

# Building Resiliency to Isolation & Loneliness: How to Increase Our Resiliency During the COVID-19 Crisis

Patrick Hendry

**MHIA**  
Mental Health America  
**B4Stage4**



# Psychological Resiliency

---

The ability to mentally or emotionally cope  
With a crisis or to return to pre-crisis status  
Quickly.

# The Nature of the Crisis We Face: COVID-19

- The COVID-19 crisis hits us on many levels:
  - The fear of infection
  - The fear of death for us or our loved ones
  - The pain of isolation and social distancing
  - The fear of losing our jobs
  - The fear of recession
  - The fear of the unknown

# The Nature of the Crisis We Face: COVID-19

- Fear of infection
  - People at the highest risk of infection are:
    - People who have prolonged, unprotected contact with confirmed COVID-19
    - People who have recently been to an area with sustained transmission
- Fear of death from the virus:
  - People who are risk for the most serious outcomes are:
    - Older adults over 65
    - People who have certain underlying chronic medical conditions:
      - Chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
      - Heart disease with complications
      - Immunocompromised, including cancer treatment
      - People who are severely obese.

# The Nature of the Crisis We Face: COVID-19

- Facing the pain and anxiety of isolation and social distancing
  - Lockdowns, curfews and social isolation are being imposed in communities across the country, and from the point of view of reducing the rate of infection this is good, but, as we know, loneliness is a major barrier to good health for everyone.
  - Mankind is hardwired for social contact and experiences loneliness in the same centers in the brain in which we experience pain.
  - Personal contact is extremely valuable and precious to nearly everyone.

## The Nature of the Crisis We Face: COVID-19

### The fear of losing our jobs:

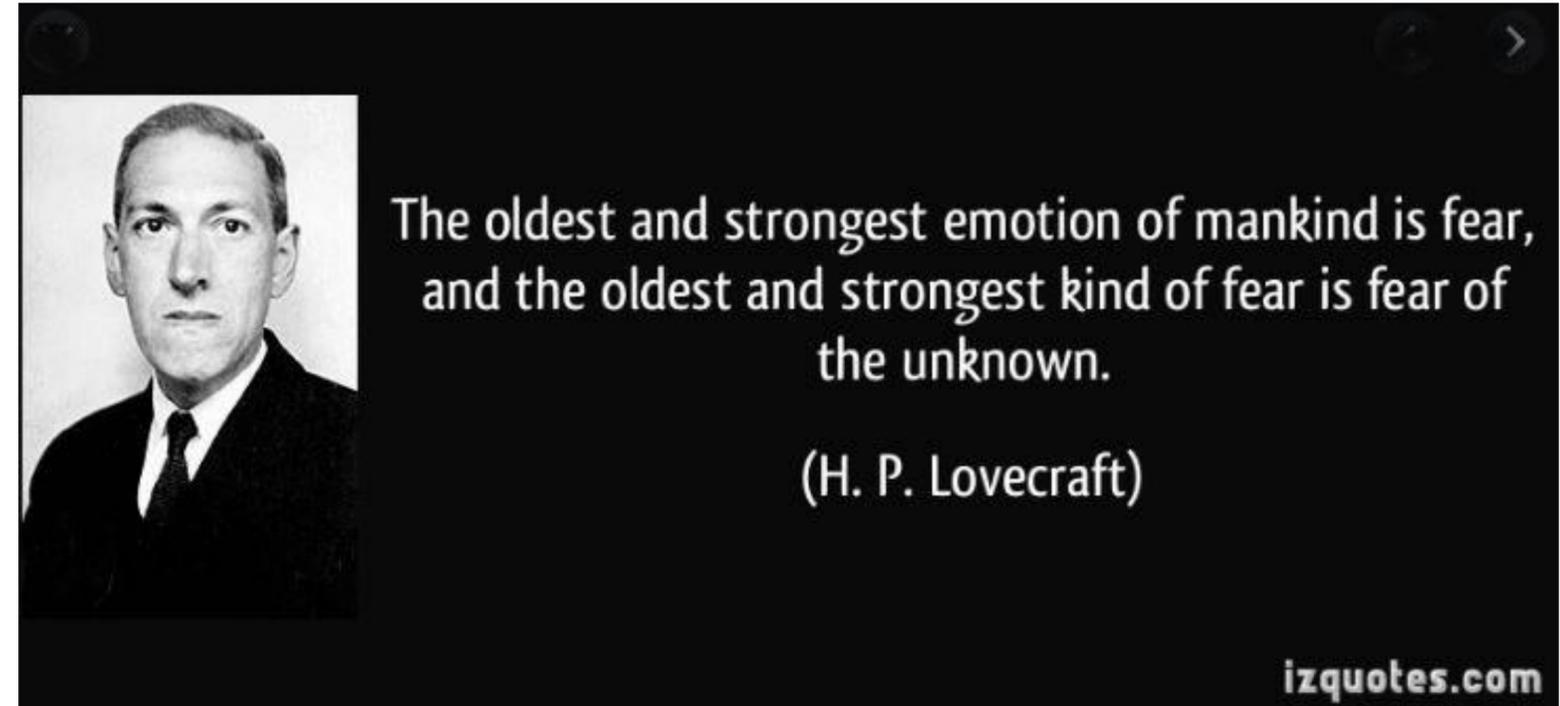
- Unemployment rates are soaring
- As of 4-3-20 over 10 million jobs have been lost
- The \$2 trillion CARES Act has been passed
  - This will provide increased unemployment payments for a longer time
- Unemployment is likely to continue to soar

