

MAINTAINING FAMILY RELATIONSHIP THROUGH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



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HOW TO MANAGE STRESS AND
CRISIS EFFECTIVELY

Beatrice Febe Fedolina - 19/438470/PS/07793
Francisca Galuh Sekar - 19/438478/PS/07801
Margaretha Galuh Martha - 19/438479/07802

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Introduction



Mental health is important at every stage of life. It is critical to always maintain stable and positive mental health, including during the outbreak of COVID-19. Everyone must have felt the negative impacts of this sudden pandemic and many people are not ready to face them. One of the impacts is self-quarantine, in which people are required to do all activities from home, for instance, adults who work from home and also students who study at home. For some people, doing all activities from home and staying at home for a long time might lead to poor mental health conditions, which include stress. Ubedilah Badrun, Executive Director of Center for Social, Political, Economic, and Law Studies (CESPELS), stated that people are experiencing quite high levels of stress due to the environment outside home that is not safe and discomfort at home. Thus, it is very important that we maintain a positive and strong relationship in the family to keep each other's well-being and to cope through the pandemic together.

Six Major Qualities of Strong Families

Based on more than 30,000 families in 40 different countries have participated in a long series research, John DeFrain's research team found six major qualities that form strong families around the world, which are:

- 1 Appreciation and affection for each other
- 2 Commitment to the family
- 3 Positive communication with each other
- 4 Enjoyable time together
- 5 A sense of spiritual well-being and shared values
- 6 The ability to manage stress and crisis effectively



CASE STUDY

A family consists of a husband, a wife, and 2 children are forced to do all their activities together from home because of the pandemic. The father is a businessman who normally works in an office. The mother is a kindergarten teacher. The first child is a 19 year old girl who goes to college across the city, and the second child is a 7 year old boy who is currently studying in an elementary school. Since quarantined, the parents are forced to work from home, the first child has to go back to her hometown and study from home, and the same goes to her little brother. Both father and mother feel the pressure of working from home since they are not really familiar with the use of technology. They try to ask their daughter to help them, but she is always in her room, doing her own thing. On top of that, the parents also need to help and accompany their son with his school work since he is not able to study on his own yet, especially with this online learning method. The first child feels overwhelmed with the amount of college assignments and online meetings that she has to do from home. It is hard for her to complete all her tasks while also spending time with family since she used to do her daily routine alone in another city.

For sure, some of us are familiar or can relate to the case study, aren't we? Then, *how can we solve these problems?*



Prof. John DeFrain has broken down **the ability to manage stress and crisis effectively** into **9 components**. We will associate each of these components to the case study.



1 *Sharing Feelings*

Openness is very important to build positive communication, as by having positive communication, stress and crisis can be managed effectively. From the example above, the older child should be open about the situation that she is going through at the moment and share her feelings. **Sharing feelings with others could reduce both people's stress levels.**

New research on how to cope with stress suggests that **it is beneficial to share your feelings with someone who is having a similar emotional response.** Sarah Townsend, Ph.D., an assistant professor of management and organization at the University of Southern California Marshall School of Business, said that the value gained from spending time and talking to someone whose emotional reaction is in line with yours is one of the key findings of her research (Nauert, 2018).


It is very essential for families to know how everyone feels about a situation, especially during hard times. It could be very difficult for many people to share feelings, since human beings tend to hide their feelings from each other. But to find a solution to the problem, we must know how a situation is affecting each of us.

In the case above, the first child could share how she really feels, that she is very overwhelmed with the college assignments and online meetings that she has. The same goes with the parents and little brother. They should also share how they feel, how both of the parents need help from their daughter to get used to the use of advanced technology and that they want to spend time together with all the family members. **The family could have dinner together while sharing their thoughts and feelings. Everyone must take time to listen and understand each other and discuss the best solution together as a family.**



2 *Understanding Each Other*

To understand each other also means **to position yourself in others' situations and truly understand how it feels to be in others' shoes.** We tend to believe that people telegraph how they are feeling through facial expressions and body language and that we just need to watch them to know what they are experiencing and understand them. Nonetheless, an experiment conducted by Zhou, Majka, and Epley (2017) shows that **we would get a much better idea if we put ourselves in their shoes instead.**




By understanding each other, it helps in managing stress and crisis effectively. From the example above, when all family members have shared their feelings and thoughts to each other, they must take time to truly listen and understand each other by considering things from another's point of view. Before we can reach a genuine understanding, it takes a good deal of communicating together and listening carefully to each other (DeFrain, 2020).



3 *Helping Each Other*

When everyone has understood each other's feelings, thoughts, and conditions, it is best to help each other. Strong families are really good at helping each other. Nonetheless, sometimes people resist help, since they think they could do it alone. But we cannot deny the fact that everyone needs help at some point in life. **By agreeing to always have each other's back and share the burdens in life, everyone gains** (DeFrain, 2020).



We could help each other both by **doing actions** and **emotionally**. In the case above, the first child could help her parents and little brother without having to disrupt her college activities. For instance, they could discuss together on when is the best time for them to learn together about the use of technology in this work and study from home conditions. Also, the first child feels overwhelmed by the amount of college assignments that she has. In this matter, the parents and little brother could help her by being there emotionally, including giving direct support and also help.

