

MANAGING ANXIETY AND UNCERTAINTY IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

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Objectives

- 1) Learn about Coronavirus effects on anxiety, mental health and overall well being
- 2) Learn skills to manage your anxiety and your clients'
- 3) Learn tips to enhance your well-being and your clients'

Agenda

1. Coronavirus Impact on Anxiety and Well Being
2. Coronavirus Education – Know The Facts
3. Recency Effect/Recency Bias
4. Anxiety Treatment Goals
5. Anxiety Management Skills
 - Cognitive, Behavioral and ACT based skills
6. Doing Exposures
7. Additional Tips For Anxiety and Well-being
8. Wrap-Up

Coronavirus Impact on Anxiety and Well-Being

COVID-19 ANXIETY

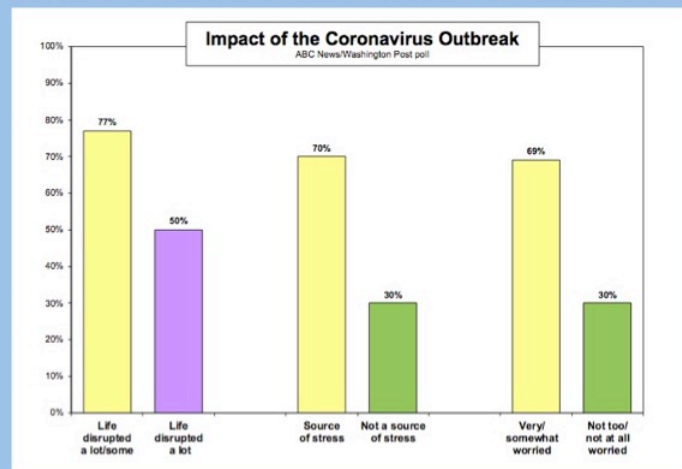
An American poll by the American Psychiatric Association:

- 62% anxious about a family member/loved one *becoming very ill from coronavirus*
- 60% worry coronavirus will have *serious negative impact on their finances*
- 68% worry coronavirus will have *serious impact on economy*
- 57% worry about running out of food or medicine
- 19% report trouble sleeping since coronavirus began

Reference: American Psychiatric Association-sponsored poll conducted online via a Porter Novelli PN View: 360 survey using Engine's online CARAVAN® Omnibus survey. The surveys were collected from a nationally representative sample of 1,004 adults during the period March 18-19, 2020

ABC News/Washington Post Poll Results

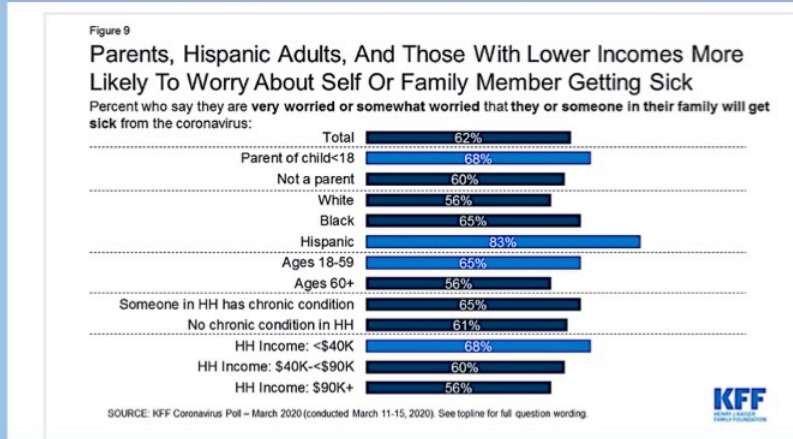
77% - Life Disrupted a lot/Some, 70% -Source of Stress, 69% Very/Somewhat worried



Random National Sample of 1003 US Adults
Conducted 3/22-3/25 by Phone Cellular and Landline)

Kaiser Family Foundation Poll Results:

62% worried they will or family member will get sick
 Parents, Hispanics and Lower Income = Most Worried



Based on 1216 Surveys conducted: 3/11/20-3/15/20

NY Times Survey Results:

Surprising Poll Results: People Are Now Happy to Pick Up the Phone

Pollsters are used to having their calls screened. But when everyone is stuck at home, a stranger with some survey questions can be a lifeline.