### The fear of recession

- The CARES Act is not a stimulus package, it is disaster relief
- Additional funding will be needed to stimulate the economy after the immediate crisis

# The Nature of the Crisis We Face: COVID-19

- The fear of the unknown:
  - Fear of the unknown may be the “fundamental fear” underlying anxiety. (Carleton, 2016)
  - It can be defined as an individual’s tendency to experience fear caused by the perceived absence of information at any level of consciousness.
  - The constant flow of information through the usual news sources and social media can be overwhelming but the lack of clarity about “what will happen to us” is the great unknown that creates uncertainty and fear.
  - Isolation exacerbates these fears.



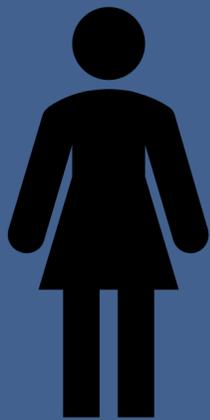
# What is Psychological Resilience?

- Resilience is our capacity to draw on inner strengths the help to rebound from stressful or even traumatic events.
- As much as it involves the ability to bounce back from adversity it can also involve profound personal growth. (American Psychological Assoc., 2020)
  - It doesn't make our problems go away, but it gives us the ability to see past them, better handle stress, and return more quickly to balance and wellbeing.
  - When stress or trauma strikes us, we still experience anger, grief and pain but resiliency allows us to keep functioning physically and psychologically.
  - It isn't about personal toughness or stoicism it is about using the appropriate strategies to accomplish our goals even if we need to reach out to others for support. (Mayo Clinic, 2020)

# What is Psychological Resilience?

- People can be resilient even while living with mental health disorders.
- Resilience can play an important role in recovery.
- It can mitigate having depression and anxiety as a result of stress or trauma.
- Strengthening our resiliency can help us in coping with the fear and isolation we are currently experiencing with the COVID-19 crisis.

# What is Psychological Resilience?



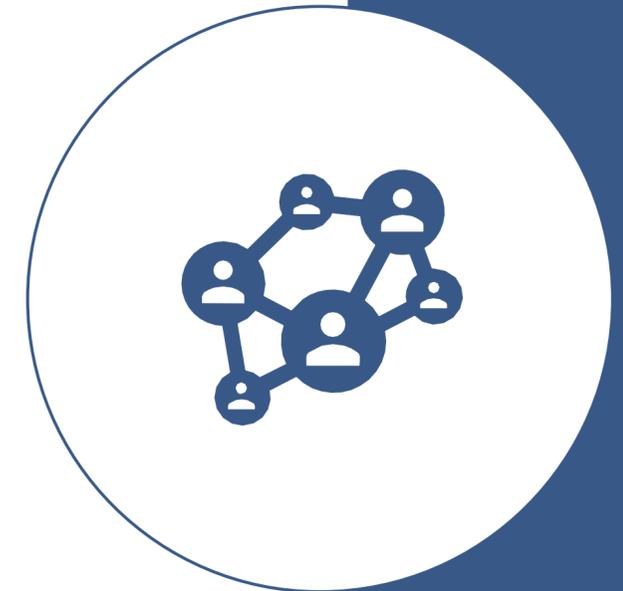
- Resilience isn't a personality trait.
  - It involves behavior, thoughts and actions anyone can learn and develop.
  - Developing it focuses on four core components:
    - Connection
    - Wellness
    - Healthy thinking
    - Meaning
  - It can increase your capacity to weather, and grow from, adverse experiences. (APA, 2020)

