

## Life Skills during a Pandemic – COVID -19

The world was a different place approximately 3 months ago. COVID 19 and its exponential spread among various countries has pushed aside all the ‘run of the mill challenges’ faced by the humanity and claimed its position as the Number Uno challenge of Day, Decade and probably Millennium.

It is not only the COVID -19 that seems to spread exponentially, but information, advice, steps towards controlling it, support services, stress of quarantine and social isolation, dos and don’ts, rumours also seem to multiply exponentially moment to moment – almost at the same rate of COVID-19.

Yes COVID 19 is the game changer and the challenge – in real terms the various changes and challenges that have followed this virus and affect the common man on a daily basis are multiple.

Mankind have faced many disasters over the centuries. How is this COVID 19 different? Both natural and man-made disasters affect a localized area or nation and the rest of the relatively unaffected humanity provide economic, physical, moral and emotional support to the affected to tide over the crisis – the affected population over the period of support develop adequate strategies to gain resilience. However in the case of this COVID 19, every nation, every human being on this earth – every nook and corner of this inhabited planet is under attack and the attack is marching, disallowing the affected to get support in any manner. It is a global crisis – that has lost the characteristic of a ‘crisis’ – a sudden, peak of threat with a decrescendo pattern. Even in Wuhan where China has stated that it has successfully controlled the spread of the virus, there is no mention of ‘herd immunity’ which is mentioned as the light at the end of the tunnel. There is no opening of gates – there is breath holding and dead pan silence. While the first world countries are reeling under the medical crisis, it is a double whammy for the third world countries – a medical and economic crisis. The decrescendo curve of the crisis is neither visible nor predicted by experts.

Despite such a gloomy milieu we, mankind – every one of us is expected to cope and deal with the continuing crisis – and the daily hassles that have ensued the crisis – the isolation during distancing or quarantine, relative lack of resources – essentials and those for sanitation, lack of exercise, boredom, interpersonal strain due to being in closed spaces for prolonged period, media overload, loss of routine, anxiety and worry of contracting the virus, sleep disturbance etc. While governments, medical fraternity and market forces are doing their part to support the common person to deal with the situation, the common man equally has a responsibility to stand up to the situation with his individual competence – life skills

All the above need Life Skills to deal with them. ***They are our personal and interpersonal abilities mainly behavioural, to deal with changes and challenges.*** Reasoning, Logic, Problem Solving, Creativity, Decision Making, Networking are some of these skills. In our urbanized and mechanical we have never had the time or the aptitude to consider them, become aware of them and hone them.

# STEPS

## SKILLS TO EMPOWER SELF

This is the opportune to do it – now is the time. All of us possess life skills in varying levels – so if we know what skills are needed, we can examine to improve those that are outliers in oneself.

Let us list the Life Skills each one of us needs during this COVID -19 crisis

- **Analysing the Situation in a manner that one can comprehend the larger issue.** Steps towards this are
  - Seeking Information
  - Differentiating what is relevant and irrelevant for you and your family members.
  - Identifying what is fake news and what is not.
  - Confirming the information received.
  - Ignoring Rumours
- **Setting up an Action Plan for Self.** Steps are
  - Discussing with Family Members about the next 7 days at a time. .
  - Planning about Cleaning and Social Isolation
  - Planning a Routine of Work within the house
  - Planning division of house work among Family Members.
  - Stating clearly Dos Don'ts for Children and Older Persons of the Family after discussion.
  - Making a list of things needed for a week and ordering / buying
  - Providing responsibility to every member of the family including children and elderly within the house.
  - Planning work schedule if working from home in relation to the house work / responsibilities
- **Strengthening the Support.** Components are
  - Keeping in touch with friends and relatives over phone or other media.
  - Keep in touch with those who work for you – including maids and employees
  - Providing supportive and relevant information to the near and dear.
  - Have periods of family time during social distancing which is fun and refreshing – games, movies, TV, group exercises
  - Identifying and creating new ways of maintaining morale and a sense of togetherness
  - Volunteering safely – through helplines, organizing donations and supplies for the vulnerable
  - Co-operating with the society at large for steps towards stopping of virus spread.
- **Taking care of Self and Self Esteem**
  - Spirituality – Volunteering, Introspecting, meditating, prayers, journaling
  - Up skilling if need be through virtual learning or in person from family members who know it – learning coding or learning to stitch a tear in a dress /missing button.
  - Keeping oneself busy with house work and cleaning and planning for the future – beyond COVID 19
  - Understanding how the anxiety related to the virus spread and the future is affecting self and others especially those in the family, friends and colleagues.
  - Anticipating strain between family members due to being in close proximity for prolonged periods and mediating it
  - Becoming a good listener among the family members.



- Developing a sense of gratitude for being safe in this time of contagion.

The above is not an exhaustive list of actions / life skills based that need to be are recognized and practiced to swim through these troubled waters. You can identify and add to the above list.

While COVID 19 may not (hopefully) linger beyond a specific period the life skills may and come handy in the aftermath and in life generally.

Stay Safe Stay Healthy

***Dr. Srikala Bharath***

Consultant - Adult & Old Age Psychiatry, Bengaluru  
STEPS 4 WellBeing Foundation