



DEPARTMENT OF GLOBAL HEALTH

UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

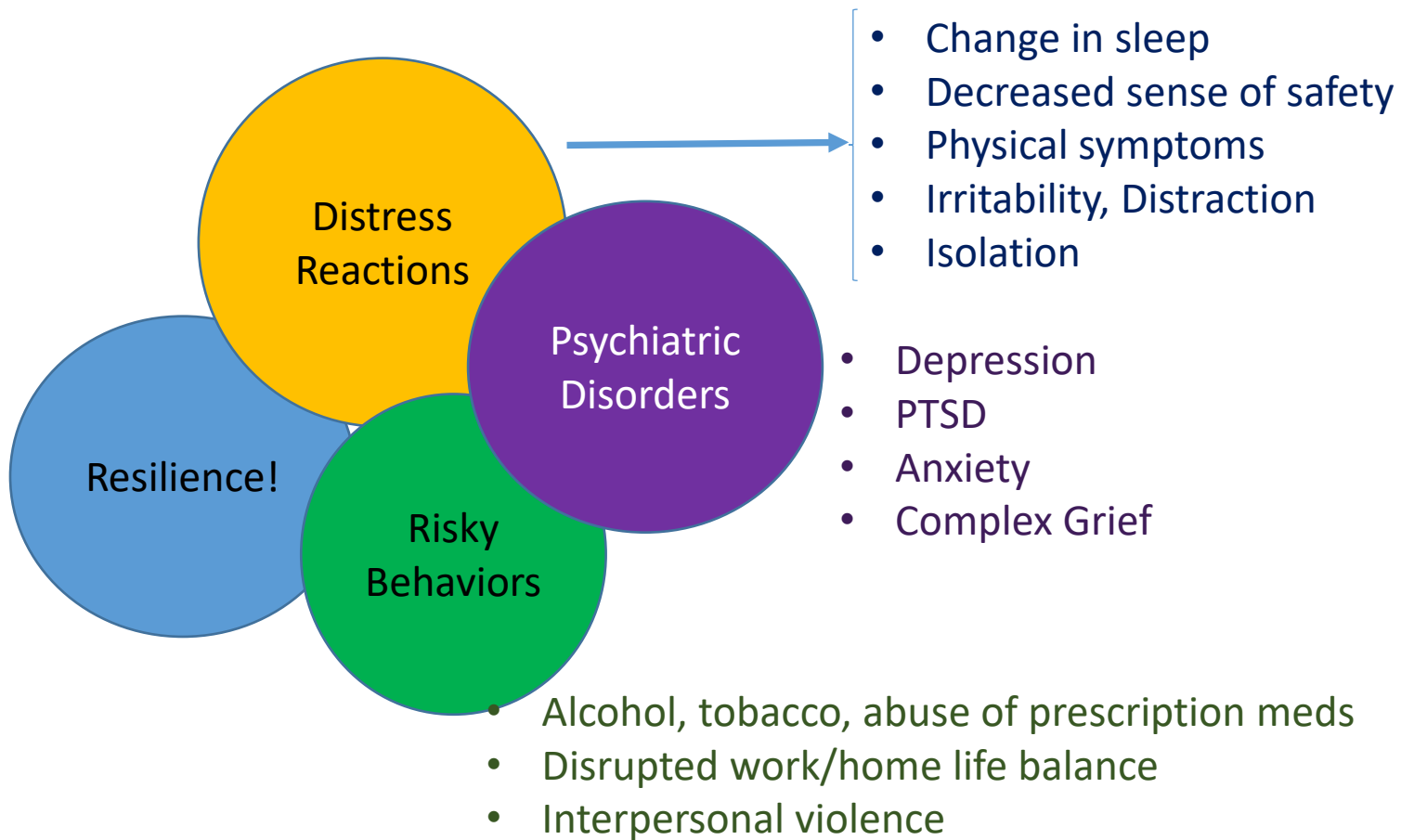
# Mental Health and Resilience during the COVID-19 Outbreak

Sources:

*American Psychiatric Association: COVID-19 and Mental Health: Caring for the Public and Ourselves*

Ursano, R. J., Fullerton, C. S., Weisaeth, L., Raphael, B. (eds) (2017). *Textbook of Disaster Psychiatry* (2nd ed., pp. 270–284). Cambridge University Press.

