

Panic and Fear in the Wuhan Novel Coronavirus Epidemic:

How can Psychologists help?

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As psychologists we have a special role to play in the management of the Wuhan novel coronavirus epidemic. Our role is to help people distinguish between panic and fear, and direct them to appropriate action.

The first thing to do is to admit that the epidemic is real and that we are not helped by denial, apathy, or panic. Denial, in this circumstance, is when we say nothing is happening even when there is plenty of evidence that a serious epidemic is taking place. Apathy is when we admit the epidemic is happening but feel that we cannot do anything about it, for one reason or another. Panic is an irrational emotional reaction to a non-threatening situation or an over-reaction to a threatening situation. Panic typically makes a bad situation much worse.

Panic and Fear

We must distinguish **panic** from **fear**. **Panic** is an irrational emotional reaction to a non-threatening situation or an over-reaction to a threatening situation. **Fear** is an emotional response to a threatening situation, which prepares us for effective fight or flight. It prepares us to deal with the situation. In dangerous situations we need to mobilize our fear in order to take appropriate safety measures, but we must guard against panic, which may lead us to engage in useless, unreasonable, careless, or even dangerous acts.

Panic is a psychological and sociological problem that is, in a sense, contagious. Panic spreads through the media and day-to-day conversations in which **limited information, exaggerated information, faulty information, vague information, and sensationalized information**

bombard our senses and begin to play on our own personal fears. This is why institutional transparency about the realistic dangers of the epidemic is so essential. If people cannot trust the official information they receive, they will naturally begin to panic, not know what to believe, and start to believe the most outrageous things. Accurate and trustable information is absolutely essential. When people doubt the reported information, they start believing rumors, conspiracy theories, and home remedies. They mistrust their neighbors, look for people to blame, and behave in erratic and dangerous ways.

Is there a realistic reason to **fear** the novel coronavirus? Yes, absolutely! It is a serious infectious disease that requires realistic preventative measures and when it is contracted by an individual, it requires realistic medical treatment. Is there any reason for panic? Absolutely not! Panic is the opposite of what is needed.

As the story fills the newspapers, the television, the radio, the Internet and our daily conversations with friends and families, our thoughts and feelings become flooded. We are horrified and panicked by the images and the news, but we continue to watch. Our powerlessness and rage oscillate prompting us to withdraw in one moment and want to take indiscriminate action in the next. Indiscriminate action is the result of **panic**. Use the media to remain informed and plan appropriate action but if you find yourself nervously watching or reading the news for hours on end, with no result other than increasing your own **panic** level, you should know that you are not helping anyone and least of all yourself.

What Should I Do?

To avoid getting caught in panic, maintain healthy habits of daily living and avoid using of alcohol or illicit drugs for coping with the stress. Some might say, “Oh no, this is a crisis. I need a drink.” But what they should say is “Oh no, this is a crisis. The last thing I need is a drink!”

Maintain good eating and sleeping habits. Anxiety increases dramatically when people have not been eating and/or sleeping properly.

If your mind becomes flooded with so many things you feel you need to do or need to worry about, it is often useful to write them down, prioritize them, number them and one-by-one make a realistic plan of how to deal with each.

While a period of withdrawal and a loss of interest in the world are not uncommon in the midst of an epidemic, it is important to not let the withdrawal become chronic. Attend to the daily life in a safe manner and stay involved with the things important to you, your family, and your friends.

Maintain your usual schedule as much as you can but be clear that this is not a usual situation and some aspects of daily living will be different. Make no mistake about it, this is an emergency situation and it requires changing one's routine and taking appropriate safety measures.

Evaluate the situation realistically, plan appropriate action, prepare for the problems you anticipate, and calmly do what must be done. Underscore the safety level of the current situation and the concrete actions that need to be taken in order to stay safe.

Keep the threat of immediate danger in perspective and distinguish it from your personal anxieties. Plan for yourself and your children in terms of the **real danger**, not the **imagined danger**.

When talking with friends and family about the novel coronavirus you can use one another to help make the distinction between realistic dangers and imagined personal fears. If your conversations lead to panic and paralysis or denial and apathy, you'll need to shift the focus. If your conversations lead to constructive evaluation of the situation and realistic planning to deal with it, you're on the right track.

