



SURVIVING COVID

Skills for Surviving A Pandemic

Emily R. Edwards, PhD

VISN 2 MIRECC, James J Peters VAMC, Bronx, NY

In recent weeks, the spread of COVID-19 has turned our world upside down. Many states have adopted quarantine measures, forcing families to stay in their homes. As a result, many of us – and especially our loved ones with BPD and/or severe emotion dysregulation – are feeling immense stress, anxiety, and helplessness. In these times of crisis, it’s vital to balance supporting our loves ones while also taking care of ourselves. In this packet are three, concrete skills derived from Dialectical Behavior Therapy that you can use during this time to help survive the pandemic. Be well, and stay safe!

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RADICAL ACCEPTANCE

Radical acceptance means completely and totally accepting a situation as it is. It is consciously choosing to let go of how things should be and instead focusing on how things are from a place of openness and willingness.

How Do I Radically Accept Something?

First, acknowledge your feelings about the situation. Is the situation stressful? Causing anxiety? Anger? Remind yourself that these feelings make sense given the situation you're in.

Next, focus your attention on the facts of the current situation. We can't always change these facts – *and* we need to accept them anyway to be effective.

Last, make the conscious decision to approach the situation from a place of openness. When you find yourself drifting back into fighting reality, choose radical acceptance again and again.



How Can I Radically Accept Something So Horrible?

Radical acceptance is *not* saying something is good or that you agree with the situation. Radical acceptance is about shifting your mindset. It's saying to yourself, this is the situation I'm in right now and even though I can't change it, I'm going to approach it from the best place possible.



RELATIONSHIP MINDFULNESS

Relationship mindfulness is using your mindfulness skills to meaningfully connect with your loved ones.

How Can I Be Mindful in My Relationships?



At its core, relationship mindfulness is about connection. During times of stress, our desire to “keep the peace” makes it easy to retreat into our own corners and minimize contact with our loved ones. However, times of crisis are when relationship mindfulness is most critical – both for our loved ones and ourselves.

While you are home, find new ways to connect with your loved ones. When they speak, give your loved one all of your attention. Prioritize nonjudgment and acceptance over criticism and “being right.” Consider watching a movie, playing a game, or cooking a favorite meal together. If you’re separated because of distance or quarantine, use online platforms to connect virtually!

How Can I Build Connection when Tensions are So High?

During a crisis, it’s perfectly natural for stress and tension to creep into relationships more than usual. For our loved ones with BPD and/or severe emotion dysregulation, this stress often presents as irritability, dependency, and/or quick-changing moods. When this happens, fall back on your validation skills. Your loved one is feeling stressed like the rest of us and is likely having trouble managing their emotions. Your validation can be a form of relationship mindfulness and will help build connection in the long run!



COPE AHEAD

Coping ahead involves devising a concrete, step-by-step plan to use in the event of a crisis. Consider it a first line of defense against feelings of uncertainty and worry.

How Do I Cope Ahead?

First, identify the potential crisis. What would it look like? Feel like?

Next, devise a step-by-step plan for how you will deal with this crisis if it occurs. Who would you contact? Where would you go? What skills would you use to manage your emotions?

Last, rehearse the plan. This way, if the crisis does arise, you and your loved ones will know exactly what happens next.



How Can I Cope Ahead When Things Keep Changing?

In a rapidly changing situation like COVID-19, it seems like many things change by the day. So, make sure your cope ahead plan is somewhat flexible and includes a back-up plan to be used just in case. At the same time, try to avoid subjecting yourself to information overload. Set aside 15 to 30 minutes per day to read or listen to relevant news updates, and spend the rest of your time living your life!



RESOURCES

Information on COVID-19

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)

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

The CDC provides practical, scientifically-based information about coronavirus, its symptoms, and appropriate measures for preparation and management. They also provide regular updates on statistics, travel advisories, and social distancing recommendations.

World Health Organization (WHO)

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

WHO provides up-to-date information on self-protection measures, travel advice, situation reports, media resources, and ongoing research and development surrounding the coronavirus.

Information on Borderline Personality Disorder

National Education Alliance for Borderline Personality Disorder (NEA-BPD)

<https://www.borderlinepersonalitydisorder.org>

The mission of National Education Alliance for Borderline Personality Disorder is to provide education, raise public awareness and understanding, decrease stigma, promote research, and enhance the quality of life of those affected by Borderline Personality Disorder and/or related problems, including emotion dysregulation.

NEA-BPD Family Connections™ Program

<https://www.borderlinepersonalitydisorder.org/family-connections/>

Family Connections™ is a **free** 12-week course that meets weekly to provide education, skills training, and support for people who are in a relationship with someone who has BPD. Focusing on issues that are specific to BPD, it is hosted in a community setting or online and led by trained group leaders who are usually family members of relatives with BPD. Family Connections provides: current information and research on BPD and on family functioning; individual coping skills based on Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT); family skills; and group support that builds an ongoing network for family members.

Crisis Text Line

<http://www.crisistextline.org>

Crisis Text Line is free, 24/7 support for those in crisis. Text 741741 from anywhere in the US to text with a trained Crisis Counselor. Crisis Text Line trains volunteers to support people in crisis.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

<http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 150 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices.

Behavioral Tech

<http://www.behavioraltech.com>

Behavioral Tech, LLC, founded by Dr. Marsha Linehan, trains mental health care providers and treatment teams who work with complex and severely disordered populations to use compassionate, scientifically valid treatments and to implement and evaluate these treatments in their practice setting.

Florida Borderline Personality Disorder Association (FBPDA)

<http://fbpda.org>

The mission statement of Florida Borderline Personality Disorder Association (FBPDA) is to promote awareness, education, and research of borderline personality disorder and cultivate an atmosphere of support among professionals, consumers, and families throughout the state. Through their website, you can locate resources and search for treatment professionals in the State of Florida.

Disclosure: Dr. Edwards is an employee of the VA Special MIRECC Fellowship Program in Advanced Psychiatry and Psychology and by the VISN-2 MIRECC. The views expressed here are the authors' and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Veterans Affairs.