defined information only. Also, try to limit this to preset hours and up to two or three times a day and no more. Avoid exposure to unfounded rumors and conspiracy theories.
3. **Routine:** A regular and planned daily routine is extremely important. Even if you are not going to work, plan a schedule for each day and try to stick to it.
4. **Fun activities:** Find ways to relieve stress by participating in fun activities that do not endanger your health. There are plenty of entertaining activities that most people can enjoy: sports, nature walks, watching movies (comedies recommended), participating in your favorite hobbies, and more.

5. **Support:** It is difficult and burdensome to bear the anxiety alone, and sometimes the burden of loneliness is heavier than the burden of anxiety. It is advisable to connect with the people closest to you, share your concerns and let them share theirs, listen to what they say about how they feel and let them listen to you. In other words, carry the emotional load together. Incorporate humor into your discourse. Humor makes carrying the load easier and helps in relieving stress.

### **When should you seek professional help?**

We have described in detail the distressing reactions that are probably common to many of us. At the same time, you know yourself well. If you feel that it is difficult to bear the emotional burden alone and family or friends aren't enough, this may be a good time to seek professional help. Sometimes, a phone call with a professional can significantly improve the way we feel.

In addition, if the reactions mentioned impair daily functioning and disrupt the ability to take an active part in daily tasks, you should seek professional help (e.g., inability to sit in lectures, severe sleep disturbance, many repetitive and disturbing thoughts, feeling disconnected from close friends and family, etc.).

We, the Counseling Services office, through our team of psychologists, operate a telephone line from Sundays to Thursdays from 9:00 to 16:00 in order to assist students and staff. You can contact 03-531-8450, or email me at [Avinoam.Dar@biu.ac.il](mailto:Avinoam.Dar@biu.ac.il) and we will be happy to assist you.

In addition, you can contact the International School and they will help to coordinate any assessments and assistance you may need. Please email Prof. Rachel Dekel at [Rachel.Dekel@biu.ac.il](mailto:Rachel.Dekel@biu.ac.il)

Please don't hesitate to reach out to us. We are here to support you through this crisis and others that come your way.

Warm regards

Dr. Avinoam Dar  
Director of Finkel-Rackman Student Counseling Services  
Bar-Ilan University