The Coronavirus Outbreak > **LIVE** Latest Updates Maps and Tracker Markets Stimulus Checks What You Can Do

By Giovanni Russonello and Sarah Lyall

April 17, 2020

It was a straightforward telephone survey of New Yorkers, a series of questions about the effects of the coronavirus crisis, and it was meant to take just a few minutes. But a strange thing kept happening. Many of the people who answered the phone wanted to keep talking — about their loneliness, about their sadness, about their fears for the future — even after the questions had stopped.

“People are dealing with anxiety, and they haven’t seen their family and friends,” said Ayala Mitchell, one of the interviewers for the survey conducted earlier this month by the Siena College Research Institute. **“They just want to talk to someone.”**

Report 4/17/2020

Source:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/17/us/politics/polling-coronavirus.html>

Education: Following Guidelines

Education - Know the Facts Source: CDC Website

The screenshot shows the CDC website for Coronavirus (COVID-19). The header includes the CDC logo and the text "Centers for Disease Control and Prevention". A search bar contains "Coronavirus". The main heading is "Coronavirus (COVID-19)". Below this, there are two main navigation buttons: "How to protect yourself" and "What to do if you are sick". A "SYMPTOMS" section includes the text "Watch for fever, coughing and shortness of breath" and a "Learn more" link. A "SELF-CHECKER" section includes the text "A guide to help you make decisions and seek appropriate medical care". A "TAKE EXTRA PRECAUTIONS" section includes the text "Older adults and people with serious underlying medical conditions like chronic lung disease". A sidebar on the right lists "Slow the spread", "Cloth face covers", and "Critical workers".

SOURCE: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

Education - Know the Facts

Source: CDC Website

- CDC Website: How Coronavirus Spreads
 - Person to person contact
 - Contact with contaminated surface or object
 - Coronavirus spreads more efficiently than influenza, but not as efficiently as measles (which is highly contagious)
- Higher risk
 - Older Adults
 - With other medical issues (Asthma, Diabetes, Kidney Disease, Liver Disease, Cancer, Heart or Lung Disease)
 - Immune impaired
 - Living in a nursing home
 - Other underlying medical conditions

