

**MOVING FORWARD AFTER
DISASTER:**

**A STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO
OVERCOMING POSTDISASTER
DISTRESS**

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If you are reading this workbook you have probably been through a very scary or life changing disaster. There are many types of disasters, natural disasters such as a worldwide virus, hurricanes or wild fire, technological disasters such as a nuclear leak, and human caused disasters such as terrorism.

It is not unusual to be upset after a major disaster. Everyone is different and responds differently, but there are some common emotional reactions. You may feel scared, worried, nervous, sad, guilty, ashamed or angry. You may feel hopeless about the future. You may experience grief over the actual loss of a loved one or over the loss of important things in your life that cannot be replaced. You may have lost interest in things you used to enjoy. You may be having difficulty getting along with friends, family members, and co-workers.

In addition to emotional reactions, many people experience physical problems after a disaster. You may have stomach aches or trouble breathing. You may have trouble sleeping or may have lost your appetite. You may be concerned about the air you are breathing, especially if people are still getting sick.

You may find that you are not coping as well as you used to with day-to-day stressors from work or from loved ones. You may feel that you have a short temper and that you are quick to get angry. You may not be taking care of yourself, eating well, or exercising. You may be drinking more alcohol or smoking more cigarettes.

Disaster survivors are often exhausted. Many are dealing with financial stressors such as job loss, unpaid bills, or other expenses. If you are or had been isolated or quarantined, you may no longer be able to rely on friends for support.

If you are experiencing postdisaster distress, you may feel like there is nothing that can help you. You may have even tried a few things that did not work. However, over the past few years new techniques have been developed that have been shown to help people just like you.

This workbook will help you to better understand your reactions to disaster, to identify the thoughts that are causing you the most distress, and to teach you skills for managing and overcoming that distress.

INTRODUCTION

Moving Forward After Disaster is a step-by-step guide for people to use to reduce postdisaster distress and move forward in their lives. While it can be used on its own, it is the most helpful when used in combination with a therapist who is using the Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) for Postdisaster Distress program. Used together, the workbook strengthens skills taught during the therapy session and the therapist can provide support and suggestions on issues that may come up while completing the workbook.

CBT for Postdisaster Distress is a 10 session program to teach individuals skills to better cope with their symptoms of postdisaster distress. The intervention is divided into four main sections: education, coping skills, and cognitive restructuring.

- **Education:** In this section you will learn about symptoms that are common after a disaster. Being aware of these symptoms is an important step toward being able to cope with them more effectively.
- **Breathing Retraining:** In this section, you will be taught some immediate ways of coping with your distress. For example, you will learn a breathing technique called breathing retraining. This skill will help you manage anxiety and symptoms of physical tension. It is easy to learn and you can use it right away.
- **Activity Scheduling:** In this section you learn the importance of engaging in pleasant and meaningful activities. Doing these things has been shown to improve mood.
- **Cognitive Restructuring:** In this section, you will be taught to make a connection between your thoughts and feelings, to evaluate the thoughts that may be causing you distress, and to replace them with more accurate, less distressing thoughts.

All cognitive therapies are based on the belief that thoughts and feelings are connected and that how you think affects how you feel. The goal of CBT for Postdisaster Distress is to teach you new ways of responding to upsetting situations by exploring alternative explanations, and assessing the accuracy of your thoughts. Even if you are not able to change the situation, you can change the way you think about a situation.

Together with your therapist, you will learn new skills and approaches to reduce postdisaster distress. After each session, your therapist may suggest that you complete a section of this workbook. In many cases it has taken years for your thinking to develop to where it is now. Practicing new skills between sessions can help you unlearn these problematic thoughts and feel better faster. In other cases, your therapist may suggest that you complete the workbook together during your sessions.

SESSION 1

UNDERSTANDING REACTIONS TO DISASTER

Almost everyone is upset right after a major disaster. In a survey conducted just a few days after the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks, almost half of the New Yorkers interviewed reported at least one significant symptom of stress. Studies on the types of symptoms people report after all kinds of disasters suggest that there are some very typical reactions.

We review some of these symptoms below including:

- Common Reactions to Disaster
- Symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (or PTSD)
- Symptoms of Depression
- Symptoms of Anxiety
- Drug and Alcohol Problems
- Grief and Loss
- Sleep Problems/Nightmares
- Problems in Daily Functioning

It is likely that you will find that you are experiencing some of these symptoms and reactions and not others. As you review the symptoms, see if you can identify those symptoms that describe you best.

