COMMUNITY EDUCATION WEBINAR – 19th May 2020

PSYCHOTHERAPY – A recovery towards Anxiety and PTSD during COVID-19

Topics discussed:

• What is PTSD?
• What is Anxiety?
• Impact of Covid-19 on our mental health
• What is Psychotherapy?
• How can Psychotherapy help you?
• When & where to seek help
• Q & A

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What is PTSD?

PTSD stands for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. According to the World Health Organisation, the definition of Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a disorder that develops in some people who have experienced a shocking, scary, or dangerous event. Covid-19 definitely is a shocking, scary and dangerous event.

PTSD has a particular set of reactions that can develop if you have been through a traumatic event which threatened your safety or that of others around you. Some common examples are; physical, emotional or sexual assaults, serious accidents, war, torture or disasters such as floods, bushfires and now Covid-19. While it is natural to feel afraid or anxious during and after a traumatic event or situation, if the symptoms continue for an extended length of time (on average 1 month), you could have PTSD.

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Symptoms of PTSD

The onset of the symptoms can appear soon after the event(s) or appear years later. Some common symptoms of PTSD include:

• Re-experiencing the trauma (memories, nightmares or flashbacks).

• Being very alert (in that fight or flight response) and having a physical response to sudden changes that could be a sign of danger.

• Avoiding reminders (triggers) of the trauma.

• Negative thoughts and mood including depression, feeling hopeless, anxious, intense worrying, anger or guilt, emotional detachment and no longer finding joy or enjoyment.

• You could also experience agitation and negative changes in your behaviour.

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PTSD Statistics in Australia

According to the Australian government “Health Direct” website, before Covid-19, PTSD affected around one million Australians each year.

It is too early for any statistics on how much that number will increase due to Covid-19, but there is a lot of talk that it could increase by as much as 2 - 4 times.

PTSD is treatable and the sooner someone seeks support, the earlier they can recover. So it really is important to seek help sooner, rather than later.
What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is more than just feeling stressed or worried. While stress and anxious feelings are a common response to a situation where we feel under pressure, they usually pass once the stressful situation has passed, or the ‘stressor’ or “trigger” is removed.

Everyone feels anxious from time to time. When anxious feelings don't go away, or happen without any particular reason or make it hard to cope with daily life, it may be the sign of an anxiety condition.
Symptoms of Anxiety

Anxiety symptoms vary for everyone but here are some common symptoms:

• Panic attacks, heart palpations, tightening of the chest, breathing quickly, feeling hot and becoming sweaty, feeling restless, feeling shaky, feeling tense, wound up and on edge.

• You could experience excessive fear, worry, obsessive thinking, thinking the worst is always going to happen, have trouble calming your mind or thinking clearly.

• You could start to avoid situations that make you feel anxious which can impact on your daily life, including work, study, family and social life.

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Anxiety Statistics

According to Beyond Blue, anxiety is the most common mental health condition in Australia. Stating that on average, one in four people (one in three women and one in five men), will experience anxiety at some stage in their life. Beyond Blue state that in a 12-month period, over two million Australians experience anxiety.

While it is currently too early to get statistics on the increase of these numbers due to Covid-19, mental health professionals are predicting significant increases in the number of people experiencing anxiety during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.
Breathing Exercise

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COVID-19 and its potential effects on our mental health

The Covid-19 pandemic is being called a once in 100 year event and is certainly something that none of us have experienced before.

It has changed our lives, the way we live, work, shop, interact with others, educate, our social lives, the way we exercise, our interactions with our family and for many of us, financially, as well as just how we live our lives in general.
COVID-19 and its potential effects on our mental health

We could currently be feeling anxious about all of these changes as well as our health and the health of our loved ones.

These anxieties can be quite normal. It is a different situation and we do not currently know the outcome, which can cause additional anxiety. When difficult or challenging things happen in our lives, we have usually experienced them or know of someone who has, so we have an “idea” of how things will turn out. Covid-19 is very different to that and not knowing or having an “idea” of the outcome can also increase our anxieties.

