



E-BOOK
MAINTAINING YOUR
EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING
DURING COVID-19



INTERCULTURAL
PSYCHOLOGY

BY SILVANA BYRNE

Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has likely brought many changes to how you live your life, and with it uncertainty, altered daily routines, financial pressures and social isolation.

You may worry about getting sick, how long the pandemic will last and what the future will bring. Information overload, rumors and misinformation can make your life feel out of control and make it unclear what to do. This can affect your mental health.

During this period you may experience stress, anxiety, fear, sadness and loneliness. including anxiety and depression, can worsen.

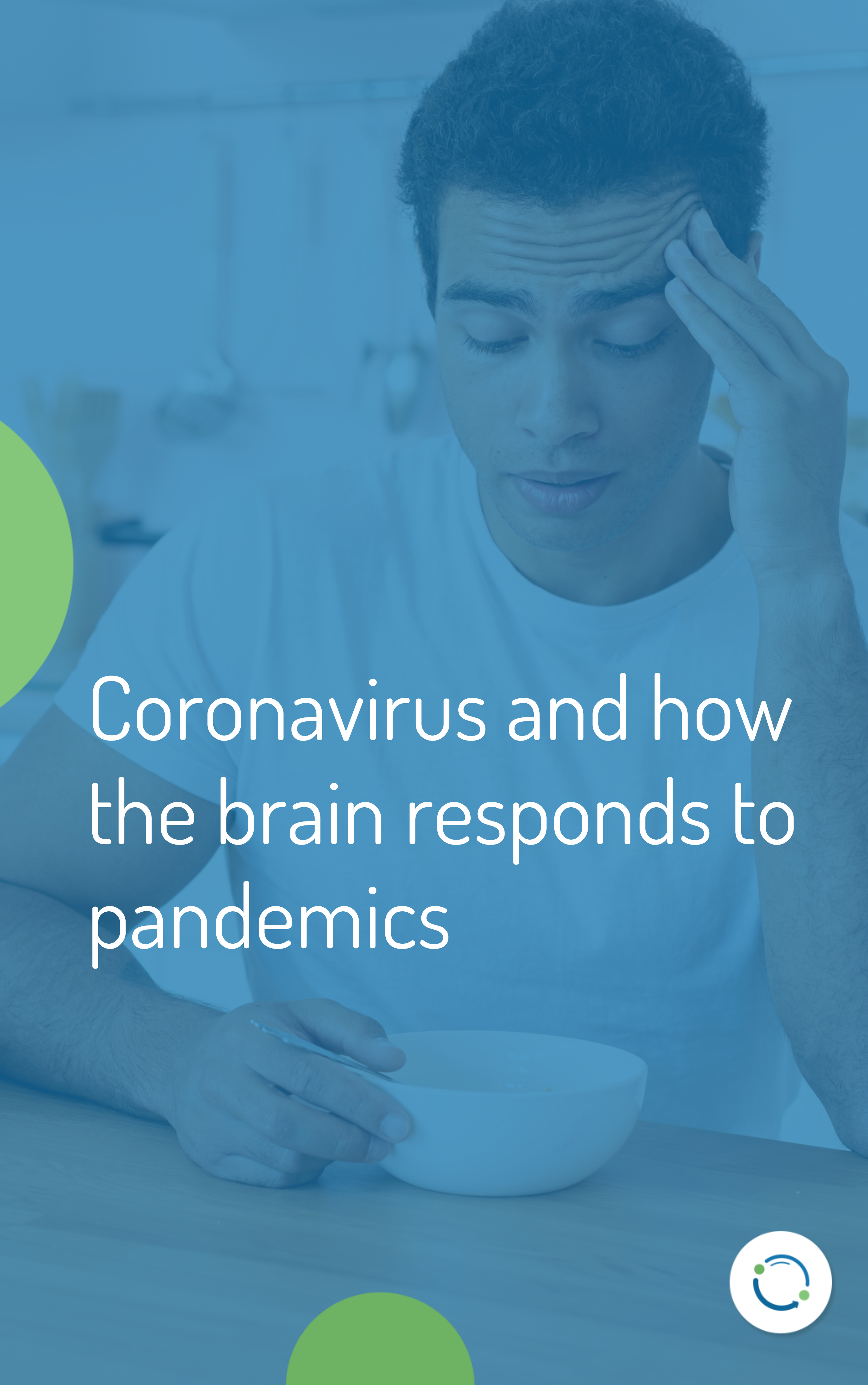
This e-book aims to bring you some knowledge and tools to support you to learn self-care strategies. This will help you to get the care you need and to cope with this uncertain time.

Sources:

HSE Ireland

Word Health Organization





Coronavirus and how the brain responds to pandemics



"Fight or Flight" response to stress

As we have been consuming news of the Coronavirus, our bodies are secreting cortisol that drives our "fight or flight" response. Cortisol causes us to hyper-focus and makes it harder to look away from a potential threat. This is the body's biological response to fear and involves flooding us with adrenaline in a bid to ensure that we are able to escape or defeat any threat, such as a dangerous animal attacking.