COMMON REACTIONS TO DISASTER

People who experience a disaster often feel intense emotions that can last long after the initial danger has passed. Sometimes even learning second-hand about a loved one's experience of a trauma can cause strong feelings. While individual reactions following a trauma vary from person to person, four core emotions are very common: 1) fear or anxiety, 2) anger, 3) sadness, and 4) guilt and shame.

Fear and Anxiety

Fear and anxiety are normal reactions to experiences that are life threatening or very scary. In moments of danger, our bodies are hardwired to help us stay safe. We prepare to fight our enemy, flee the situation, or freeze in the hope that the danger will move past us. In this sense, fear is adaptive when we are faced with a dangerous situation. Unfortunately, after a disaster, our internal alarm systems can become over sensitive and can be set off by events that are not actually dangerous. You may find that these reactions can get in the way of your daily living. Chronic fear and anxiety can be distracting; impair concentration; cause feelings of tension, agitation, and jumpiness; and can even make you less able to identify real danger.

Anger and Irritability

When people believe they have been treated unfairly, anger is often the primary emotion. After a disaster it is understandable that a person would be angry. During the coronavirus pandemic there was much to be upset about. You may have felt that it was unfair that hospitals didn't have enough equipment or you were not given what you needed by the government to support yourself or your family. These types of situations almost always lead to anger.

You may find that you actively express your anger, or you may bury the anger inside yourself. Either way, anger can cause problems with your health, emotional well being, and relationships. Feelings of anger can make you feel irritated all day long and cause you to be easily set off. Anger can also be more intense, in the form of rage.

Sadness

Sadness occurs naturally in response to loss. Following a disaster, a sense of loss can stem from the death of a friend or loved one, loss of your home, or job, or loss of your previous way of life. Sadness can also be connected with a loss of faith in the world and in your fellow human beings. You may also feel that you will never be the same person as you were before this tragedy, or that you are in some way forever changed.

Sadness can be experienced as frequent crying spells, loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed, desire to be alone all the time, low energy, or fatigue. You may also feel numb and empty, wishing you could cry, but feeling unable to do so. Feelings of hopelessness and despair can also accompany sadness, along with thoughts that the feelings will never stop or go away. When intense, sadness can be experienced as depression (see Symptoms of Depression below).

Guilt and Shame

Guilt and shame are common emotions that people often feel in the wake of a disaster. Guilt and shame may be brought on by thoughts about things you did or didn't do before, during, or after the disaster. You may feel guilty about emotions that you experienced following the disaster. Many people feel that they should be over this by now, or if they were just stronger, or more courageous they wouldn't be having these feelings. You may be experiencing "survivor guilt" which involves feeling guilty that you lived when someone else did not. Or, you may feel guilty that you did not do more during the disaster, even if you did everything you could possibly do.

SYMPTOMS OF POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

In addition to the common reactions described above, there are other more specific types of reactions that you may be experiencing. Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can occur after someone has experienced a traumatic event, such as a virus pandemic. You may be coping with some or all of the symptoms of PTSD. People with PTSD have 3 different types of symptoms: re-experiencing symptoms, avoidance and numbing symptoms, and arousal symptoms.

Re-experiencing Symptoms

After a disaster, it is common for people to re-experience the event. You may have unwanted memories of the disaster that seem to come from out of the blue. Nightmares and flashbacks are particularly strong memories that make it seem like the disaster is happening again. These memories often cause bodily reactions like a racing heart, sweating, shaking, as well as emotional reactions.

Avoidance and Numbing Symptoms

One way people try and cope with the upsetting memories they experience after disaster is to push them away or to try to avoid thinking about the event. You may also try to avoid talking about what happened because it brings up upsetting feelings. Many people also avoid situations that remind them of the disaster, such as watching the news. You may find that this starts to expand to include many other places/situations that are less directly related to the disaster.

The upsetting memories people have can lead to feeling numb or empty inside. You may feel distant or detached from other people, even people you love. You may lose interest in activities you used to enjoy. Sometimes the painful thoughts or feelings can be so intense that your mind just blocks them out altogether and you may not remember parts of what happened. This way of responding to a disaster can make it difficult to get the support you need from others. It can also be associated with feelings of depression and social isolation or withdrawal.

Arousal Symptoms

Arousal symptoms include feeling keyed up and jumpy, irritability, being easily startled, feeling overly watchful and on edge, and having trouble sleeping or concentrating. These reactions are caused by your body's "fight, flight, or freeze" response to fear, which is normal when faced with a sudden, unexpected traumatic experience like a disaster. As a result of your experience, you know there is danger in the world and you want to be ready for it. However, having your body in a constant state of arousal takes a great toll on you and can interfere with your day-to-day life

How Can I Manage My Posttraumatic Stress Reactions?

