

PSYCHOLOGICAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO FACE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Given the exceptional situation imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, we want to share some reflections and suggestions aimed at helping us maintain our emotional and psychological balance. First of all, there are two important elements in this situation that have a direct effect on people's emotional well-being:

1. **Risk perception.**
2. **Isolation** imposed due to quarantine.

RISK PERCEPTION in this case it is very high in general population, given the objective situation we are in. It must be remembered that our mind does not objectively process the situation but instead uses a series of heuristics or "shortcuts". Thus, because of the amount of information available about the virus, the disease, the count of the victims, etc., our mind, due to the heuristics of accessibility and impact, tends to attribute a much higher risk than what would actually correspond to the statistic facts. This creates a sensation of fear, that causes our brain to go into "defence" mode and do things like gathering food (unnecessary) or, as we are seeing in the USA in recent days, an increase in arms sales. Excessive fear generally leads people to make non-rational decisions. This high perception of risk also increases anxiety, hypochondriacal thoughts, fear of contact with others, etc. In addition, in extreme cases, if people feel helplessness, they can abandon the healthy behaviours that must be carried out to reasonably prevent infection.

To avoid this, it would be important to:

1. Not be connected all the time and constantly informed of the evolution of the pandemic. It is better to choose a reliable source and get information once a day (on the mid-day news for example) or two at the most. The rest of the time, spend it doing or thinking about things not related to the pandemic.
2. Contextualize the information (relating the number of deaths with those of other diseases, such as the flu, helps provide that context) and relate the negative information to positive facts (number of people who died and the number of people who have overcome the infection, for example).
3. Pay attention to the specific indications that reliable sources give us about how we should proceed and what are the reasonable self-protective behaviours. Focus on carrying out those healthy and logical behaviours.
4. Keep yourself occupied with pre-programmed activities for the day (more about this in next section).
5. Remember that, despite the severity of the disease, many people will be asymptomatic or with mild symptoms and that what we are really trying to do with this quarantine is slow down the contagion curve to avoid collapsing our health system. The goal is not so much not to contract the coronavirus as to prevent its rapid spread, allowing our health system to attend all those who need it. Most of us will have Covid-19, or maybe already have it, and, hopefully, it will not be a serious risk to our health.

Regarding the situations that arise from **ISOLATION**:

1. It is very important to keep a daily routine that includes: adequate hours of sleep and rest, balanced diet (it may be necessary to reduce a little the amount of intake due to the decrease in physical activity) and, very important, physical exercise. There are many videos and tutorials available on the web for this purpose.

2. Limit the number of hours per day in front of screens. Greatly limit the search for information about Covid-19 (see previous section).
3. Have, if possible, short daily periods of sun exposure or natural light exposure, even through a window. It is important for the assimilation of vitamin D and the immune system, as well as for the circadian rhythm.
4. Keep proper daily personal hygiene and dress up keeping a good appearance, even if one is not going to leave home.
5. Keep up social contact (calls, video calls, etc.) with friends and family. Participate in group sessions through different programs and applications (Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp, Jitsi Meet, Facetime, etc).
6. Schedule activities and specific moments to do them throughout the day (reading, yoga, etc.). Don't make them depend on the mood of each moment.
7. Do activities at home with other family members: games, sports, etc.
8. Get used to a slower pace in general; remember that certain doses of boredom are good for our mind.
9. Think about the activities that must be done day to day; don't count the days remaining for the end of the quarantine.
10. Feel that we are all part of a community, that we are all in this together, feeling the support of others, even if it's in the distance. Participate in as many group activities as possible to increase this feeling (go out to clap in the balcony at the proposed time, for example).
11. Remember that we are facing an exceptional and unique situation, that we have never lived before and that we may not live again. Make the most of this time that is given to us to do things that we would otherwise not find time to do: read, paint, organize, have conversations, etc.

We sincerely hope that these suggestions are of some help in this quarantine time.



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