The Recency Effect

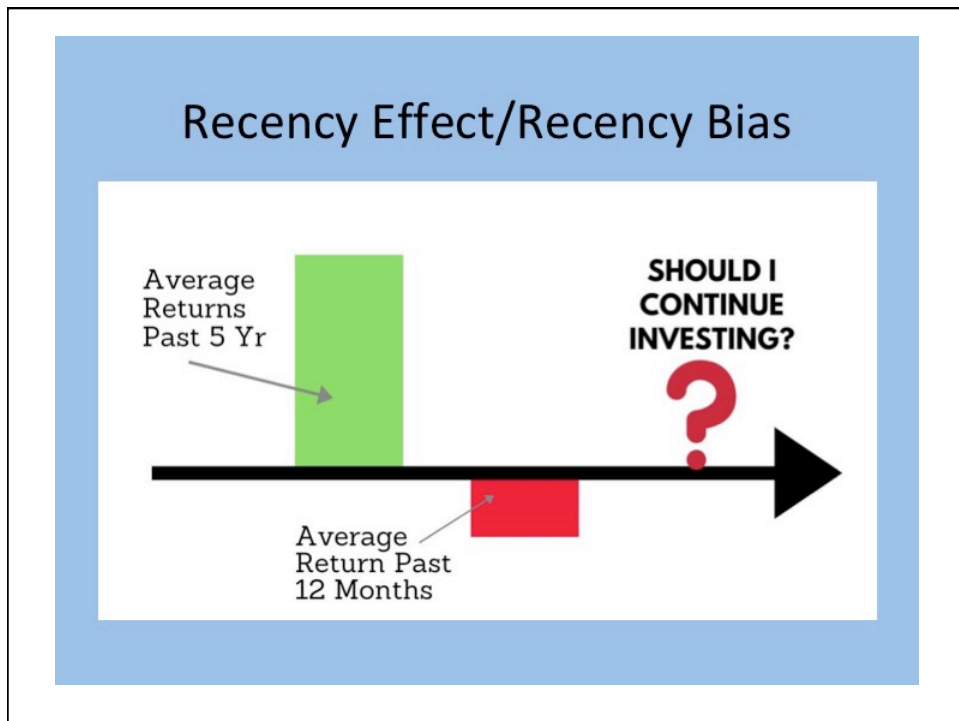
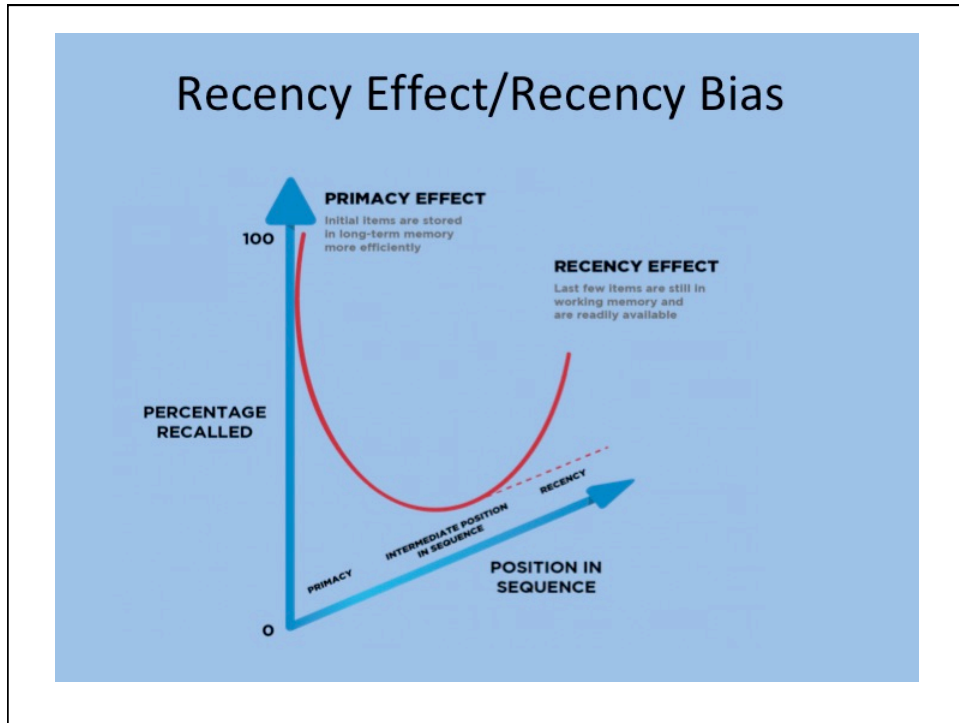
Anxiety Accelerators

- Recency
- Salience: Impact, Intensity, “Drama”
- Availability
- Uncertainty
- Invisibility
- Lack of Control
- Horribleness
- Sudden Change

Source: Robert Leahy via Psychology Today
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/anxiety-files/202003/coronavirus-anxiety>

Recency Effect

- What we hear first and last most effects what we recall and focus on
- Again, what we hear last (aka NOW)
 - Given HIGHER VALUE
 - What we focus on, what we attend to
- Marketers use the Recency Effect
 - Beginning and Ends of Ads = positive and appealing.



