

Basic Psychosocial Skills
A Guide for COVID-19 Responders



Basic Psychosocial Skills Guide for COVID-19 Responders

Adapted presentation and facilitation notes.

For full PowerPoint resource with facilitators notes please

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Aims of Training

Today's Agenda



- To Introduce you to the resource 'Basic Psychosocial Skills: A Guide for COVID-19 First Responders
- To learn what basic psychosocial skills are
- To learn how to use basic psychosocial skills in the COVID-19 response to help others feel supported.

But first- Time for Introductions!

Who can use basic psychosocial skills?

You may work...

as a health professional, e.g. a doctor, nurse, counsellor; or a social worker or case manager



as a first responder, e.g. law enforcement officer, ambulance driver or firefighter



in food supply or preparation, in a pharmacy or in funeral work, transportation, government, utilities or sanitation



in supporting loved ones or friends, or vulnerable people in your community



as a supervisor or manager supporting staff or volunteers.





Psychosocial Skills

- are at the core of supporting others to feel supported
- can be used to support the well-being of those you come into contact with
- can support you to perform your role
- can be used with anyone.

When you think of a recent interaction that you had with someone where you felt supported, there were probably some things that they did that were helpful. Can you think of what they were?

What are psychosocial skills?



Everyday Interactions

- Helping others feel comfortable with you
- Listening and communicating



Practical Support

- Providing practical support
- Linking with other organizations
- Helping people to manage their own problems



Emotional Support

- Using listening and communication
- Encouraging people to help themselves
- Providing suggestions to help them
- Helping those who are seriously distressed

Why Are Basic Psychosocial Skills Important in the COVID-19 Pandemic?

In your role, why is it important to support the well-being of those in your community during the COVID-19 pandemic?



Why are these skills important?

1 Most people will feel stressed during the COVID-19 Pandemic

2 People will recover better when they feel supported

3 You can make a difference to the well-being of people through how you interact and communicate



Your Wellbeing

Why it is important to look after yourself, and ways to look after yourself.



Before you can look after others,
you need to look after yourself.

In the same way that a car needs fuel to drive, you need to look after yourself and keep your tank full so you can keep going. Helping in the COVID-19 response is a long distance race, not a sprint, so pay attention daily to your wellbeing.



What do you do to look after your own wellbeing?

Looking after yourself.

- 1 Stay up to date with accurate information about COVID-19
- 2 Eat well, get enough sleep and exercise every day
- 3 Do an activity that you enjoy or find meaningful every day.
- 4 Take 5 minutes to talk to a friend or family member every day about the way you are feeling
- 5 Talk to your manager or supervisor about your wellbeing at work.
- 6 Establish daily routines and stick to them
- 7 Avoid use of drugs, alcohol and kava
- 8 At the end of each day make a short list of how you have helped or been successful
- 9 Be realistic about what you can and can't control
- 10 Try an activity to relax- see what works for you.

Patrick's story

Patrick enjoys his work as a community leader. However, during the COVID-19 crisis, many community members have lost their jobs and are unable to eat. There are rumours spreading that COVID-19 is not real but a hoax. People started calling Patrick, asking for help and for money. Patrick found himself working long hours listening to community members' problems. He felt powerless and confused about how best to help. He even lost his temper with one person. He realised that he must do something to look after himself. Patrick made a routine. He put time aside to be with his family and take a walk every day. He made a "control circle" and realised that he could not compensate for people's lost salaries, so he thought about ways he could kindly explain this to others if they asked. He also identified ways in which he could support others: listening and helping people to support each other. After a week, Patrick felt more relaxed, was able to speak respectfully to community members and was able to do his job effectively for a longer period of time.



Think of one thing you will do to support your wellbeing today, and tell someone your plan.



Everyday Interactions

Helping others feel comfortable with you

Supportive communication



Everyday interactions: Helping others feel comfortable with you

A



B



Everyday interactions: Helping others feel comfortable with you

Do	Don't
Keep an open, relaxed posture	Don't cross your arms
Look at the person	Don't look away, down at the floor or at your phone
Use culturally appropriate eye contact to support the person to feel relaxed and heard	Don't use culturally inappropriate eye contact, e.g. don't stare at the person
Clearly introduce yourself – your name and role	Don't assume that the person knows who you are or what your role is in the response
Maintain a calm and soft tone of voice with a moderate volume	Don't shout or speak very quickly
If the person cannot see your face, try to have a photo of yourself attached onto your clothing (e.g. if you are using personal protective equipment such as a mask)	Don't assume that the person knows what you look like if you are wearing personal protective equipment (e.g. mask)
Confirm that they are comfortable speaking with you, e.g. "Are you comfortable speaking to me (a man)? If you would like to speak to a woman, I can arrange for my colleague to speak with you"	Don't assume that the person is comfortable speaking to you
If someone speaks a different language from you, try to access an interpreter (or family member) and to reassure them	Don't assume that the person speaks the same language as you