Don't make decisions irrationally.

In the midst of a crisis people often lose their ability to set priorities. Things that are most important are minimized or forgotten and other things of minor importance seem to take on disproportionate significance. It is often useful to make a list of what needs to be done and separate the items into short-term goals and long-term goals.

Watch yourself to see that your anxiety doesn't get expressed in reckless driving, carelessness when handling dangerous tools, or irritability with people with whom you come into contact. Take time to relax and then make a realistic plan of action to deal with the situation.

Think realistically about the real dangers and use your realistic fear to mobilize yourself into practical action.

Take a break and remind yourself that if you don't take breaks you will not be much use to anyone.

Maintain a sense of humor. Be kind to yourself and others.

What Should I Not Do?

Avoid heavy drinking and the illicit use of drugs as a means of coping with the crisis.

Don't withdraw from the world entirely. Back off for a while if you need to and then get back into it.

Don't deny what is going on hoping it will just go away. Admit it and confront it.

Don't sink into apathy thinking that you can't have an effect. If it makes the task more approachable, think small, think realistic, and think concrete.

Be flexible and creative.

Channel your anxieties into creative and productive action.

What to Do to Help Children in this Crisis:

While some adults close down and others emote in the midst of this epidemic, young children tend to respond the way the adults around them are responding. Children often become quite theatrical about these things when they feel that is what the parents are expecting. **It is for this reason that parents, teachers, and school counselors should neither minimize, nor exaggerate the problem.**

Give children only the basic facts that the children can understand, keeping in mind their age and intellectual level. Don't talk about aspects of the epidemic that will frighten or confuse children. If you give too much detail, they will just absorb your anxiety and feel powerless to deal with it. Parents should talk to other adults to sort out things of an adult nature. Leave the small children out of these conversations and tell them only what they need to know.

Be sure not to overwhelm children with the horrible details. Tell them what they need to know to be safe. "There are people who are sick, and they are going for treatment at the hospital. It is dangerous to visit them now because we don't want you to get sick from them. So, we will stay home and do some indoor activities instead."

Give children opportunities to draw and tell stories about what they have seen or heard and about how they feel about it. Irrational fears are often put into better perspective when they can be expressed creatively, discussed calmly with those willing to listen, and dealt with realistically. Offer your children creative play experiences for expressing thoughts, feelings, and conflicts.

Don't plant the seeds of panic in the impressionable minds of children. Speak with your children about the epidemic and the real dangers involved in a straight-forward and realistic fashion.

Conclusions

Panic reactions may include extreme and unrealistic responses to the actual threat, carelessness, restlessness, agitation, depression, withdrawal, sleep disturbances, changes in appetite, upset stomach, dermatological problems, irritability with others, reckless driving, headaches, etc. While these reactions take a personal toll and can become problematic to family members and co-workers, they can become particularly dangerous when, for example, people begin to seek simple solutions to their problems by blaming others and striking out violently. This is another panic reaction. So, once again, avoid panic and deal with the real dangers in a realistic fashion.

This is a health crisis that renews itself every day, attacks every day, and will require our calm and creative solutions every day for many months. For some, it may be useful to read and re-read the recommendations listed here day after day. The reader will notice that the ideas are not very complicated, sophisticated, or even new. In most cases they are really nothing more than simple common sense but in the midst of a crisis it is often difficult to think straight and so these reminders become useful to return to and remind others of again and again

Often people in the midst of a crisis like this, feel they need to solve all the problems and if they cannot, they feel powerless and become somewhat paralyzed. This is why it becomes important for each person to participate in his/her capacity and in his/her way. If each person contributes just his/her part, that should be sufficient for us to achieve our goals.

I have heard it said that in Chinese the word for **crisis** is a combination of the words **change** and **opportunity**. The Wuhan novel coronavirus epidemic calls for a **change** in daily life, which includes efforts at prevention and treatment, but it is also an **opportunity** for people to find new ways of working together to overcome a common challenge.