Open access: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/textbook-of-disaster-psychiatry/pandemics-health-care-emergencies/478824C480288A8935798FBF151D96FA>



## Psychological and behavioral responses to disasters

*-A pandemic is a natural disaster and those who experience it may feel distress, experience mental health conditions, or increase risky behaviors*

*-The **majority** of people—even those with initial difficulties—**will do well and return to normal***

# Psychological impacts of Pandemics

In the case of COVID-19, these concerns raise anxiety:

- Fear and uncertainty each day → increased risk behaviors
- Altered perception of risk, e.g. anxiety about risk, no matter the exposure
- Threat of an invisible, imperceptible, powerful agent
- Delays in detection of infection, non-specific symptoms
- Potential for isolation and quarantine
- Shortages & scarcity (protective equipment, treatment)

# Behavioral Impacts of Pandemics

- Misinformation spreads rapidly
- Fear, anger, scapegoating
- Surge in healthcare demand
- Medically unexplained physical symptoms –accounts for many people seeking care

# Important lessons from prior pandemics - 1

- Risk perception (vs. actual risk) governs individual and community behaviors
- Timely and accurate information enhances public trust
- Population-based prevention and treatment measures are enhanced by education
- Cultural, political and religious beliefs & practices impact adherence to recommendations
- Fear-based decision-making increases population distress and erodes trust

Source: Morganstein, J. C., Fullerton, C. S., Ursano, R. J., & Holloway, H. C. (2017). Pandemics: Health Care Emergencies. In *Textbook of Disaster Psychiatry* (2nd ed., pp. 270–284). Cambridge University Press.

# Important features from prior pandemics - 2

- First responders have unique psychological vulnerabilities
- Adequate resourcing of health care personnel is critical to sustaining response efforts
- Media plays a critical role in public perception of risk and safety
- Behavioral health interventions are essential in preparation & response

# What to do:

## Psychological care for communities-1

- Stay informed using credible sources of information
- Discuss children's concerns using developmentally appropriate language
- Use prevention measures (e.g. hand-washing) to reduce risk
- Avoid socially isolating due to fear
  - Remember: social distancing means *physical distancing* with *enhanced social connection*!
- Take medications as prescribed (including for pre-existing conditions)

# What to do:

## Psychological care for communities-2

- Tell a health care provider (or other support provider) if stress or worry causes problems at home or work
- Avoid using alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs to manage difficult emotions
- Talk with friends, family & neighbors to foster support for one another



# Psychological First Aid (PFA)

- Assists people to respond to distress in the aftermath of a disaster
- You don't have to be a mental health care provider to provide PFA
- Principles
  - Establish safety; identify safe areas & behaviors
  - Maximize ability to care for self & family & enable people to be successful in their efforts
  - Teach calming skills and maintenance of natural body rhythms (sleep, rest, nutrition)
  - Maximize and facilitate connectedness to family & social supports
  - Foster hope and optimism while not denying risk

Source: Morganstein, J. C., Fullerton, C. S., Ursano, R. J., & Holloway, H. C. (2017). Pandemics: Health Care Emergencies. In *Textbook of Disaster Psychiatry* (2nd ed., pp. 270–284). Cambridge University Press.

# What to do if you're feeling anxious - 1

- Have an emergency plan ready and don't second-guess it. You can control how you will respond
  - Make a plan for your household
    - What to do when schools are closed, if you have to work longer hours, if a family member gets ill. See CDC guidance for your [home](#)
- Talk with someone
  - Connect with friends and family via text, WhatsApp to share concerns
  - Try a therapy app if you need to talk with a therapist
- Gauge your reaction to the news and limit exposure when you need to. Set a time limit for looking at coronavirus news daily.

# What to do if you're feeling anxious - 2

- Take a mindful moment
  - Deep breathing
  - Prayer
  - Meditation
- Practice self-care and healthy habits
  - Eat well
  - Stay hydrated
  - Exercise
  - Step away from social media
  - Do something enjoyable to relax

# What to do if you're feeling anxious

- Keep your routines
  - Maintain your bedtime, meal times, safe outdoor activities
  - Challenge yourself to build something enjoyable into your routine during this time (e.g. read a book, listen to music, take a walk, etc.)

# Resources

- CDC Household [preparedness](#)
- Psychological First Aid
  - Training and manuals:  
[https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/type/psych\\_firstaid\\_manual.asp](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/type/psych_firstaid_manual.asp)
  - WHO resources:  
[https://www.who.int/mental\\_health/publications/guide\\_field\\_workers/en/](https://www.who.int/mental_health/publications/guide_field_workers/en/)
- COVID-19 Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
  - IASC Interim Briefing Note
  - WHO: Social Stigma Associated with COVID-19
  - WHO: Mental Health and Psychosocial Considerations during COVID-19 Outbreak