



Addressing COVID-19 Related Concerns Among Abusive Partners

This exercise, modeled after an Allies in Change exercise on coping with holiday stress, is intended to help abusive partners more effectively cope with the stress and challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a two-part brainstorming session that typically takes 30-45+ minutes to complete, possibly longer. It is vital that the entire exercise be completed in a single group. Stress levels typically elevate during the first brainstorm and then settle during the second. That is why it is important that the full lesson is covered in a single group session.

First, have the group brainstorm sources of stress related to the COVID-19 outbreak. As they make suggestions, make sure they adequately elaborate about what is so stressful about the particular thing that they mentioned. Some items (e.g., economic hardship) can be unpacked a great deal more with further discussion/explanation. It is best if the suggestions can be written on a whiteboard (or the virtual equivalent) so that all in the group can see them. Listed on the next page is a list of some possible responses. It is not intended to be exhaustive, simply listing some relevant and important responses. This list should not be directly shared with the group, rather it can be used to provide guidance to fill in missing gaps in the list the group generates itself. Group members are likely to come up with additional relevant items not on the list on the next page. Feel free to amend these lists accordingly. Continue adding to the first list until there are no more ideas from the group and any relevant gaps have been filled from the list on the next page.

Second, while scanning the list they have just generated, have the group brainstorm specific ways of coping with the stresses they have listed. It is especially important with this list of ways of managing to spend as much time as needed explaining responses (and/or having group members explaining responses) fully and in great detail so they are fully understood on a practical, concrete level. For example, if someone says “take a time-out” spend time discussing how that could be done practically, what the steps would be in the given circumstance, when they might most need to take a time-out, etc. As a result, this list is likely to take more time to generate because of the more extended explanations. Make sure to write down each suggestion made, preferably on a second white board (or virtual equivalent) or the other half of the first one, if there is enough room.

You might want to take a photo of the completed lists to share with the group members (some sometimes do this on their own when the holiday stress version of this is done in person).

Listed on the next two pages are some possible responses for each list. Many of these responses came from colleagues attending the March 2020 Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network meeting in Portland, OR. These lists will be further updated and refined as the exercise is done in other groups, based on the lists those group members generate.

You are free to use this and share this exercise with others!

Chris Huffine, Psy.D.
Executive Director

COVID-19 Concerns

- Getting sick
- Fear of getting sick
- Fear of loved ones/children getting sick/dying
- Loved ones getting sick/dying
- Concerns for elderly/medically vulnerable getting sick/dying
- Hypervigilance of possible symptoms/possible infection
- Fear of infecting others
- Fear of a breakdown in society
- Public transportation fears
- Unemployed/lost job
- Additional work-related stresses
- Having to work from home
- Social isolation/unable to see loved ones
- Unable to attend support groups and other supportive services
- Food insecurity/grocery shopping
- Misinformation
- Too much information/media coverage
- Not getting adequate supplies
- Not getting medical help
- Appointments getting cancelled
- Disrupted routines
- Loss of what is normal/having to find a new normal
- Uncertainty about the future
- Work shutting down
- Not going on vacation
- Not being able to travel
- Public entertainment/events getting cancelled
- Not having anything to look forward to/get excited about
- Not knowing who is sick/infected
- In quarantine
- In close quarters with family members
- Kids out of school and having to stay at home
- Additional childcare demands
- Going stir crazy/cabin fever
- Dealing with other people who are stressed
- Slower economy/stock market
- Loss of income/unable to pay bills
- Unable to comply with probation/child welfare requirements
- Dealing with other people's fear
- Risk of losing medical benefits
- Medical expenses
- Old trauma/psychological issues getting triggered
- Existential concerns

Ways to Manage COVID-19 Concerns

- Talk about your feelings/concerns with others
- Know the facts
- Know the symptoms
- Stay current on the latest information
- Pace yourself/limit news consumption
- Pursue a new hobby
- Get to long put off projects at home and around the house
- Keep perspective—this, too, shall pass
- Manage your own distress
- Acknowledge your struggles
- Be gracious in allowing others to have their distress/practice patience
- Acknowledge/validate people's fears
- Support your loved ones in their distress in the ways they wish to be supported (practice the Platinum Rule)
- Identify and practice practical ways to reducing infection risk
- Focus on what you can do rather than on what you can't
- Practice the Serenity Prayer ("Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference")
- Check in more frequently with yourself on how you are feeling/coping
- Check in with your partner more frequently including how they are feeling
- Be vulnerable with your partner
- Check in with your partner to non-defensively hear how they think you are behaving
- Keep a clean/safe environment
- Stay engaged/live/play
- Draw on your sense of spirituality
- Meditate
- Keep calm
- Identify positive family activities
- Take breaks from parenting/support the other parent taking breaks from parenting
- See it as a "staycation"
- Set a schedule/structure your day
- Make/schedule time to play
- Find new games to play
- Make time and activities for solitude/get away from the stimulation (e.g., go for a walk, spend time alone in the parked car)
- Find new ways to exercise/work out
- Make concrete plans for "what if" situations (e.g., "what if one of the kids gets sick", "what if we're still having to stay in when it gets hot out")
- Brainstorm ways to get out of the house while practicing social distancing (e.g., going for walks/hikes, going for a drive, garden, have the kids play in an open area)
- Identify practical ways to co-exist when at home for extended periods of time
- Identify projects to do to keep busy
- Prioritize what aspects of self-care that you can, especially those of greatest importance to you
- Use stress reduction techniques (e.g., conscious breathing, progressive relaxation, meditation)
- Reach out to others via the phone, email, texting, FaceTime, etc.
- Reach out to others you haven't communicated with in a long time
- Utilize community resources—both existing ones as well as new ones that may become available during this time
- Use humor
- Ask for assistance from others—emotional, practical, etc.
- Come up with a new temporary budget based on current financial situation
- Practice self-compassion

- Remember that you are not alone with this/"we are all in this together"
- Volunteer/practice acts of service for others (e.g., donate blood, meals on wheels)
- Pursue online learning and online educational opportunities
- Take virtual vacations via Google Earth and Google maps/street view and other online venues
- Make plans for "post COVID-19" activities
- Practice compassion towards others—this is a tough time for all of us
- Reach out to those who are isolated and/or needing assistance
- Be mindful of your emotional intensity and stress level
- Watch shows/movies/read books that distract you from current situation
- Develop a practice of gratitude and thankfulness, even in these times
- Acknowledging the many acts of kindness that others are doing
- Practice good sleep hygiene
- Set up virtual social gatherings (e.g., happy hour, watching a movie together remotely)
- Cooking/baking more for fun/trying out new recipes
- Take time-outs as needed
- Be vigilant about becoming abusive and controlling—identify those situations/circumstances you are most likely to be tempted to behave that way

3/30/2020