**Psychological First Aid for the COVID-19 Pandemic**

1. **Setup**
   - Identify a private place
   - Use the HIPAA-compliant version of Zoom, if conducting a video call

2. **Contact & Engagement**
   - Introduce yourself and your organizational affiliation
   - Confirm that person is in a private setting
   - Orient to the purpose of the contact (i.e., providing supportive listening and/or practical coping skills and resources, not therapy or a crisis line)
   - Set a time expectation
     - Build rapport and communicate calm, respect, and compassion

3. **Gather Information**
   - Collaboratively assess needs and priorities without making assumptions

4. **Address Specific Needs**
   - If the person is overwhelmed by many different issues
   - If the person shares negative emotions or thoughts
   - If the person is having a serious distress reaction that interferes with duties, risks safety, or prevents coping

5. **Provide Practical Assistance**
   - Collaboratively prioritize needs and concerns, select an issue to focus on, develop an action plan
   - Use active listening, sit with and validate emotions, ask gentle and curious questions about negative thoughts
   - With permission, teach short-term coping strategies like grounding or deep breathing

6. **Provide Coping Information & Referrals**
   - Provide basic information about common stress reactions (e.g., intrusive thoughts, avoidance, bodily symptoms, strong negative emotions)
   - Work together to identify the person’s existing helpful coping strategies and provide information about potential new coping strategies
   - Provide referrals and other appropriate links to services if needed (e.g., UW CareLink)
   - Encourage brief, ongoing contacts with social supports

7. **Wrap Up**
   - Summarize key take-aways and next steps
   - Offer a follow-up if indicated

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**Support Session Outline**

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**DO**
- Collaboratively assess needs and priorities
- Meet them where they are
- Share concrete, simple, factual information
- Communicate calm, compassion, and respect
- Take the person’s culture into account
- Acknowledge strengths
- Be aware of the limitations of your role

**DON’T**
- Make assumptions about their needs or priorities
- Pressure them into sharing details of their story
- Make false promises or reassurances, use jargon
- Rush the person or talk about your own troubles
- Assume their worldview or way of coping is the same as yours
- Judge their reactions, focus only on problems
- Think or act as if you need to solve all of their problems
- Try to take their pain away or cheer them up

**IS GROUNDING APPROPRIATE?**
- Is the person unresponsive, panicked, or frantic? Are they stuck in their anxiety?
- Is the intense reaction interfering with essential duties, threatening safety, or preventing healthy coping?
- Is this likely a one-time reaction in a crisis?

**HOW TO PRACTICE GROUNDING**
1. Sit comfortably and breathe slowly and deeply
2. Name 5 non-distressing things you can see.
3. Pause and breathe.
4. Name 5 non-distressing sounds you can hear.
5. Pause and breathe.
6. Name 5 non-distressing things you can feel.
7. Pause and breathe.

**ENHANCING COPING**
- Collaboratively assess and prioritize needs and concerns
- Choose the most pressing, controllable issue to address
- Brainstorm possible solutions to the problem
- Consider pros and cons and choose a solution
- Make an action plan for carrying out the solution
- Consistently meeting basic needs for sleep, nutrition, and health
- Reaching out to others and finding ways to connect, even at a distance
- Expressing feelings (e.g., journaling, crying, talking to supportive people)
- Doing daily activities that give a sense of pleasure or achievement (e.g., exercise)
- Maintaining a normal schedule when possible, or creating a new routine
- Using calming and compassionate self-talk
- Focusing on what you can control and what you can do about those things

**HEALTHY COPING IS... RATHER THAN**
- Sleeping, eating, or taking medicine inconsistently
- Withdrawing from family and friends or waiting for others to reach out
- Suppressing negative feelings, including with drugs or alcohol
- Withdrawing from activities or focusing on activities that aren’t possible
- Working too many hours or avoiding responsibilities
- Using negative self-talk or treating worries like they’re facts
- Ruminating about things you can’t control or hypothetical situations

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