Everyday interactions: Supportive Communication



Listen attentively

- Really try to understand the person's point of view and feelings.
- Let them talk; remain quiet until they have finished.
- Block out distractions – is it noisy around? Can you go somewhere quieter? Can you calm your mind and focus on the person and what they are saying?
- Be warm, open and relaxed in the way you present yourself.



Repeat

- Repeat messages and key words the person has said, e.g. "You say looking after your children while working can be overwhelming."
- Ask for clarification if there is something you didn't understand, e.g. "I didn't quite understand what you said just then, could you please explain again?"



Summarize at the end what you have understood

- Identify and reflect key points you heard the person say, so that they know you have heard them and to be sure you have understood them correctly, e.g. "From what you have just said, I understand that you are mainly worried about [summarize main concerns they have expressed], is that correct?"
- Describe what you have heard, rather than interpreting how they feel about the situation (e.g. don't say: "You must feel horrible/devastated"). Don't judge them or their situation.

Everyday interactions: Supportive Communication

Show that you care.



Everyday Interactions- Supportive Communication

- **Words**

Use supportive phrases to show empathy (“I understand what you are saying”) and acknowledge any losses or difficult feelings that the person shares (“I am so sorry to hear that”, “That sounds like a tough situation”).

- **Body language**

Includes your facial expressions, eye contact, gestures and the way you sit or stand in relation to the other person.



Everyday Interactions- Supportive Communication



Lina, a worker in a funeral parlour, was able to use active listening to support Grace:

Grace: Hi, I need to arrange a funeral for my brother who has... [sobs]

Lina: It's okay, take your time. It sounds like you are having a difficult time.

[10 seconds of silence]

Grace: Okay, I am here. Yes, thank you. It's so hard – I can't believe this has happened.

Lina: I can hear how upsetting this is for you.

Grace: I just don't want this to be real.

Lina: Mmhmm, I am here, listening.

Grace: I loved my brother so much – we were tight. He was my best friend. And today he passed away.

Lina: It sounds like your brother was very important to you – your best friend.

Grace: Yes, he was my best friend... it's so tough... I remember all the fun times we had together [laughs a little].

Lina: I am hearing that you are also remembering the fun times too.

Grace: Yes, it makes me smile to think of the fun times. Thank you, my dear, you have really helped me feel better.

Lina: Of course, I am happy to support in these tough times.

Grace: I am now ready to discuss what can be done about the funeral arrangements.

How could you adapt these psychosocial skills for everyday interactions to remote/telephone working in the COVID-19 response?



- Clearly introduce yourself
- Ask if the person is able to speak
- Clarify any miscommunications or misunderstandings
- Allow for pauses when the person stays silent
- Make helpful comments to normalize silence
- Try to minimize disruptions
- If possible, support the person to both see and hear you when talking, e.g. by using video software.



Take a Break for 10 minutes

Have a stretch or take a refreshment break.



Practical Support

- Providing practical support to others
 - Linking with other organizations
- Helping people to manage their own problems.



Practical Support

What kind of problems have people in your community experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic?



Practical Support- Providing help yourself.

1

- Provide information (e.g. about the situation)

2

- Provide support yourself (e.g. food, water, shopping)

3

- Don't feel pressured to provide direct support if you are not able to.

In your role, can you provide direct support?



Practical Support: Norma's story



Norma lives in a crowded community. One of her neighbours, Barry, is an elderly man who lives by himself. Norma telephones him and asks how he is doing. Barry says he has not been able to get outside to buy the medicine he normally takes for his hypertension. Norma goes to buy food every week and suggests that she could go to the hospital or pharmacy and buy Barry's medicine too. They decide on a safe place just outside Barry's door where he can leave money and Norma can leave the medicine. In that way, they do not have to come into physical contact.