Below is some information from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. It offers guidelines for preventing the spread of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus Wuhan, China.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread-chinese.html>

预防 2019 年新型冠状病毒 (2019-nCoV) 传播给家庭和社区中其他人的暂行指南
English

本暂行指南基于目前已知的有关 2019 年新型冠状病毒 (2019-nCoV) 和其他病毒的呼吸道感染传播情况。美国疾病控制与预防中心 (CDC) 将根据需要并在获得更多信息时，更新此暂行指南。

冠状病毒是一大类病毒，其中一些会导致人类患病，而另一些会在动物（包括骆驼、猫和蝙蝠）之间传播。在罕见情况下，动物冠状病毒能进化并感染人类，然后在人群中传播，例如在中东呼吸综合症 (MERS) 和严重急性呼吸道症候群 (SARS) 中所见到的情况。2019-nCoV 的人传人可能性尚不明确。以下暂行指南可能有助于预防这种病毒在家庭和社区的人群中传播。

此暂行指南适用于以下情况：

- 患者已确诊患有 2019-nCoV 感染，但无需住院治疗，并且可以在家中接受治疗
- 患者正在接受由医务人员进行的 2019-nCoV 感染评估，其无需住院治疗并且能在家中接受治疗
- 已确诊患有 2019-nCoV 感染或正在接受 2019-nCoV 感染评估的患者的照护者和家庭成员
- 与已确诊患有 2019-nCoV 感染或正在接受 2019-nCoV 感染评估的患者有密切接触的其他人

已确诊患有 2019-nCoV 感染或正在接受 2019-nCoV 感染评估的患者在家中接受治疗的预防措施

您的医生和公共卫生工作人员将评估您是否可以在家中进行治疗。如果确定您可以在家中隔离，您将由当地或州卫生部门的工作人员监测。您应该遵循

以下预防措施，直到医务人员或当地或州卫生部门告知您可以恢复正常活动。

除了进行诊疗护理之外，请留在家里

除了进行诊疗护理之外，您应该限制出门活动。不要上班、上学或前往公共场所，也不要使用公共交通工具或出租车。

将您自己与您家中的其他人隔离

您应尽可能与家中的其他人待在不同的房间里。此外，您应使用单独的洗手间（如有）。

前往就诊之前，请先电话联系您的医生

在您预约就诊之前，请致电医务人员并告诉他们您患有 2019-nCoV 感染或正在接受 2019-nCoV

感染评估。这将有助于医务人员的诊所采取措施，以免其他人受到感染。

戴口罩

当您与其他人在同一房间时，以及您到医务人员处就诊时，您应该戴上口罩。如果您不能佩戴口罩，那与您同住的人在与您处于同一个房间时，应戴口罩。

遮挡咳嗽和喷嚏

当您咳嗽或打喷嚏时，应用纸巾遮挡口和鼻，或在咳嗽或打喷嚏时用您的袖子遮挡。将用过的纸巾扔到有塑料袋的垃圾桶中，然后立即用肥皂和水洗手至少 20 秒。

洗手

经常用肥皂和水彻底清洗您的双手至少 20

秒。如果没有肥皂和水，并且您的手没有明显变脏，则可以使用含酒精的手部消毒液。避免用未清洗的手触碰您的眼睛、鼻子和嘴巴。

避免共用家居用品

您不应与家里的其他人共用碗碟、饮水杯、杯子、餐具、毛巾、床上用品或其他物品。使用这些物品后，应用肥皂和水对其进行彻底清洗。

监测您的症状

如果您的病情恶化（例如呼吸困难），请立即就医。在您预约就诊之前，请致电医务人员并告诉他们您患有 2019-nCoV 感染或正在接受 2019-nCoV 感染评估。这将有助于医务人员的诊所采取措施，以免其他人受到感染。要求您的医务人员致电当地或州卫生部门。

照护者和家庭成员的预防措施

如果您与已确诊患有 2019-nCoV 感染的患者或正在接受 2019-nCoV 感染评估的患者同住或在家里为其提供照护，则应：

- 确保您了解并可帮助患者遵循医务人员的药物和治疗指示。您应该帮助患者获得居家基本需求，并在购买杂货、处方药和其他个人需求方面提供支持。
- 家里只需留下为患者提供必需的照护的人。
 - 其他家庭成员应留在其他的住所或居住地。如果无法做到这一点，则他们应该留在另一个房间，或者尽可能与患者隔离。如果可以，应使用单独的洗手间。
 - 限制没有必要的客人到家里来。
 - 避免老年人和免疫系统受损或有慢性健康疾病的人员接近患者。这些人员包括患慢性心脏病、肺病或肾脏疾病、及糖尿病的患者。
- 确保家里的共用空间通风良好，例如使用空调或在天气允许的情况下，打开窗户。
- 经常用肥皂和水彻底清洗您的双手至少 20 秒。如果没有肥皂和水，并且您的手没有明显变脏，则可以使用含酒精的手部消毒液。避免用未清洗的手触碰您的眼睛、鼻子和嘴巴。

