

## Likely Psychological Stages for Covid-19 Pandemic

**Stage 1: Uncertainty and Fear.** Concern over health, safety of loved ones, job security, food/supplies, finances, and toilet paper(!). Fear from not knowing when it will peak or when it will end, how to work under the new stay at home norms, etc.

**Stage 2: Boredom and Isolation.** Being cooped up in one place can have significant effects on the human mind. When the mind has a lot more time to think, less stimulus to hold its attention, and it will often drift toward worst case scenarios. The mind likes to attend to the negative things first. Being isolated or cooped up in one space with family for an extended period of time can also create significant stress for anyone. (So, there is nothing wrong with you as a parent if you are going stir crazy or frustrated trying to manage an energetic child or children). We can pour gasoline on this brain phenomenon and boredom by spending a lot of time on our phones and picking up news feeds from social media or other sources that may not have the most balanced news (e.g., showing us the worst case events that are occurring from the pandemic).

**Stage 3: Depression, Anxiety, Stress, Grief, Anger and Fear.** Being isolated or cooped up in one space for an extended period of time can wear anyone down. In addition, because of the significance of this pandemic, we will likely know loved ones who will get sick. We likely won't be able to see them if they need to go to the hospital. This can be traumatizing, generating a wide range of emotions such as fear, anger and sadness. If it continues for a prolonged period of time, it may make it easy for us to slide into a more significant depressive or anxious period that can be debilitating for our functioning. We will need energy, fuel, skills and strategies to keep our mental health functioning at a more optimal level. And, we will need access to good and reliable resources to help us all learn tools and strategies to manage this stage.

**Stage 4: Recovery and Something New Emerges.** When we go through a crisis - either individually or collectively - we often emerge stronger, more focused and more creative than we were when we entered. Utilizing this time to reflect on what is most important to us, how we can give more to others, and recognizing how we can structure our time/days to get more of what we need can bring us to places we never thought possible. Hold out hope and positivity.

*“Choose to be optimistic... it feels better” – Dalai Lama*

## Suggestions to Manage These Uncertain Times

1. Take care with how much time you're spending and where you are consuming your news. Social media is going to be wild. Be mindful of the thoughts and body sensations (tension) you experience from reading, watching or listening to the news. Build the right time, amount and sources into your routine. For example, instead of reading social media posts on the virus anytime you have a break or just before you go to sleep (which you may find keeps you from getting a good night's rest) consume your news in the morning from a reliable and balanced news source.
2. Put a plan and routine in place but try to not be too compulsive. The mind likes routine - it gives us a sense of security. For example, if you don't normally make your bed in the morning, make a point to make your bed when you wake up each day. Do your dishes each day or make a point to read a book for 15 minutes – whatever fits for your lifestyle.
3. Be disciplined on what you are putting your attention toward. Create (and practice!) your own plan for focusing your attention back to the things you can control. Be mindful and notice if your mind is drifting (to everything that sucks about this situation) and simply bring it back to something you can control. This might be re-engaging in a present moment task or reflecting on something that you are grateful for. You may have to catch your attention and shift it back to something more constructive multiple times each hour – which is expected. However, being mindful of these drifts and being intentional about reframing your focus will help your brain to begin to normalize this new routine.
4. Practice mindfulness (utilizing breathing techniques, mindfulness practices, or the Calm or Headspace App). Here are a couple of brief mindfulness exercises:

- a. Better mindset with deeper breathing: Deeper diaphragmic breathing of over 12 seconds per breath (5 second inhale, 2 second hold, 5 second exhale) can activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which can reduce the amount of cortisol being released and activate calming neurotransmitters in your brain.
  - b. Reappraisal of the situation: See what good you can find from this challenging situation (e.g., new ways of being, making better connections with family members, discovering new hobbies, etc.). Challenge yourself to learn the skill of being comfortable with being uncomfortable.
  - c. Change your thoughts by changing your actions: If you're feeling significant anxiety, change what you are doing. For example, if you notice that you're spending a significant amount of time on social media, pick up the phone and give someone a call. If you're laying in bed (perhaps unable to sleep), get up and get a drink of water. If you're feeling overwhelmed being in the house, go for a five-minute walk outside (no matter the weather). Any shift helps – the simple act of choosing to take a different action will automatically help to shift our focus – even if only momentarily.
5. Stay connected with loved ones and friends through other mediums e.g., Facetime/WhatsApp/Google Duo/Zoom/etc.
  6. Seek professional help if you're struggling. Please free to contact me or anyone from our Premier Sport Psychology team via email or phone if you need support (contact information below). However, we are not a crisis hotline – please call 911 if you are concerned that you may not be able to keep yourself safe).

## Lockdown

By Brother Richard Hendrick (A Capuchin Franciscan Priest)

*Yes there is fear.  
 Yes there is isolation.  
 Yes there is panic buying.  
 Yes there is sickness.  
 Yes there is even death.  
 But,  
 They say that in Wuhan after so many years of noise  
 You can hear the birds again.  
 They say that after just a few weeks of quiet  
 The sky is no longer thick with fumes  
 But blue and grey and clear.  
 They say that in the streets of Assisi  
 People are singing to each other  
 across the empty squares,  
 keeping their windows open  
 so that those who are alone  
 may hear the sounds of family around them.  
 They say that a hotel in the West of Ireland  
 Is offering free meals and delivery to the housebound.  
 Today a young woman I know  
 is busy spreading fliers with her number  
 through the neighborhood  
 So that the elders may have someone to call on.*

*Today Churches, Synagogues, Mosques and Temples  
are preparing to welcome  
and shelter the homeless, the sick, the weary  
All over the world people are slowing down and reflecting  
All over the world people are looking at their neighbors in a new way  
All over the world people are waking up to a new reality  
To how big we really are.  
To how little control we really have.  
To what really matters.  
To Love.  
So we pray and we remember that  
Yes there is fear.  
But there does not have to be hate.  
Yes there is isolation.  
But there does not have to be loneliness.  
Yes there is panic buying.  
But there does not have to be meanness.  
Yes there is sickness.  
But there does not have to be disease of the soul  
Yes there is even death.  
But there can always be a rebirth of love.  
Wake to the choices you make as to how to live now.  
Today, breathe.  
Listen, behind the factory noises of your panic  
The birds are singing again  
The sky is clearing,  
Spring is coming,  
And we are always encompassed by Love.  
Open the windows of your soul  
And though you may not be able  
to touch across the empty square,  
Sing.*