Practical Support: Linking in with other organizations

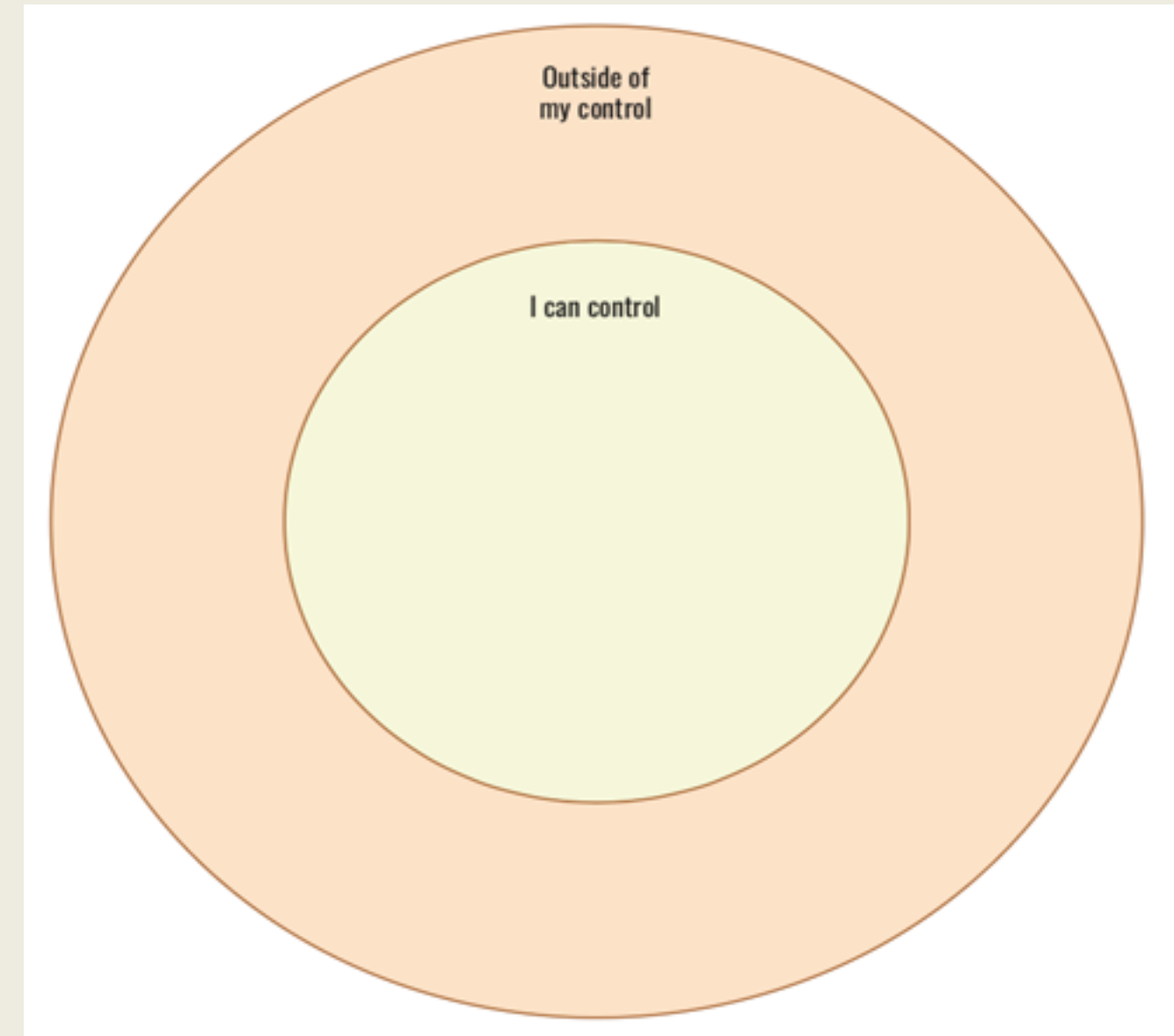


- Create a list of all organizations operating in your area and their contact details. Keep this with you at all times.
- Quickly link people in distress or those who need food, water, shelter or urgent medical or social services.
- Follow up with people if you agree to do so.

Personal Reflection: Do you know all the organizations operating in your area?

Practical Support: Helping people to manage their own problems

 **STOP** Help the person to take a pause, and consider what problems are most urgent. Help the person to use the circles of control to identify and choose a problem which they can do something about.



Practical Support: Helping people to manage their own problems



THINK Encourage the person to think of ways to manage that problem. The following questions may help:

- What have you done in the past to overcome problems like this?
- What have you already tried doing?
- Is there someone who can help with managing this problem (e.g. friends, loved ones or organizations)?
- Do other people you know have similar problems? How have they managed?