Over the next few weeks you will learn strategies to cope with your PTSD reactions. In the meantime, here are a few tips for dealing with reminders of your traumatic experience.

- Try not to avoid reminders of the disaster. The more you push the memories away the stronger they come back. Talk to your therapist, close friends, or family about ideas regarding how to gradually approach situations you've been avoiding. Sometimes having a friend or "coach" accompany you in the beginning can be helpful.
- Allow yourself to have memories in amounts that you can manage. Distraction can be a useful tool when the memories get too strong, but if you rely too much on distraction, in the long run it usually makes it harder to deal with the memories.
- Reduce stress by eating healthy foods, exercising, and getting enough sleep.
- Use self-care to nurture yourself. This might include activities that you would not typically indulge in, such as taking a bath, taking time (even 10 minutes) for yourself or reading a book.
- Try to keep active and schedule positive and meaningful activities in your day.
- Use a breathing technique to manage immediate symptoms of anxiety (see information on breathing retraining).

How Can I Manage Emotional and Physical Reactions to Trauma and Loss Reminders?

Before Expected Reminder Occurs: The goal before expected reminders is to reduce anxiety in anticipation of the reminder, and to prepare to managing and reducing reactions during and afterwards.

- 1) ***Anticipate situations when a reminder will likely occur:*** Some reminders are very expected, such as anniversaries or activities that are connected to the event. Other types of reminders are less obvious, such as going to the doctor for a check-up, or running into people who are connected to what happened.
- 2) ***Anticipate how you are likely to react when you encounter a reminder.*** Consider how you typically react, or may react to reminders of what happened, especially ways in which you may cope that are not in your best interests, like using drugs or alcohol, becoming very irritable so you get in fights with other people, doing reckless things, skipping school or zoning out at work, and so forth. We'll focus on coming up with strategies that may be more helpful for you, especially in the long run.
- 3) ***Reduce unnecessary exposure to reminders (avoiding or changing reminders):*** It is protective of your physical and emotional health not to expose yourself to reminders that are unnecessary. This may involve avoiding the distressing reminder, if doing so will not interfere with important activities such as limiting exposure to news about the coronavirus pandemic.

- 4) **Create a coping plan for what you are going to do when a reminder occurs.** There are many things that you can do before you encounter a reminder that will help you to cope with it when it happens. Here are some ideas:

For example, you may say:

It's not good to have your heart rate up too high before you confront a reminder or it will just get worse. It's good to have a plan to manage reactions in anticipation of reminders. Here are four things that you can do:

- 1) Say to yourself something like, "It may not be easy for me, but that's okay I can handle it. Then think of ways that the situation is different from what you will be reminded of, and say to yourself how it is different."
- 2) Actively make the anticipated reminder situation different in ways that are helpful to you.
- 3) Prepare to have someone close to you there to help you if the situation becomes difficult.
- 4) Practice breathing exercise beforehand.
- 5) Make sure that you have adequate rest, nutrition, and exercise.

During the Reminder: The goal during the reminder is to reduce anxiety.

- 1) **Seek support from others:** One options is to connect with someone who cares about you. You may, if appropriate, choose to talk about the reminder, but it may be just as helpful to do something else with them to get your mind of things and give your mind a rest, such as playing a game, watching TV, or just hanging around.
- 2) **Distract yourself with positive activities.** It can be helpful to do something to take your mind off the reminder, such as by listening to music, watching TV or listening to the radio, exercising, or helping someone else.
- 3) **Take a break.** It can be helpful to take a break or a time-out by leaving the stressful situation. For example, reading a book or talking to a loved one.
- 4) **Reduce the duration of the reminder.** Some reminders, like upsetting things on the radio, TV, or in a movie, are simply not helpful to spend time with. Think about changing radio or TV stations, or putting on another show that does not contain upsetting reminders. If a picture of a loved one makes you feel very sad, then consider putting the picture in a place where you can see it when you want to, but where you won't be running into it all the time when you are not prepared to deal with the feelings that it will bring up.
- 5) **Breathing Retraining.** Survivors often find it helpful to concentrate on their breathing. Use your breathing retraining in the moment when you are reminded.

6) **Self-Talk.** Survivors often find it helpful to talk to themselves, either aloud or in their minds.

- Of course I'm reacting strongly—this is reminding me of a terrible experience. It's understandable why I am feeling upset, especially because it happened not so long ago.
- I can get through this. I can tolerate this.
- This, too, shall pass.
- Think of what in the situation is reminding you of what happened, and then think of at least three ways in which it is different from the traumatic event (e.g., different time and date, different setting, etc.).

