



The Community Stress  
Prevention Center

## **A practical guide to dealing with the psychological effects of Corona:**

### **What does it mean when yesterday does not predict today and tomorrow**

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#### **This paper includes two parts**

The first offers a conceptual framework of why this new and ever evolving situation confronts us with an immense fear of the unknown: The Continuity Model. The second part will try and use the 40 years of expertise of working in psycho trauma and community resilience to give some practical recommendations for active coping.

Let's start with the name of the virus. Corona means crown or tiara due to the similarity between the virus form and its similarity to a crown. Our goal should be to reduce Queen Corona's control over our lives!

#### **Why does COVID-19 scare us so?**

Human beings are creatures who hate uncertainty and even more so detest feeling a loss of control. Uncertainty and uncontrollability confront us with a sense of helplessness. But the human being is, in fact, an expert at dealing with uncertainty. There is no other creature who takes "risks" in the face of uncertainty in life like the human being. Examples of daily life are not missing

Let's look at some:

1- Childbirth - Our greatest hope is that our children will grow and develop into successful, popular people and that life will only bring good blessings upon them. But do we have an "insurance plan" for this? Certainly not, and yet we give birth and bring up our children with love and hopes.

2- Marriage - The vast majority of couples in the world planning their wedding with both concerns, worries, hopes, love and a desire to bond together. In the Western world, a high percentage of marriages will unfortunately end with separation or divorce (in some countries over 50%). Does this stop us from plunging into this uncertainty? No!

3- Driving - Most drivers set off with a sense of complete control. They are not occupied with the fact that they are sitting in a tin box... and while they are traveling 60 or 80 or 90 km per hour, the vehicle in the opposite lane is traveling at the same speed or even quicker than that. Yes again we are taking a risk and getting into our cars despite the uncertainty.

4- We are ready to change job or work - to move from career to career but if it's our choice we feel certain about it, however, if someone forces or imposes on us a role that we did not want, we may feel aggravation and lack of control.

#### **So what's so scary about Corona?**

The invisibility of the scary virus. Although we got an explanation of how it is spread, it is still invisible and perceived as a major threat.

- The enormous news and social media coverage.





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- Historical associations with past "epidemics" that have destroyed entire populations in Europe, for example the Spanish Flu of 1918.
- Imposed quarantine or isolation - denial of freedom of movement.
- Not knowing when a vaccine will be found and distributed.
- And most of all the threat that COVID-19 can cause death.

The fear of death is the deepest and greatest fear of the human being - this fear accompanies us almost from birth and it is about 5 or 7 years old when the child realizes that death is a universal (all living things die), irreversible, and final.

However, because this fear is so enormous, we make efforts to distract ourselves from dealing with this uncontrollable certainty accompanied with the unknown and we try to manage our lives as if: "Yesterday (and today) predict tomorrow." What Janoff Bulman (1992) called the fundamental assumptions about the world's meaningfulness and benevolence.

We call this mechanism the Continuity Principle that allows us to control and manage our lives despite the deep knowledge that one day we will not be. The continuities we will discuss now are made of hopes, facts, habits and dreams.

**How can we turn this concept into a practical guide for action?**

What are the components of the mechanism called continuity?

Continuities in daily life or how to cross the bridges of life peacefully?

**Reality and Logical Thinking Continuity** - From the dawn of life, one tries to learn laws to gain experience and try to predict what will happen tomorrow. A Bridge of rules depicting logic reality and past experience in a routine setting, helps us to make sense of the world as a logical and predictable place.

**Interpersonal and Social Continuity** - The human newborn depends for his survival on his human and social environment. We live in a family, extended family, kindergarten, classmates, students. We have work friends, colleagues and our personal social circle. These are pretty constant throughout life so expecting to meet those people / friends and the encounter with them creates a sense of continuity. "I know those around me and meeting them is giving me a sense of safety and a sense of control"

**The Continuity of Role and Function** - Most of the roles we play in life go on for many years and create the same sense of "Yesterday Predicts Tomorrow". We are children, siblings, students, members of various organizations, managers, parents, etc. and because we know our role in these circumstances, we can often act as in a predetermined script or in a certain ritual that gives us a sense of stability across time.

**Personal / Historical Continuity** - This is our inner continuity – the way we know ourselves over the years. Our beliefs, our self-image, our face in the morning when we look in the mirror. How much we perceive ourselves as optimistic / healthy, cautious, risk-takers, and more. Although this is not static and we know that we are constantly changing [physically and mentally] these processes are usually very slow and give us a sense of security and continuity. I can predict myself!

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## What happens to us in a state of threat and uncertainty?

A health event like the Coronavirus or any other type of crisis disrupts our sense of continuity, at once we meet with uncertainty and a feeling that yesterday does not predict tomorrow.

The disruption or even break in the reality / logic and routine continuity is expressed in a bewilderment: "I do not understand what is happening? I feel confused that the world order has been shattered that my routine is disrupted or even violated.