GO Help the person to choose a way to manage that problem and try it out. If it doesn't work, encourage the person to try another solution.

Practical Support: Helping people to manage their own problems



Emotional Support

Module 4



- Use listening and communication
- Encourage people to help themselves
- Provide suggestions to help them
- Helping those who are seriously distressed.

How have people reacted to COVID-19 in your community?

When someone is feeling distress it can result in...



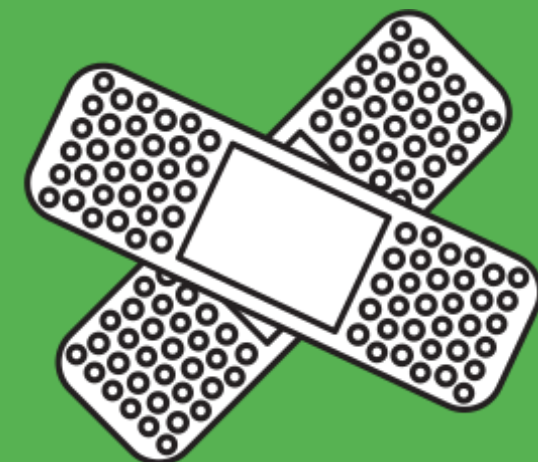
Emotional Reactions
(feeling angry, sad or scared)



Behavioural Reactions
(lack of motivation, avoiding activities, becoming violent).



Physical Reactions
(headaches, muscle pain, back pain, difficulty sleeping, lack of appetite)



When someone is experiencing stress

Use listening and communication skills

- Help the other person to feel comfortable with you
- Listen
- Show you care.



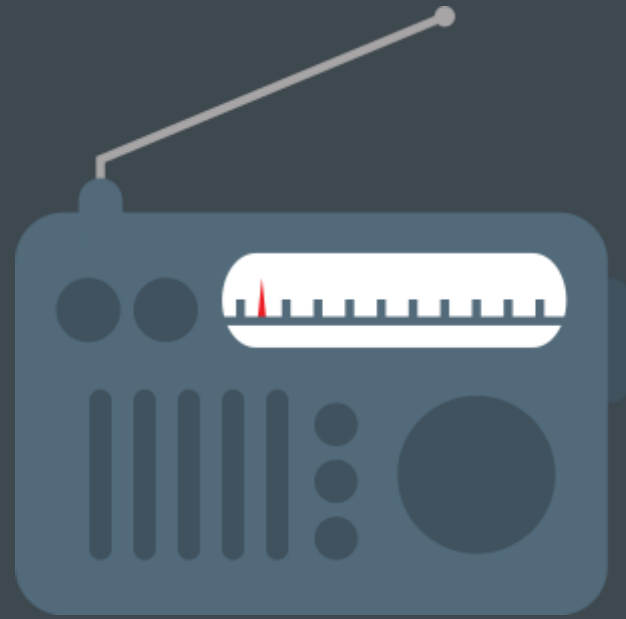
When someone is experiencing stress

Encourage the person to think of something they can do to feel better.

- “What has helped you previously when you have felt this way?”
- “What do you currently do to help yourself feel better?”
- “Is there anyone who can help you?”
- “Are there any activities you used to enjoy doing that you could do now?”



Provide Suggestions to help them



- Do an activity you enjoy or find meaningful (e.g. pray, sing)
- Exercise, walk or dance
- Do something creative, such as art, singing, crafts or writing
- Listen to music or the radio
- Speak to a friend or family member
- Read a book or listen to an audiobook
- Make a list of all the things you are grateful for (in your head, on paper).

Emotional Support- An Example of Support



Josephine's partner has been taken into hospital with COVID-19. She is so worried about him that she is not sleeping at night, she cannot eat and she has back pain.

Josephine is talking to her colleague, Julia, on the phone and tells her how she is feeling. Julia listens to her, and shows her support and care. She asks Josephine if there is anything she can do to make herself feel better.

Josephine is so tired that she can't think about anything at the moment. Her back aches so much...

She realises that she has been at home without walking or moving very much and decides to do some stretches and to dance in the mornings to some nice music, as she and her partner would normally do.

Julia loves this idea and tells her that she can join her by telephone or video call in the morning to stretch and dance too. Josephine is happy about that suggestion and to have her colleague join her in this way.

Practising slow deep breathing can be a helpful strategy for some people.

Be mindful of the need for masks and physical distancing.