Anxiety Treatment

Goals

Anxiety Treatment Goals

1. Remember when treating Anxiety the Goal IS NOT to make anxiety go away
Anxiety going away does happen with treatment
BUT this is the byproduct and NOT the Goal
2. Tolerating, Accepting, Living With and even embracing uncertainty and anxiety are the goals of most standard anxiety treatments

****Based on Inhibitory Learning Models, Habituation Models and ACT based Models of Anxiety Treatment**

Anxiety Treatment Goals

In the words of one of my patients who has GAD and OCD (First week April 2020)

“Thank G-d we did all those exposures and all that cognitive work before this happened. Now I stay safe, follow guidelines and stay informed but I don’t worry excessively about it. I’m careful but I focus on living my life the best way I can right now”

Illusion Of Certainty

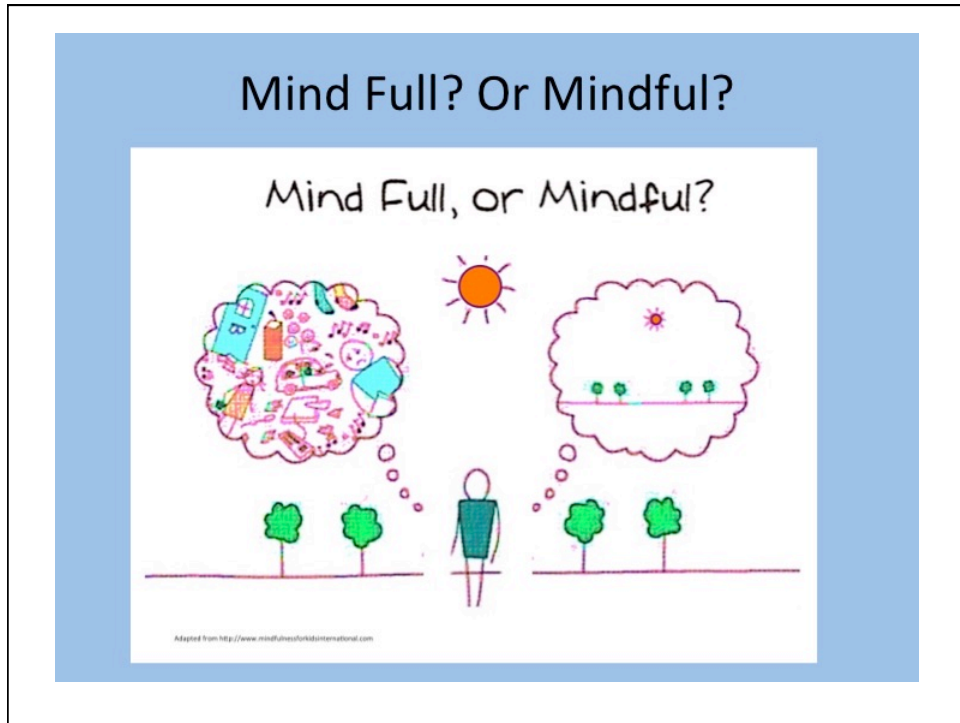
- Pre-coronavirus life was uncertain then too
- Day to day life was/is uncertain – most just don’t readily acknowledge this
- Anxiety Disorders - result of or exacerbated by difficulty with uncertainty
- Now Amplified further by so much unknown
- *BUT really all we ever have is right now....*

Anxiety Treatment

Skills

Mindfulness

- 1) Being in this moment
- 2) Right here, right now
- 3) Whats happening NOW? In *this* moment?



Acceptance

1) Does NOT Mean

- 1) You Like It
- 2) Want It
- 3) Enjoy It

2) Things are as they are and you accept them

3) Acceptance is an ACTION

Acceptance

Applies to Panic, Anxiety, Worry, etc...

When you lose your fear of panic it will stop happening.

Observe each day do you keep checking on the symptoms hoping they are gone – do you find yourself being overly careful not to trigger panic?



Subtle Avoidance disguised as Acceptance

True Acceptance

The “C” in CBT

1. The “C” in CBT still applies. Ask –
 - What is your self talk?
 - What is your self narrative? Your internal dialogue?
 - What is running through your mind as you think about this?
 - Any Images/Pictures in your mind about this?
2. Check/Gently Challenge Cognitive Distortions
 - Fortune Telling
 - Catastrophizing
 - Overgeneralizing
 - And all others

What's happening is horrible but what's happening *right now*?
What are you predicting?