This hyper-focus is crucial in times of crisis. If a saber-tooth tiger is standing in front of you, you had better focus and run as if nothing else in the world matters. But if real danger is not present, we may become obsessed with the wrong things. If fear doesn't have the proper target, it can become anxiety and paranoia. If you see danger on the other side of the world, the fight or flight response isn't helpful and your brain can get confused. And that is exactly what is happening right now.

What is helpful ?

At times of stress and anxiety, hyperventilation and shallow breathing is common. Purposeful, regular breathing can therefore work to reset the fight or flight response and prevent the onset of panic and the unpleasant physical symptoms associated with anxiety. This is also true for exercise, which can help reduce the excess adrenaline build-up associated with anxiety.

In the second part of this e-book you will find practical techniques to reduce anxiety.





**What are
anxiety
symptoms, and
how do they
differ from
coronavirus?**



There's a common experience associated with anxiety with irrational fear and dread. Some of the more common anxiety symptoms include:

- Feelings of panic, fear, and nervousness
- Uncontrollable, obsessive thought
- Repeated thoughts or "flashbacks" of traumatic events
- Irrational ritualistic behaviors
- Excessive sweating or numbness in the hands or feet
- Shortness of breath, hyperventilation
- Chest pain or heart palpitations
- An inability to be still and calm
- Dry mouth, nausea, dizziness
- Feeling restless, wound-up, or on-edge
- Being easily fatigued
- Having difficulty concentrating; mind going blank
- Being irritable
- Having muscle tension
- Difficulty controlling feelings of worry
- Having sleep problems, such as difficulty falling or staying asleep, restlessness, or dissatisfying sleep.



People with the virus exhibit some common symptoms:

- Fever
- Difficulty breathing
- Dry cough

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) other, less common coronavirus symptoms include: aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat, or diarrhea.

What's the main difference between coronavirus symptoms and those of anxiety?

People with COVID-19 usually have a fever along with coughing and difficulty breathing; since anxiety doesn't cause coughing, this is a key distinction between the two.

When a person experiences a panic attack, which does include shortness of breath, it usually only lasts 20 to 30 minutes, hitting its peak at about 10 minutes. Someone with coronavirus who is having trouble breathing will have that difficulty for a longer period of time, typically alongside flu-like symptoms.



COVID- 19 and the 5 psychological stages of grief process

- 1. Denial**
- 2. Anger**
- 3. Bargaining**
- 4. Despair**
- 5. Acceptance**

We are all experiencing forms of loss during this time, whether that's the tangible loss of a job or security, the loss of feeling of personal freedom, the loss of friends or loved ones when we can't see them regularly, or the loss of health if we got sick.

When you lose anything, there is a process that one goes through to the other side.

Breaking down each of the stages and how it may relate to how you're feeling during this period, can be really helpful in finding the light at the end of the coronavirus tunnel.



Stage 1: Denial

Chances are we've all been through this initial stage already with Covid-19, and remember our former ignorance about the virus with a little embarrassment. Many people were in total denial about the potential crisis that we were facing just a few weeks ago, and didn't want to accept the enormity of what was happening. This still may be true for many, like those who don't take social distancing seriously. It's natural, when we've never faced a time like this before, to dismiss the idea.

Stage 2: Anger

When you feel like all control has been taken away, and life has drastically changed in a very short space of time, it's completely natural to feel angry. This is probably the stage that a lot of us are facing right now. We're frustrated, we feel anxious, and we're just simply pissed off that this is happening. It's important to try and remember that although not everything is clear right now, it won't stay that way forever, this situation will eventually come to an end and we will come out the other side.



Stage 3: Bargaining

It's hard to believe that just a few weeks ago, we were all heading out to the pub, cuddling our parents and shopping away as normal. In the Bargaining stage of grief, you begin to think about the 'what ifs' and make promises to yourself about what you would do if life was different or returned to normal. Don't convince yourself that you can swap certain factors of this outbreak for others, stick to the advice of health professionals and try to be patient.

Stage 4: Depression

This is the stage when you feel helpless and your negative energy may start to turn inwards. Rastically changed in a very short space of time, it's completely natural to feel angry. This is probably the stage that a lot of us are facing right now, we're frustrated, we feel anxious, and we're just simply pissed off that this is happening. It's important to try and remember that although not everything is clear right now, it won't stay that way forever, this situation will eventually come to an end and we will come out the other side.

Stage 5: Acceptance

The last stage of grieving is acceptance, but this doesn't mean being totally okay or happy with the situation. We're never going to be happy about a virus changing all of our lives — but we can get to the point where we understand what's going on and we're willing to work with what we have. This is the new normal, for now, and as long as we're helping each other out as much as we can, we'll get through it.





Tips and techniques to reduce anxiety

MANAGING COVID-19 STRESS

Daily tips on looking after yourself



SET PRIORITIES

Don't become overwhelmed by creating a life-changing list of things to achieve while you're home. Set reasonable goals each day and outline steps you can take to reach those goals. Give yourself credit for every step in the right direction, no matter how small. And recognize that some days will be better than others.



KEEP YOUR REGULAR ROUTINE.