If your anxiety is to a point where it is not subsiding and you cannot function normally in your day, it is important to ask for help.

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Safety Plan

It is important to have a safety plan for when/if you start to feel overwhelmed, anxious or start having a panic attack. Often when we feel like that, we cannot think clearly so a really good idea is to have a little note somewhere. I find using the notes function in your Iphone is good if you have an Iphone, or you can write it on a card and have it in your wallet or purse. Whatever will work for you. On this note I want you to write reminders of what you can do to calm yourself when you are feeling like unsettled.
Samples of what can be in your safety plan

- Do the three breathes.
- Recite the alphabet backwards.
- Say the colours of the rainbow.
- Remind yourself of your favourite musician when you were younger and/or remember your favourite song and try and remember the lyrics.
- Say out loud as many different breeds of dogs or cats that you can remember.
- Write the name and number of a person to contact if you cannot calm yourself or if you are having suicidal thoughts. Have 2-3 people on this list in case you cannot get onto one of them.
- Reminder to call 000 if you are having thoughts of harming yourself or others.
- A helpline telephone number you can call.
- And/or anything else which may be useful at the time.

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How are we going to feel returning to the world out of “isolation”?

It can feel daunting returning to the world as our isolation restrictions lift. Returning to life, bit by bit and living with the fear that we or someone we know may become sick or that we could make someone else sick.

Life as we know it, will most likely never be the same. Social distancing will most likely continue for some time and hand washing and not touching our faces will also continue for some time and will most likely become “normal” habits for us.

We are not born with habits, they usually take 3 weeks to create. So, we will most likely already find that we have adapted to our current situations and our new “normals” are now our new “habits”.

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How are we going to feel returning to the world out of “isolation”?

It is very important to keep an eye on your mental health as well as the mental health of the people around you.

Look out for the signs or symptoms we have discussed earlier in today’s presentation.

Don’t wait to ask for help. The sooner your seek help for your anxiety or PTSD symptoms the quicker the recovery. Don’t ignore. Anxiety and PTSD are also known to be linked to substance abuse and other issues, which can bring on a whole other range of issues. So don’t wait. Ask for help. There is no harm in asking for help, but there can be harm by ignoring symptoms.

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What is Psychotherapy?

According to the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia, Psychotherapy is the comprehensive and intentional engagement between a therapist and client for the healing, growth or transformation of emotional, physical, relationship, and behavioural issues, or of chronic suffering, through a variety of well-founded interactive processes and techniques that are all designed to help with the clients mindset.

While traditionally psychotherapy has been done in person, during the Covid-19 pandemic it has become increasingly popular to be done online. This is also a very effective technique. There are many therapists offering online sessions which you can do from the comfort of your own home.
How can Psychotherapy help you?

• Give you someone highly experienced, impartial and non-judgemental to speak to, in a safe, confidential space.
• Allow you to feel like you are not alone.
• Help you identify your triggers.
• Give you tools and techniques to use in your everyday life.
• Help you release those fears, worries, phobias etc. that are triggers for you.
• Help you change negative and harmful behaviours.
• Help you remove emotions attached to specific events so that you do not have to relive the emotions over and over.
• Empower you by giving you the self-esteem and self-confidence to get back on with your life and be able to live your life to your full potential without your past holding you back.

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When and where to seek help

If your symptoms are not improving after 1 week, see your GP. Below is a list of help line telephone numbers you can also contact. A lot of these organisations also have webchat available. Check their webpages for more information. Please note: If you are having suicidal thoughts or thoughts of harming yourself or others please call 000

- MHFA Helpline 1300 643 287 – 9am – 11pm, 7 days a week; admin@mhfa.org.au
- Life Line 13 11 44 - 24/7
- Suicide Line 1300 651 251 – 24/7
- Suicide Callback Service 1300 659 467 – 24/7
- Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636 – 24/7
- Your GP
- Book to see a Psychotherapist/Psychologist/Counsellor
Q & A

Type up your questions in the Q & A menu located at the bottom of your screen.

If you would like to contact Janine Nash you can email her at:

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Or visit www.melbourneclinicalpsychotherapy.com.au

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