



National Council of
Urban Indian Health



EXCELLENCE · EQUITY · EFFECTIVENESS

Weaving Calm: A Strength-Based Approach to Addressing Stress Among Urban Native Youth During COVID-19

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ABOUT NCUIH

The National Council of Urban Indian Health (NCUIH) is the national non-profit organization devoted to the support and development of quality, accessible, and culturally-competent health and public health services for American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) living in urban areas.

NCUIH is the only national representative of the 41 Title V Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs) under the Indian Health Service (IHS) in the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA). NCUIH strives to improve the health of the over 70% of the AI/AN population that lives in urban areas, supported by quality, accessible health care centers.





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JOHNS HOPKINS 
CENTER FOR AMERICAN
INDIAN HEALTH

Overview

- **Recognize behaviors associated with stress in Native youth**
- Understand the negative impacts of stress on behavioral wellness, especially regarding suicide and substance misuse
- Identify how stress is intensified among Native communities by COVID-19
- Identify interventions/coping strategies/strengths-based solutions for chronic stress in Native youth

What is Stress?

- The good news
- The bad news
- Short-term stress vs. long-term stress
- Stresses in different domains and time points
- Comfort zones vs. reaching your limit



Signs of Stress

- Each person, family and community has their own signs of stress
- Behavioral Signs
 - Pacing
 - Changes in mood, patience
 - Withdrawal
- Physiological Signs
 - Body feels tense
 - Sleep or eating problems



Stressors

- What are stressors?
- External Stressors
 - People
 - Situations
 - Places
- Internal Stressors
 - Thoughts
 - Mental images

POLL: What are some negative impacts that stress causes on physical and behavioral wellness in your community?



Recognizing Stress

Why is it important to know our individual stressors and signs of stress for our families and communities?

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How Stress Impacts Our Work

- Over-identification with those we attempt to assist
- Withdrawal from and even anger at those we attempt to assist
- Burnout
- Vicarious traumatic stress (aka compassion fatigue)

POLL: What stressors are specific or unique to home-visiting or being a caregiver?

Work Life Balance

- At least 24% of people say it's hard to relax and not think about work (probably much higher during this unprecedented time)
- Why is it important?
 - Be more effective in your position and provide support for co-workers
 - Increases individual and team productivity
 - Strengthens team relationships
 - Helps us to be stronger for our participants and community

How Stress Impacts our Behavioral Wellness

- When stress becomes overwhelming and prolonged, the risks for mental health problems increase.
- Long-term stress increases the risk of mental health problems such as:
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Substance use problems
 - Sleep problems
 - Suicide*

Historical Trauma and Ongoing Oppression

- Historical Trauma: Intergenerational response to losses of Indigenous land, peoples, culture due to contact and colonization (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998)
 - Including intentional and unintentional spread of disease
- Growing research with AI/AN/First Nations communities shows links between HT and:
 - Depression, anxiety, substance use, suicide ideation (suicidal thinking), suicidal behavior

From Dr. Victoria O'Keefe

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How COVID19 Impacts Behavioral Wellness in Native Communities

- Ongoing care for those dealing with mental health or substance use problems + those experiencing new stress, depression, anxiety, suicide ideation, or increasing substance use
 - Access to ongoing psychiatric or mental health care: medication, therapy, support groups, community wellness groups, ceremonies
- Individual, family, community grieving
 - Guidelines about physical distancing and number of people attending service
 - Traditional practices disruption due to COVID-19 restrictions

From Dr. Victoria O'Keefe

How COVID19 Impacts Stress in Native Communities

- Historical Trauma reminders
 - Past diseases as intentional and unintentional acts of genocide, losing Elders today and tribal cultures, languages, stories
- Ceremonies, family and community gatherings
 - Social connection; cultural identity; healing
 - Certain times of year, inability to reschedule certain types
- Stress for COVID-19 frontline workers and families

From Dr. Victoria O'Keefe

COVID19 and Stress

POLL: What stressors are specific to COVID19 for individuals and families in your community?

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What is Self-Care?

Refers to the activities and practices that we deliberately choose to engage in on a regular basis to maintain and enhance health and well-being.

Why is Self-Care Important?

- Minimize stress
 - Prevent burn-out
 - Be at our best for our participants, families and communities
 - Stay healthy
-
- *POLL: Do you think you spend an average amount of time engaged in self-care compared to other people (above average, below average)?*

Barriers to Self-Care



PARENTHOOD



CAREGIVER
AT HOME



CLASSES



BILLS

Calm Body, Clear Mind, and Calming Actions

1. Let feelings out and talk about them
2. Exercise
3. Rest and Relax
4. Use distraction and pleasant activities
5. Try to solve the problem

Mindfulness/Meditation



Calm Body, Clear Mind, and Calming Actions

6. Identify and change your self-talk
 - “Stress enters my body through my mind”
7. Decrease negative coping behaviors
8. Boundaries
9. Traditional Practices and Prayer
 - Sweat lodges, smudging
 - Talking circles
 - Time with Elders

POLL: What are some coping strategies/ strengths-based solutions that address chronic stress for Native youth in your community?

Self-Care Strategies during COVID19

- Learn to "switch off" (i.e., take a psychological or mental break/rest)
 - Get some fresh air
 - Make a social call
 - Use meals as a natural time to "switch off"
 - Hide/detach from technology during your break time
 - Try to protect a chunk of time each morning and evening before and after work to be technology free

Self-Care Strategies during COVID19

- Take regular breaks including taking leave
 - Research shows that 5-15 min breaks during our work day, both at home and in the office, can increase productivity (and it helps us feel less stressed too)
 - You can even set an alarm or timer to help you get into the habit
 - We can have coffee with a co-worker, listen to music, pray/meditate, go outside

Self-Care Strategies during COVID19

- When you take leave, really take off (try not to check email or take work calls), or it won't really feel like a break
- Even taking 1 day off can make a difference
 - During COVID19 it may seem strange to take time off especially when it is hard to travel and go places, but just spending quality time with loved ones, or having quiet time by ourselves, can improve our mood

Tips for Working Remotely

- Create a designated work space when you are doing work at home
 - If you are working at home full-time it is a good idea to switch rooms
 - However, it is important to have some "sacred" spaces where you try your best to never do work, like our bedrooms
 - Experts would even encourage us to limit all technology if possible in our bedrooms like TV or phones (helps us sleep better)
 - A place where you or your family gathers for meals would be another place to try to limit work and technology

In summary, just BREATHE!

- B – Be in the moment.
- R – Realistic goals, set them.
- E – Everyday events, notice them.
- A – Acts of kindness, do them.
- T – Turn around the negatives.
- H- Honor your strengths and be true to yourself.
- E – End each day with gratitude.
Check what has happened that day.



Discussion

- Why are these strategies helpful?
- What are some tips or specific ways to engage in these calming actions?
- Which of these strategies are you good at, which could you use more often?
- How can you incorporate this into work?



Thank You!
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