# How can we build psychological resilience?

- Prioritize relationships:
  - Connect with people who are empathetic and understanding and who can remind you that not alone in the midst of your problems
  - Even while we collectively experience isolation don't isolate yourself
    - Reach out by phone, social media, video calling or any other method to people we know and care about.
    - Personal contact is extremely valuable and precious to nearly everyone.
    - People are social creatures and our brains are hardwired to rely on social contact.

# How can we build psychological resilience?

- Prioritize relationships:
  - In these times when we can't have our usual means of contact (social groups, visiting with friends, attending religious services or events, etc.) if we are lucky enough to have people we care about, reach out.
  - Try to set up regular communication. In times of uncertainty knowing there are supports we can rely on is precious.
  - Join a group that strengthens your sense of belonging.



# How can we build psychological resilience?

- Foster Wellness:
  - Practice mindfulness
    - Journaling, spiritual practices, meditation can help you to focus on the positive aspects of their lives
    - Connect to the part of you that remains strong in the face of adversity
    - Avoid negative habits
    - Alcohol and drugs can mask your pain but does not allow you to overcome the long term effects of stress or trauma
    - Take care of yourself, eat well, and get adequate sleep when possible.
    - Physical resilience contributes to psychological resilience.

(APA, 2020, Mayo Clinic 2020)

# How can we build psychological resilience?

- Learn from experience
  - Think of how you have overcome hardships in the past
  - Think of the skills and strategies that helped you.
  - Remember the negative thoughts and actions that prevented success in overcoming and growing from hardships
  - Write down positive thoughts, journaling can be helpful.
- Remain hopeful
  - You can't change the past but you can affect the future
  - Visualize success and positive outcomes
  - Acknowledge and remember the things that make you feel hopeful

# How can we build psychological resilience?

- Be Proactive
  - Directly address your problems
    - Confront your fears and arm yourself with facts
    - Overcome loneliness by being the person who reaches out to others.
    - Helping others by maintaining social connections helps you
    - Being proactive is a major factor in resilience
- Make your days meaningful
  - Do things that give you a sense of accomplishment and purpose.
  - Set goals and make plans to achieve them.
  - Establish routines that support your ability to overcome adversity

# How can we build psychological resilience?

- Keep things in perspective
  - It is easy to catastrophize
  - How you think affects how you feel and how resilient you are
  - Try to maintain a realistic view of your situation and then look at possible courses of action
  - You may not be able to change what is happening but you can change how you interpret and respond to it.
- Accept change
  - Change is a part of life
  - Accepting things that you can't change helps you to focus on the circumstances you can alter. (APA, 2020)

---

## How can we build psychological resilience?

---

- Use events as opportunities for self-discovery
  - Overcoming obstacles can increase feelings of self-worth
  - Discovering new areas of strengths allows you to grow.
  - Surviving traumatic and stressful experiences can increase your appreciation for life.



# Resilience and Recovery

- Resiliency is a major component of recovery
- The ability to recover is in part the product of resiliency.
- These concepts contribute to feelings of self-efficacy
  - Self-efficacy is the perception that a person has her/his own ability to respond to life's demands in effective and functional ways.
  - It is woven into the fabric of well-being.



## Resiliency and Recovery

Increasingly resiliency is being associated with better health outcomes in later life and increases in longevity. The fact that it is composed of a set of learnable and practicable skills that have remarkable results for our quality of life and our perceptions of ourselves is huge. It, in fact, means that we have the ability to learn to experience happier, more productive and longer lives.

# Contact Us



-  Mental Health America  
500 Montgomery Street  
Suite 820  
Alexandria, VA 22314
-  Facebook.com/mentalhealthamerica
-  Twitter.com/mentalhealtham
-  Youtube.com/mentalhealthamerica
-  Patrick Hendry  
[phendry@mhanational.org](mailto:phendry@mhanational.org)



**THANKS FOR COMING**