When the social and interpersonal continuity is affected, we feel lonely, detached from others. The closure at home due to the fear of Coronavirus increases social disconnection. The fear that if they find out that I am identified as having the Coronavirus, people will avoid contacting me or maybe even outcast or shame me in the social media.

People who are referred to a hospital find themselves in a new and different social environment that is unfamiliar with its rules and routine, and of course they lose their role. They are "patients" now. Not parents, spouses, managers, secretaries, students etc. All those who are now in home isolation do not work, are in a complete disarray as to what their role is now, as workers, members of their family [the over 60 who can't function as active grannies ] what do they do in this new 'imposed' role as "detainees". Many times the disruption in this continuity is manifested in helplessness and dysfunction.

Historical continuity is interrupted when the individual feels that he "does not recognize himself" a feeling we call estrangement. Or that he may go crazy, that the feelings he feels now are foreign to him that he does not recognize himself as scared, crying, tired, emotional, depressed, in pain, etc.

## So, what can we do?

**Reality, Logical Thinking Continuity** - First, we will learn the facts and try not to listen to interpretations that are not issued by a formal reliable source and work out the way we plan to proceed in our life accordingly. In such situations, it is very important to be attentive to officials like the Ministry of Health, your local health care team. It is important to build a routine even if the usual daily agenda is interrupted. That is, even if you are "in isolation at home", create a routine for yourself. Such as a personal time table: some physical exercise, time to cook, controlled time for news consumption such as watching the internet / computer /TV. Make time for fun things at home and make sure you have enough sleep.

When it comes to a home where children have a routine it helps them as well as their parents. Two- or more weeks is a long time to be indoors. Look for all the things you keep postponing but really want to do, fix that dripping faucet at home, clear out those cupboards you've been wanting to do for years. Every home has a surplus of things we don't sort or throw out. Find time for rest. Anyone who knows how to relax is wonderful, there are plenty of examples of relaxation on YOUTUBE including relaxing tunes of various types. Choose the one you like , find a reasonably quiet place and relax for minimum 5 to 20 minutes a day . This will "restart" your system.

**Interpersonal Social Continuity** - Keep in touch with family and friends. Use the smartphones, social networks, emails, WhatsApp and more.

Get organized using any App to order home food delivery, or other services that can be ordered online to be delivered to your home and of course the courier should leave the delivery outside the door if





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you are in solitary confinement. Create a SKYPE group, ZOOM, FACETIME or any group that you can "meet" your friends / family and put it in the daily routine to communicate with your dear and not always so near. Remember those who are not in isolation are busy so make sure to find the convenient time to contact them. Do not take offense, initiate. And may we add it is a great time to reconnect with old friends check how they are and even make peace with those you care for but for some reason things went wrong. Crisis can be an opportunity to heal.

**Role and Function Continuity** - It is very important that we try and organize roles within this new forced or unpleasant routine at home. Both adults and kids will benefit from it. It is very important for children to feel useful so having a role or a responsibility, even the smallest one can help them. An active role moves us from being passive to being active and it creates a sense of control. For example a child can be in charge of watering the houseplants every two days, feeding the fish, etc. You may decide on a routine sports activity at home to keep you active {using YouTube or other televised gym programs [if you do not suffer from the symptoms of the disease]}. Involve household members with the menu planning and as far as possible in preparation of meals it will give them a role. Meals are a connecting experience. Every hour take a 5-10 minutes break put on an energetic music and just move. If you have a balcony or a garden do it outside.

If you are not in isolation try to keep to your daily routine and if you need up to date information in order to feel in control, limit the time you get updates otherwise it will interfere with your activities. Engaging / being very active is helpful..

**Personal / Historical Continuity** - This is our inner continuity. It is important to remind ourselves what has not changed? What can we identify, that despite the situation, you were not affected? how can I continue as much as possible with my routine that make me feel good and competent. Remind myself how I coped in previous situations, what helped me and how can I make use of it maybe with some adaptations. Do every day something that you can within the limits and that makes me feel good. Divert your attention by means of movies / reading / playing games.

Confirm to yourself and to your family that things are going to end, that each difficult situation ends, and encourage them to imagine or plan what you and they want to do when it all ends? Something fun to mark the end of this period.

For those who find solace in praying, recite a prayer or read Psalm.

Remember as long as we manage to maintain some of our continuities we will enhance our sense of control over our lives.

Please share with us any ideas or requests and send them to the [william@colman.ac.il](mailto:william@colman.ac.il)

Or CSPC FACEBOOK <https://www.icspc.org/en/cspc-disaster-managment/>

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### About Us:

The Community Stress Prevention Center is s the oldest organization in Israel that deals with the treatment and prevention of psychotrauma. CSPC promotes stress and crisis management on national, organizational, community and individual levels worldwide, and the development of resiliency programs. CSPC has been providing both multidisciplinary treatment and support to victims of psycho-trauma due to natural and manmade disasters, crisis, emergencies, terror and war within Israel and internationally for almost 4 decades. <https://www.icspc.org/en/cspc-disaster-managment/>

