



Dear Student Body and University Faculty,

Reducing Coronavirus-related emotional stress

At this time, the entire world, including Israel, are facing the COVID-19 coronavirus, with significant consequences to our lives. The worry of harm to our health and the health of our loved ones, and the fear of uncertain times ahead – raises many concerns.

In order to cope as best possible with the stress, it's important to differentiate and define the causes for increased tension. Keep in mind that anxiety is a reaction intended to prepare the individual for a potentially threatening situation. Thus, increased anxiety at times like this is a **normal reaction** to an abnormal reality. Acknowledging and accepting the fear and anxiety of people around you, therefore, not only is not harmful, it actually is essential and constructive. Stress may be expressed emotionally (for example: anxiety, despondency, loss of appetite) or cognitively (for example: attention deficit, confusion).

What does anxiety come from?

A sense of confidence derives from physical safety alongside a sense of control, knowledge and expectation of the future. Furthermore, states of emergency are likely to threaten the regularity of day-to-day life, and thus they may arouse anxiety. Thus, maintaining a semblance of sequence and regularity in life's routine could have a most calming effect. An environment lacking sequence and rife with uncertainty will naturally arouse anxiety.

To reinforce and maintain our sense of confidence and security, we recommend the following:

1. **Physical security** – Follow Ministry of Health guidelines, practice good hygiene, maintain social distancing and avoid large gatherings.
2. **Information** – Try to keep informed from authorized, clearly defined information only. Furthermore, try to limit this to pre-defined hours and periods of time, up to two or three times a day, not more. Try to avoid exposure to unfounded rumors.
3. **Routine** – A regular and planned daily routine is of utmost importance. Even if you are not going to work, plan a daily schedule and try to stick to it.
4. **Enjoyable activity** – Find a way to relieve the tension through **enjoyable activities that do not endanger** your health. Everyone has something that's entertaining for them: sports, nature walks, movies (we recommend comedies), hobbies, etc.
5. **Support** – It's hard to bear anxiety alone, and sometimes the burden of loneliness is even heavier than anxiety. Find people who are **close to you**, share your concerns with them, listen to their feelings, and carry the emotional load together. Introduce humor into your conversations; it lightens that weight and helps alleviate it.

When is it necessary to seek professional help?

We've described to you in detail the distressful responses that are certainly common to many of us at this time. Still, you know yourselves well. If you feel emotionally overwhelmed, this may be a good time to seek professional help. Sometimes, a telephone conversation with a professional can make us feel noticeably better.

Furthermore, if the responses mentioned affect your day-to-day functioning and disrupt your ability to actively carry out your daily tasks, seek professional help (for example, you can't sit through a lecture, you are sleeping poorly, disturbing thoughts continually race through your head, you feel disconnected from people close to you or from reality, etc.).

The Counseling Center has set up a telephone hotline available Sundays through Thursdays from 9 AM to 4 PM to provide assistance for students and employees by the staff psychologists of the center. Call us at 03-5318450, or the e-mail: Avinoam.Dar@biu.ac.il and we'll be glad to help.



At other hours, you may leave a message and we will do our best to call you back as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Dr. Avinoam Dar, Director
Maria and Joel Finkel Student Counseling Center
Bar-Ilan University