Maintaining a regular schedule is important to your mental health. In addition to sticking to a regular bedtime routine, keep consistent times for meals, bathing and getting dressed, work or study schedules, and exercise. Also set aside time for activities you enjoy. This predictability can make you feel more in control.



RELAX AND RECHARGE.

Set aside time for yourself. Even a few minutes of quiet time can be refreshing and help to quiet your mind and reduce anxiety. Listen to music or read or listen to a book, whatever helps you relax.

CLOCK IN AND CLOCK OUT IF YOU ARE WORKING OR STUDYING

The working day for anyone in an office or College has commutes either side of it, but these aren't there if you're working or studying from home and the risk is that the time between when you're on-shift and when you're off will merge into each other.



COMMUNICATE

Talk to people you trust. These are extraordinary times and we must all come together (virtually) to help each other out. Reach out to your family, friends or to a health professional, if you need any help.



BE KIND TO YOURSELF AND OTHERS

Support a family member or friend. Take connections. If you need to stay at home and distance yourself from others, avoid social isolation. Find time each day to make virtual connections by email, texts, phone or apps.





KEEP CALM

Use the word CALM to relieve unpleasant feelings and to balance your emotions, following these 4 steps:

C ONTEMPLA
A CCEPT
L ET
M ENTALISE



Contemplate

Note things around you. Let it happen, without judgment, what is going on in your body: good nor bad. Look around you, observing every detail of the situation you are in. Describe them in detail for you, as a means of moving away from your inner observation.

Accept negative feelings

Accept your feelings of anxiety or any other unpleasant feeling. Even if it seems very difficult, accept the sensations in your body just as you would accept an unexpected or unknown visitor or uncomfortable situation in your home. Replace your fear, anger and rejection with acceptance. By resisting, you will be prolonging and intensifying your discomfort. Instead, flow with them.

Let the air out of your chest

Release the air from your lungs! Breathe very slowly, calmly, inhaling slowly through your nose and exhaling long and gently through your mouth. Try to find the ideal rhythm of your breathing, and you will discover how pleasant it is.

Mentalize positive things

Mind your thoughts- You may be anticipating catastrophic things. Examine what you are saying to yourself and reflect rationally. What you are feeling at the moment, can be unpleasant, but remember that the way you interpret situations reflect on your feelings.





BREATHING EXERCISE

Since breathing is something we can control and regulate, it is a useful tool for achieving a relaxed and clear state of mind. Try the following exercise:

- Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose.
- Keep your shoulders relaxed. Your abdomen should expand, and your chest should rise very little.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth. As you blow air out, purse your lips slightly, but keep your jaw relaxed. You may hear a soft “whooshing” sound as you exhale.

Repeat this breathing exercise for several minutes.

You can perform this exercise as often as needed. It can be done standing up, sitting down, or lying down.





MINDFULNESS SEEING EXERCISE

This is a simple exercise, requiring only a window with some kind of a view:

- Find a space at a window where there are sights to be seen outside;
- Look at everything there is to see. Avoid labeling and categorizing what you see outside the window; instead of thinking “bird” or “stop sign,” try to notice the colors, the patterns, or the textures;
- Pay attention to the movement of the grass or leaves in the breeze. Notice the many different shapes present in this small segment of the world you can see. Try to see the world outside the window from the perspective of someone unfamiliar with these sights;
- Be observant, but not critical. Be aware, but not fixated;
- If you become distracted, gently pull your mind away from those thoughts and notice a color or shape again to put you back in the right frame of mind.



THOUGHTS RECORD EXERCISE

One of the best techniques for coping with negative feelings is to create an intervention in your mind.

The negative thoughts record is a form that can be used to perform an analysis of the relationship between situation-thought-consequence and therefore can be used to assess dysfunctional thoughts and cognitive distortions that affect your emotions. This exercise is designed to question your thoughts, so as not to believe the first thing that comes to your mind, helping you to be more logical and rational. By doing this with some frequency, you will discover certain harmful and irrational thought patterns, which create a lot of problems for you, and you can begin to change them into more constructive thoughts.

Instructions

When you notice that you are in a bad mood or feeling low, ask yourself: "What is going through my head right now"? What real events, thoughts and memories led me to this unpleasant emotion? What did I think that made me feel or behave like this? Is this thought a fact? Am I exaggerating? Am I making a wrong assumption? Is it really that terrible? Is this really happening the way I'm feeling? Is there another possible explanation?



Sometimes you just need to slow down, remain calm and simply let life happen. Take a deep breath and focus on the simple important things. Within time, we will all be back to normality!

Mind yourself, mind your thoughts!





A little bit about me

My name is Silvana, I am a psychologist and the founder of Intercultural Psychology clinic, established in Dublin since 2010.

The clinic specializes in psychotherapy and psychological support programs for students. The sessions are provided in Portuguese, Spanish, and English, in-person or online.

I have been working with hundreds of people living in Ireland, from over 15 countries, helping them to overcome their life, language or cultural difficulties and to be prepared for an international mindset.

I love inspiring people and I hope I can do the same for you with this e-book.

Warm wishes
Silvana Byrne



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