When Someone is Seriously Distressed

So upset they cannot take care of themselves or others

Being very anxious
and fearful

Talking about
wanting to hurt or
kill themselves

Crying

Not knowing their name,
where they are from,
what is happening

Shouting

Feeling disoriented or “unreal”

Shaking

Being very withdrawn

Being angry

Threatening to hurt others

they may need to be connected to more specialised support.

When Someone is Seriously Distressed



If you are talking on the phone, try to stay on the line with the person until they calm down and/or you are able to contact emergency services to go and help directly. Check that they are comfortable and able to talk.

1 Safety first! Make sure that you, the person and others are safe from harm. If you feel unsafe, leave and get help. If you think the person may hurt themselves, get help (ask a colleague, call emergency services, etc.). Take preventative measures against COVID-19 infection (e.g. physical distancing). Do NOT put yourself at risk.

2 Let them know who you are: Introduce yourself clearly and respectfully – your name and your role, and that you are there to help. Ask them for their name so that you can address them.

3 Keep calm: Don't shout at the person or physically restrain them.

4 Listen: Use your communication skills, as described in Module 2. Do not pressure the person to talk. Be patient and reassure them that you are there to help and to listen.

5 Offer practical comfort and information: If possible, offer the person a quiet place to talk, a non-alcoholic drink or a blanket. These gestures of comfort will help them feel safe. Ask them what they need – don't assume that you know.

6 Help people regain control:
a. If the person is anxious, support them to breathe slowly – see “slow breathing” technique page 14.
b. If the person is out of touch with their surroundings, remind them where they are, the day of the week and who you are. Ask them to notice things in their immediate environment (e.g. “Name one thing you see or hear”).
c. Help them to use their own good coping strategies and to reach out to supportive people in their lives.

7 Provide clear information: Give reliable information to help the person understand the situation and what help is available. Make sure that you use words they can understand (not complicated words). Keep the message simple and repeat it or write it down if needed. Ask them if they understand or have any questions.

8 Stay with the person: Try not to leave the person alone. If you can't stay with them, find a safe person (a colleague, a friend) to be with them until you find help or they feel calmer.

9 Refer to specialized support: Do not go beyond the limits of what you know. Let others with more specialized skills, such as doctors, nurses, counsellors and mental health professionals, take over. Link the person directly with support, or make sure that they have contact information and clear instructions for getting further help.

Can you think of groups in your community who may require additional attention or support during the COVID-19 Pandemic?



Groups who may require additional support

- People who are experiencing stigma relating to COVID-19 (individuals and families)
- People at risk of, or currently experiencing, violence or discrimination (e.g. people experiencing gender-based violence and/or intimate partner violence that may escalate during movement restrictions during the pandemic, LGBTQ+, minorities)
- Older adults, especially those who are forgetful (e.g. those with dementia)
- People in rural and remote locations
- People who are also experiencing impacts from major incidents and disasters (natural or man-made)
- Pregnant women and people with chronic health conditions who need regular access to services
- People with disabilities, including mental health conditions and psychosocial disabilities
- Children, adolescents and their caregivers
- Those in crowded living conditions (e.g. prisoners, older adults in nursing homes, people in psychiatric hospitals, inpatient units or other institutions) or those who are homeless
- People living alone who have difficulties leaving their home
- People who may have difficulty accessing services (e.g. migrants, or people far from communication or transport options).

Stigma- the psychosocial impact

Annie became unwell with a headache, fever and a scratchy throat on Wednesday, so went for a COVID-19 test, and self-isolated at home while she waited for her result. In the days waiting for the test result, she found herself feeling lonely and disconnected from her friends and family, and worried about how they would treat her when they heard about her illness.

Annie's family live in a neighboring village and have not seen Annie for more than 3 weeks, but when someone there heard about Annie's test, their attitude changed towards the family. The family were told they were not welcome in the local market, and local children were told that the family is 'dirty'.

On Friday Annie received a negative COVID-19 result. She no longer had symptoms of sickness so returned to work. Her office manager said that Annie could not have the amount of hours that she used to, as other workers were uncomfortable with her being in the office.



Overall Reflection

How are you most able to support others?

- Through everyday interactions
- Providing practical support
- Providing emotional support.

How can you best apply the basic psychosocial skills to your role?



Thank you.



Please contact IASC MHPSS RG for translations and other resources.

<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-reference-group-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-emergency-settings/iasc-guidance-basic>

mhpss.refgroup@gmail.com