

Caring for your mental health during this crisis

Limit news consumption, rest and recharge, and other tips

Philippine Daily Inquirer · 21 Mar 2020 · C1 · By Niña Rodriguez

Due to the nationwide outbreak of the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the government imposed an enhanced community quarantine all over Luzon, which resulted in the suspension of classes at all levels up to April 14.



Because of this, students in droves went home to their provinces to be with their families, but some weren't able to do so and are locked down in Metro Manila.

With COVID-19 plunging the nation into panic, constant news on television and social media sites about the pandemic can make young adults, teenagers and children feel restless and worried, especially those boarding in city dormitories, far away from their families.

Gypzy Granado, a Grade 12 student of the University of Santo Tomas (UST) Senior High School, said, "I constantly experience anxiety, sadness and paranoia. I am away from my parents, and it is hard to go through this by myself."

For those struggling with anxiety, depression and other mental health issues, being quarantined at home with little to no face-to-face connection with family and familiar faces can take a toll on one's mental health.

Keira (not her real name), a student of Far Eastern University, said, "It's difficult when you're dealing with depression and anxiety and then trapped ka pa indoors. You have limited social interaction, you're left alone with your thoughts, and that can be very troubling."

Some, even when they're already with their families, still can't help but worry due to the unpredictable nature of the virus.

"Aside from the normal stress I get from school, these days it's different," said Eloisa Tandoc, also a Grade 12 student of UST. "I'm with my family, but I'm still worrying about a lot of things, like my family's health and safety, academics, and the current situation of our town and how I can cope with what's happening."

So what can we do to take care of our mental health amid the pandemic?

1. Avoid watching, reading or listening to news that may worsen your anxiety and distress.

An article released by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 12, “Mental Health and Psychosocial Considerations During COVID-19 Outbreak,” says that if negative news surrounding COVID-19 starts to make you feel distressed or anxious, you should limit your news consumption, whether from print, broadcast, online or social media. The WHO recommends that when you’re looking for information and updates on the pandemic, do it only once or twice a day, and for the purpose of taking practical steps to protect yourself and loved ones.

2. Distract yourself, or do things that make you happy.

Arielle Añonuevo, a flight attendant student at the Philippine Transmarine Carriers Aviation Training Center, said: “For someone recovering from manic depressive disorder and anxiety complex, the quarantine wouldn’t seem ideal at first. Things such as school and other extracurricular activities help distract me. These help me stay away from unwanted dark thoughts and negative emotions or just anything that could trigger those feelings again.”

It’s guidance counselors’ advice that when you feel like you are falling down a rabbit hole of dark thoughts, try doing something that diverts your mind from it. An online post by the Psychological Association of the Philippines recommends setting aside time to do things that you enjoy. Extracurricular activities such as hobbies can be a good tool to make you feel better during these difficult times. Keep on doing things that make you feel happy, and look for positive things in your life to keep that light of hope shining inside of you.

3. Reach out to someone and keep in touch with family and friends.

Talking to someone is always one of the best ways to deal with negative thoughts and difficult situations. Don’t be afraid to reach out for help. Talk to a trusted friend or a loved one. If you are far away from friends and family, keep in touch and check up on them as often as you can. This will help reduce the anxiety of not being with them physically. It may also build relationships and make them stronger.

4. Take time to rest.

“The quarantine has a positive impact because I had a break from academic stress and breakdowns,” said Hannah Zhaine Merillana of King stone Advance School. Now is the time to catch up on some sleep, which you couldn’t do when you were cramming school work and doing late-night studying. Numerous studies have found that sleeping helps boost the immune system, and a healthy immune system means you’ll be less at risk to contract COVID-19.

Take this time to de stress from aca demics. Rest your body and mind, and recharge.

5. Find opportunities to amplify positive and hopeful stories and images of local people who have experienced COVID-19.

For example, find stories of people who have recovered or who have supported a loved one with the virus and are willing to share their experience. The WHO recommends we find the light in these dark times. While we should always keep in mind the gravity and seriousness of the pandemic, let us do our best to share with those who have COVID-19, their families and those who are struggling to cope during these difficult times some hopeful and positive stories of people who have recovered, and people who are helping out communities to cope with the quarantine. In these trying times, we should take care not only of our physical health, but our mental health, as well. Rest, recharge, be in touch with your loved ones and, of course, do not lose faith that things will get better soon. In the words of Stephen Hawking, “How ever bad life may seem, there is always some thing you can do, and succeed at. While there’s life, there is hope.” —CONTRIBUTED