- 触摸或接触患者的血液、体液和/或分泌物（如汗液、唾液、痰液、鼻粘液、呕吐物、尿液或腹泻物）时，请戴一次性口罩、防护服和手套。
 - 在使用后，丢弃一次性口罩、防护服和手套。请勿重复使用。
 - 脱下口罩、防护服和手套后应立即洗手。
- 避免共用家居用品。您不应与已确诊患有 2019-nCoV 感染或正在接受 2019-nCoV 感染评估的患者共用碗碟、饮水杯、杯子、餐具、毛巾、床上用品或其他物品。在患者使用这些物品后，应对其进行彻底清洗（请参阅下文“彻底清洗衣物”）。
- 每天清洁所有“高频接触”的物体表面，如柜台、桌面、门把手、洗手间固定装置、厕所、手机、键盘、平板电脑和床旁桌子。另外，清洁可能带血、体液和/或分泌物或排泄物的任何表面。
 - 阅读清洁产品的标签，并遵循产品标签上提供的建议。标签中包含了安全有效使用清洁产品的说明，包括您在使用产品时应采取的预防措施，例如佩戴手套或围裙，以及确保在使用产品期间通气良好。
 - 使用稀释的漂白液或标签标有“EPA-批准”的家用消毒剂。在家中配制漂白液时，应将 1 汤匙漂白剂加入到 1 夸脱（4 杯）水中。如需更多漂白液，可将 ¼ 杯漂白剂加入到 1 加仑（16 杯）水中。
- 彻底清洗衣物。
 - 立即取下并洗涤带血液、体液和/或分泌物或排泄物的衣物或床上用品。

- 处理污染物品时，应佩戴一次性手套。脱下手套后应立即洗手。
- 阅读并遵循洗衣或衣物标签和清洁剂标签上的指示。一般情况下，采用衣物标签上推荐的最高温度来洗涤和干燥衣物。
- 将所有使用过的一次性手套、防护服、口罩和其他污染物品放入带有塑料袋的容器中，然后再将其放入其他居家垃圾中。处理这些物品后应立即洗手。
- 监测患者的症状。如果患者的病情更加严重，请致电他们的医务人员并告诉他们患者患有 2019-nCoV 感染或正在接受 2019-nCoV 感染评估。这将有助于医务人员的诊所采取措施，以免其他人受到感染。要求医务人员致电当地或州卫生部门。
- 照护者和家庭成员在密切接触已确诊患有 2019-nCoV 感染或正在接受 2019-nCoV 感染评估的患者时，如未遵守预防措施，则被视为“密切接触者”，应监测其健康状况。遵循下文中针对[密切接触者](#)的预防措施。
- 与您所在州或当地卫生部门讨论任何其他问题

密切接触者的预防措施

如果您与已确诊患有 2019-nCoV 感染或正在接受 2019-nCoV 感染评估的患者有密切接触，您应：

- 从您第一次与患者密切接触之日开始监测您的健康状况，并在您最后一次与患者密切接触后继续监测您的健康状况 14 天。观察以下这些体征和症状：
 - 发烧。每天两次测量您的体温。
 - 咳嗽。
 - 呼吸短促或呼吸困难。

- 其他需要注意的早期症状包括畏寒、身体疼痛、咽喉痛、头痛、腹泻、恶心/呕吐和流鼻涕。
- 如果您出现发热或任何这些症状，请立即致电您的医务人员。
- 在您预约就诊之前，请务必告诉您的医务人员您与已确诊患有 2019-nCoV 感染或正在接受 2019-nCoV 感染评估的患者有密切接触。这将有助于医务人员的诊所采取措施，以免其他人受到感染。要求您的医务人员致电当地或州卫生部门。

如果您没有任何症状，您可以继续进行日常活动，如上班、上学或前往其他公共场所。