According to Doré , Morris, Burr, Picard, and Ochsner (2017), it is natural to seek out others for emotional support when life takes a turn for the worse and **by helping other people regulate their emotions, we can ultimately enhance our well-being.**



4 *Patience with One Another*

We live in a busy world. Indeed, for many of us, it gets so busy that some complain about the violence of busy-ness. The speed of life could damage our soul, the inner core of our being. Thus, **we all need to slow down and be patient with one another.**

In the case above, the parents must understand that their daughter is having a lot of assignments that need to be finished on time. They must have patience and wait for her daughter to get to finish all her work. On the other hand, the daughter should also understand that their parents and little brother are all waiting for her to help them with the use of technology in this work and study from home conditions. If the parents want all the family members to spend time together, they could take time out and enjoy the presence of each other, since **strong families know how to take time out and enjoy the presence of each other** (DeFrain, 2020).



5 *Forgiving Each Other*

We all make mistakes and it is part of human nature. We cannot keep blaming our own family members for something that has upset us. Like from the case study, the parents are irritated by their daughter, so does the daughter to her parents. We have talked it through, understand each other's situations, and came up with a solution, so it is time to accept the mistakes that happened and move on. Forgiveness is not an easy thing to be done, but it is important to remember that as a part of a family we need to be the support system for one another, which means by supporting each other to grow from the mistakes, not to judge them with what they have done. There are already many stressors in this pandemic.

Here's a little reminder on how to accept and eventually forgiving the mistakes that our family members have made:

1

Remember that no one is perfect and we all can make mistakes.

2

Holding grudges does not benefit your own well being and does not support your family member's growth.

3

Instead of blaming, and criticizing, tell your family member(s) how you feel and what did you expect them to do. Openness is important.

4

If you feel upset or mad about things that your family member have done, let them know; if you're the one that is to blame for, listen

It is a process that involves reducing negative responses and increasing positive responses toward the person who caused the hurt, across the realms of affect, cognition, and behavior (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000)



6 *Choosing to be Happy*

Being happy is a choice when we can take control of our negative emotions and choose to be happy. Choosing to be happy is not the same as pretending to be happy. To gain control of our negative emotions, we must first acknowledge them. It is okay when we cannot put ourselves together right away. Forcing to be happy when you're actually not, could just give more stress. But here is just a reminder in going through the stressful times of pandemic: it is important to think and do things that give us the sense of positivity.

How can we stay positive in these stressful times?

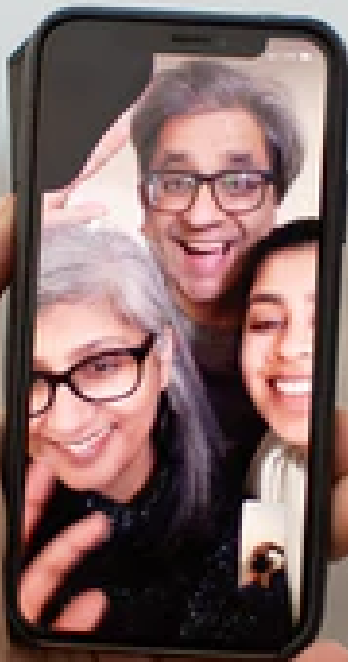


- 1 **Remember that it is okay not to be okay.** Give yourself time to acknowledge all the negative emotions.
- 2 **Pray and meditate.** Try to give time to sit, eyes closed, and focus only on breathing. It helps in quieting one's mind and prevents constant internal mental chatter.
- 3 **Do things that give you positive energy** such as: pursuing hobbies, eating healthy meals, or simply sing and dance along with your mom, dad, brothers, and sisters.
- 4 **Chat, Call, or video call** good friends and family loved ones outside the household. It can elevate self-esteem, and our sense of belonging.

7

Reaching Out to Others

At some point, we can be overwhelmed by our own family members. From the problem in the case study, it could lead to a consensus but it could also lead to nowhere. Reaching out trusted friends and communities or other family members outside the household, could be beneficial in gaining new perspectives in solving the problem.





The benefits of *reaching out to* social communities:

1

It gives a sense of belonging in the social community.

2

It can reduce stress in the family. This typically occurs through sharing each other's coping strategies within the family.

3

It can support the family member's self-esteem and self-worth. Reaching out to trusted friends can act as another support system, which can strengthen the individual, as a result it could strengthen the family.

4

Improves relationship bond between the family and the social community.

8



Growing to the Crisis Together

With all the stressors that are happening because of the covid-19 pandemic, dealing it together gives benefit to each one of us. From the case study, it is important for the whole family, especially the parents to guide them to a solution for the problem. Our burden of thoughts and feelings can be lighter if we keep reminding ourselves that we can be stronger as we stick as a family together, rather than going apart.

How can a family work together to face the crisis of the pandemic?

When it comes dealing with a problem in the family, **all members should participate** to make an agreement to the solution.



Parents, as the one who guides the family, need to bring a **calm atmosphere and use open and direct communication**, so that the children could easily share their thoughts and feelings without hesitation.



Parents should let the **children contribute to share** their opinions about the problem that occurred, yet also **maintain control of what is happening by guiding it to the consensus**



To reach the solution, **parents should guide the family to do an evaluation** of how the problem occurred and **bring up creative ideas** to reach an agreement in the family.





9 ***Adaptability***

In maintaining the relationship, a family needs to be adaptable to changes, especially to the negative changes like the pandemic crisis. From the case study, the parents can approach to the daughter calmly and listen out to what she's going through. The parents should also say how they feel with gentle language and tone. Adaptability is actually *the matter of how can the family manage to find ways together both parents and children to reorganize and gain stability together.*

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