

COVID-19 is impacting all of us. Needed measures such as physical distancing, school and daycare closures, travel and work restrictions, and job and financial losses are contributing to heightened anxieties. **During these extraordinary stressors, we offer our suggestions to integrate into telemedicine-delivered Behavioural Activation. We appreciate that all of the SUMMIT BA providers are working under significant pressures.**

Take care and thank you for being you when interacting with our participants and one another.

Using BA to Manage Participants' Anxiety

1. Anxiety, worry and fear are **valid emotions** in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Use the **EMPOWER skills** to validate distressing emotions. A helpful BA principle is to remind participants to **act according to values, rather than emotions**. This helps foster a sense of well-being – especially in times of crisis.
3. Values such as **compassion** and **connectedness** can be upheld. This is an opportunity to override our tendency to act according to fears, to slow down and focus on things that are important. Please see helpful guidelines and vetted apps on [managing your own stress & anxiety as a treatment provider](#) (page 2)



Delivering BA in the Context of COVID-19

In the context of needed social distancing, how can we select or plan activities that are no longer allowed? **It is helpful to:**

- Differentiate what we do and do not have control over.
- Make choices that are aligned with our values: take small steps to engage in modified activities that provide a sense of meaning or purpose, connection, accomplishment and pleasure.
- Express emotions and reflect in the presence of a validating, empathic BA provider.

A. BEGINNING PHASE TASKS:

- **Mapping** – COVID-19 and its impacts are considered in mapping of both the situation AND affected activities contributing to Downward Spirals.
- **Activity/Mood Tracking & Circles of Connection** – Activities will need to be maintained with physical distancing in mind. Make sure you're texting or talking with people you care about, even if only for a few minutes.
- **Values Card Sort** – An opportunity to highlight how values can be upheld even in these stressful times to guide one's choices in meaningful, healthy and creative ways to foster recovery.

B. MIDDLE PHASE TASKS:

- **Selecting, Structuring and Planning Healthy Activities** – Creatively brainstorm to generate ways to modify and implement activities to maintain safety and in compliance to public health constraints.
 - Ask, "What is the benefit of activities that contribute to upward spirals? Can the participant get that benefit virtually/differently without taking any risks?"
 - **Examples:** Virtual connecting with social supports through email, Facetime, WhatsApp, Facebook and telephone - **physically (not socially) distancing**.
- **COPE skills** – It can be applied with a broadened understanding of [stress coping frameworks](#) (click to watch a helpful video)
- **Communication skills** – It remains useful and salient to many issues, relational impacts and emotionally triggering interactions.

C. TERMINATION PHASE TASKS:

- To consolidate the identified activities to continue or stop to **sustain recovery**, restrictions to preserve safety and public health will require modification according to what is or is not possible.

Please remember to practice what we teach: maintain physical distance, engage in activities aligned with your value and health, stay connected with supports, and don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or need support. If you experience any symptoms, contact your local public health authority for guidance.

Managing Your Own Stress & Anxiety as a Treatment Provider

Healthcare workers and teams are facing an unprecedented global pandemic. Many of us feel anxious about what will happen to our patients, families, friends, and communities. Below are four specific steps we can all take to cultivate a sense of calm.

1. PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is the practice of returning your attention to the **here and now**. It sounds simple but it's not easy, especially when we're facing uncertainty about our situation and the future. We find our thoughts wandering to what will happen next. The "what ifs" of tomorrow quickly capture all of our attention and send our stress response into overdrive. One way to reverse this cycle is to bring our attention back to the present moment. Use the **5 senses exercise**. Here's how it works:

- 1) Look around the room you're in. Notice the colours in the room. Find everything in the room that's blue. Next, find everything in the room that's green.
- 2) Listen to the sounds you can hear. Sometimes it helps to close your eyes so that you can hear not just the obvious noises, but also the quieter ones that you usually miss.
- 3) Smell the scents in the room. Take a few breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth. Can you smell anything?
- 4) Taste the flavours in your mouth. Focus your attention there for a moment and see if you can notice anything.
- 5) Feel the air on your skin. Does it feel cool or warm? Notice the places where your clothes touch your skin. See if you can hold your attention there for a couple of seconds.

You have just contacted the present moment through your 5 senses. You can do it anytime, anywhere without anyone else knowing.

Mindfulness is like a muscle—the more you exercise it, the better it will work when you need it most. You may find that practicing mindfulness first thing in the morning or last thing before you go to sleep helps you better meet the challenges of the day.

Other **mindfulness strategies** include:

- Paying attention to your breath for 10 breaths without trying to change or control your breathing. Just notice each breath in your nose, throat, lungs, or diaphragm.
- Feeling the water in the shower on your skin. Notice how the shampoo and soap smell. Hear the sounds of the water.
- There are many more mindfulness and meditation exercises on the [Headspace app](#), which is free to healthcare workers.

2. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

The most important thing you can do to take care of yourself is to make a plan to ensure you can get your most basic needs met. You will need to sleep, eat healthy food, and drink plenty of water.

Think about the things you normally do to relieve stress. Those activities will be especially important during this time. **Write down three activities** that you can choose from when you're feeling overwhelmed and put them in your phone. You can put them in your Notes app, an email to yourself, or schedule them in your calendar. No idea where to start? Activities that connect us with others and help us feel pleasure are important for managing stress. Here are some examples:

- Call someone you love
- Go for a walk or a run. If you're at work, walk or run up a flight of stairs.
- Listen to your favourite song (bonus points if you dance or sing along)
- Watch a funny video or show (laughing is great medicine)
- Express gratitude to someone

3. CONNECT WITH YOUR PURPOSE

When facing challenging and difficult circumstances, it's important to tune out the noise and re-connect with your inner "why?" In other words, **why you do what you do?** Not just at work but also as a person. Healthcare professionals feel called to honour their oath to help the sick, often at great personal sacrifice. We also feel called to honour our commitments to our family, friends, colleagues, and community. Reconnecting with these important callings can help us find the strength to meet the challenges of our day.

4. CULTIVATE WISDOM

It is important to be well informed, but it is easy to become overwhelmed with information and sensationalist news stories during a crisis. Check one or two trusted news sources daily but no more. Read health system updates and emails. Combined with mindfulness, staying well informed will give you the wisdom necessary to make good decisions for yourself, your family, and your patients.

These four steps will be important to take on an ongoing basis. If you can practice all four each day, you will not only modulate your stress response, but you may also improve your immune function. And remember, you are not alone. We are all in this together.