

W.A.R.A. (WIRING AFFECT WITH REATTACH) PROVIDED BY REMOTE TRAINING:
FIRST-AID PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTION?

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Abstract

Wiring Affect with ReAttach (W.A.R.A) is an ultrafast affect-regulation technique that is commonly provided by ReAttach therapists in the proximity of the patient. The benefits of W.A.R.A. are that the intervention is light, brief, and simple in helping to process negative affect. Facing the COVID-19 pandemic and the devastating consequences for mental health, we propose W.A.R.A, amongst other self-regulation strategies, as a first-aid psychological intervention. We immediately started to give access to free online W.A.R.A. training, so professionals, worldwide, can offer W.A.R.A. by remote training and help patients suffering from elevated stress to regulate their negative affect.

Key words: COVID-19 pandemic, First-Aid, W.A.R.A., ReAttach

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Nowadays, a massive number of people are in social isolation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (WHO, 2020). Although we know that the novel coronavirus is only life-threatening for a relatively small percentage of the world population, (although in limited regions of some countries, such USA, Spain and Northern Italy, the mortality is extremely high), the impact on society in terms of economic loss, increased poverty and mental health will be devastating.

The tendency to overestimate a likelihood to experience good events in our lives and underestimate the possibility of experiencing adverse events is called an optimism bias (Sharot, 2016; Weinstein, 1980). Even though we all know we are mortal, we are biased to believe that we are not going to die very soon (Bränström, 2006; Sharot, 2007). We do not expect disasters to happen in our immediate surroundings, which allows us to stay engaged in our daily life routines, with no preoccupation. The sudden and unexpected coronavirus outbreak and the measures taken by governments to contain the pandemic are, therefore, shocking experiences (Mucci, 2020; Ornell, 2020). Indeed, our generation grown up during over 70 years of peace, at least in most advanced countries, was not prepared to cope with this dramatic event and the consequent restrictions to daily life. It is quite natural

that in times like these, the optimism bias is exchanged for a negativity bias. At the beginning of the virus outbreak, it is likely that a large number of people will have been preoccupied with the negative news and will have suffered from psychological distress and anxiety reactions (Conversano, 2020). After the first shock, some people will re-engage in meaningful activities, such as supporting themselves first and then others, as compassionate behavior seems the most beneficial attitude to cope with negative events. Concern for other people is a way to stay connected, to feel in control, and to increase the optimism about the future (Kappes, 2018). Arousal and affect are co-regulated by the social environment (Krueger, 2019), and, therefore, the increased confidence and activated coping will produce a positive influence on the wellbeing of others. However, if we want to prevent a subsequent mental health pandemic, we must immediately start to support those who are not able to deal with their affective states by themselves (Marazziti, 2020).

Wiring Affect with ReAttach (W.A.R.A.) is an ultrafast affect-regulating intervention that is used for the reduction of negative affect in different neuropsychiatric conditions (Weerkamp-Bartholomeus, 2020). Usually, W.A.R.A. is provided by ReAttach therapists as an extra tool for patients with chronic pain or emotional

dysregulation (Weerkamp-Bartholomeus, 2019). This exercise is accessible, fast, and simple enough to be given remotely. Training self-regulation might play a significant role in re-establishing mental health in societies carrying pandemic stress and facing dramatic economic consequences. It makes sense to provide open access to self-regulation strategies that might serve as an emergency mental health relief. Therefore, we have decided to give access to free online W.A.R.A. training to provide W.A.R.A. as a psychological crisis intervention.

We immediately started to train hundreds of professionals, worldwide, free, to offer W.A.R.A. by remote training and help patients suffering from elevated stress to regulate their negative affect.

The benefits of W.A.R.A. are that the intervention is light, fast, and simple in helping to process unpleasant feelings for which there are no words yet. If we succeed in training professionals to transfer W.A.R.A. by remote training, we are of the opinion that we might support a large number of patients who want to benefit in a relatively short time.

We recognize the urgency to offer psychological support as soon as possible and facilitate healthcare professionals, those who are in social isolation, and our patients (Marazziti, 2020; Srivastava, 2020). We want to contribute, provide self-control, and prevent deterioration of mental health issues by proposing W.A.R.A., amongst other self-regulation strategies, as a first-aid psychological intervention. Indeed, it is now evident that coronavirus will be not defeated shortly, at least until we do not have the availability of a vaccine. Therefore, this evidence forces us to re-shape not only our way of living and to re-think our social and economic politics, but to invent and implement novel strategies of intervention for our patients that, for their intrinsic fragility, are amongst the groups most affected by consequences of coronavirus pandemic.

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