The “C” in CBT

Practice Cognitive Restructuring

What would you tell a child about this?

What are you predicting will happen?

Are your predictions accentuating only the negatives?

Until we know what will happen, which “story line” do you want to follow?

The “B” in CBT

Behavioral Tips

- Keep a regular routine
- Have structure
- If working from home:
 - Dress for work as if you are going to work
 - If possible, separate work space
- Following all precautions – Exercise!
 - Run or walk outside
 - Stay active at home
 - Videos show full workout in just a few square feet

The “B” in CBT

Behavioral Tips When Triggered Or Needed

Breathing Exercises

PMR – Progressive Muscle Relaxation

(Google PMR Script)

Grounding Exercises – Focus on your Senses

Limit Stimulus – quiet, calming environment

Exposures For Anxiety

Doing Exposures

1. Much to Consider Here!
 - Contamination OCD Exposures
 - Social Anxiety exposures
 - Agoraphobia Exposures
 - Etc, etc.
2. Remember the first tenant of exposure treatment – *what is considered objectively safe?*

Doing Exposures

1. Continue Exposure work!
2. Be Safe, Follow all guidelines, check the CDC
3. And, be creative –
 - Socially anxious patient – online speed dating
 - Agoraphobic patient – Following precautions drive own car further and further on off hours
 - Contamination OCD – this one is tougher
4. As always, use videos, movies, books, articles for exposure wherever applicable

Doing Exposures

1. Embrace Imaginal Exposures
2. Where indicated, practice interoceptive exposures
3. **The future of this is uncertain BUT our future has ALWAYS been uncertain**
4. Ask what your client's, Best Case, Worst Case and Likely Case Scenarios are?

Additional Tips For Anxiety And Well-Being

Worry Is Unproductive *Most of the Time*

- Standard anxiety treatment asks
"Is this worry productive or unproductive"
- If productive - change something, do something as result
- If unproductive - refocus, shift your attention, *step out of the worry cycle*
- Ask yourself and/or your clients –
"Will this worry help?"
"Is it helpful to worry right now?"
"Will this worry lead me to do anything differently"

Accentuate Positives

This does NOT mean what is happening is positive, what's happening across the world is horrible...

AND.....

Is there anything about the changes that have been unexpectedly good, positive, enjoyable?

Q&A BOX - share unexpected pleasures you've found

- Playing with my dog on breaks between sessions
- Making Lunch at home in my own kitchen
- Family dinner is now possible!

Finding Balance

- 1) Be Informed
 - News
 - Social Media

- 2) But Set Limits
 - How Much?
 - When?
 - First thing you listen to before bed?
 - First when you wake up?

- 3) Do you really want to read that or listen to that RIGHT before bedtime? Or right NOW?



Daily Gratitude

- What can you be grateful for?
- Everyday list 3 things – try not to repeat
- Write it down, after 1 week, 1 month go back and read it
- Q&A BOX – What are you grateful for today?

Get “Outside Yourself”

- Remember you are not alone in this
- Everyone is in this together
- The person at the supermarket, on the sidewalk isn't your enemy – they are in it too
- Delivery people, mail delivery people, nurses, doctors, pharmacists, and everyone else on the front lines are heroes.

Distant But Not Alone

- Social Distance NOT Social Isolation
- Connect with others as much or as little as you want
- Small connections matter
Quick talks with coworkers matter
Short interactions boost mood too
Make space and time for this

Wrap-Up

- What is happening is horrible and like nothing before AND this will pass, remember the Recency Bias
- What you THINK (Cognitive) and what you DO (Behavioral) will determine how you manage this
- ACT Skills – Acceptance, Mindfulness, Here and Now focus will help
- Find Balance and Daily Gratitude

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