Remind yourself that, when you are upset by a reminder, it is important not to do anything rash. Don't make big decisions, don't do things you normally wouldn't do that will put you at risk or lead to negative consequences (like use drugs). During the reminder situation, be careful about making important decisions, be aware of becoming irritable with others, and refrain from risky behaviors or use of alcohol or drugs.

After the Reminder: The goal is to focus on calming down. Some ideas for doing so include:

- 1) **Self-Talk:** Use self-talk to reassure yourself that the reminder is over and that you are OK.
- 2) **Distraction through positive activities.** Exercise, play a game, watch TV, or listen to music. It can help to get back on schedule, doing what you normally do, like studying, doing your chores, school or work, etc.
- 3) **Socially connect.** Get some social support, like spending time with family, talking with a friend, or talking over how you feel. It can be helpful to explain the reminder to the people around you and why you behaved the way you did. This can help them to learn how to be more sensitive and supportive.
- 4) **Relax.** Use relaxation exercises, like deep breathing.
- 5) **Pat yourself on the back.** Remember that traumatic experiences and losses, and the trauma and loss reminders that remind us of them, are very difficult to live through. Give yourself the credit you deserve for getting through it.

SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

Symptoms of depression are common after a disaster. In the previous section on common reactions to disaster we discussed the fact that it is common to experience sadness, but at times sadness may become very severe or long lasting. You may feel down, depressed, or blue for several weeks. You may lose interest or pleasure in activities you used to enjoy. You may experience weight loss or weight gain, or a large change in appetite in one direction or the other. You may find that you cannot fall asleep or that you sleep too much. Some people report physical agitation or jitteriness, while others report feeling slowed down. You may find that you have trouble concentrating or making decisions. It is also common for people experiencing depression to report feelings of worthlessness or guilt. The most severe and dangerous symptom of depression involves recurrent thoughts of death, or thoughts or plans regarding suicide. If you are having suicidal thoughts, even if you have no intention of acting on them, it is critical that you discuss this with your doctor or therapist so that you can develop a safety plan to use in case your suicidal thinking increases to a dangerous level.

How Can I Improve My Mood?

- Try doing more pleasant and and/or meaningful activities even if you don't feel like it.
- The Cognitive Restructuring (CR) skills you will be taught in this program will help you to change many of the thoughts that are adding to your depression, and should lead to a decrease in symptoms over time.
- Reduce stress by eating healthy foods, exercising, and getting enough sleep.
- Do something nice for yourself. This might include activities that you would not usually do such as taking a bath, taking time (even 10 minutes) for yourself, or watching your favorite show.
- Use positive self-talk, such as “this feeling won't last forever,” or “It's okay that I am still feeling bad, I am doing everything I can to feel better.”
- Don't judge yourself for having negative feelings. Don't judge the negative feelings themselves. Judging yourself and your feelings tends to make the negative feelings worse.
- Try this “feeling” exercise: Be an observer of your own feelings, watching the painful feelings flow through you, as though they are water flowing through a stream.
- Try this “thought” exercise: Be an observer of your thoughts. As each thought comes up, try placing it on a cloud and allowing the cloud to float away.

SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY

Anxiety and fear are also very common reactions in the aftermath of disaster. Anxiety can take many forms, including excessive worry, physical tension, panic, and fear. Some symptoms of anxiety also overlap with other psychological problems we've discussed, such as difficulty concentrating and difficulty sleeping.

Everyone worries sometimes, and at low levels our worry can provide us with motivation to get things done or to make changes in our lives. Like so many of the symptoms discussed in this intervention, worry becomes a problem when it is excessive and feels out of control. You may have muscle tension and fatigue, difficulty thinking clearly or making decisions, and irritability. Individuals who tend to worry a lot often have trouble falling asleep, because they cannot "turn the worry off."

For some individuals, the anxiety and fear reach peaks, called panic attacks. Panic attacks can involve any of the following: shortness of breath or feelings of being smothered, heart palpitations or a racing or pounding heart, chest pain or discomfort, stomachache, trembling or shaking, sweating, dizziness, unsteadiness, lightheadedness or faintness, hot or cold flashes, nausea or abdominal distress, feelings of unreality or detachment, numbness or tingling, fears of dying, and fears of going crazy or losing control. If you experience panic attacks, it is important for you to understand that although these symptoms are uncomfortable, they are not harmful.

Another type of anxiety that can be caused by disasters or other traumas is phobias. Phobias simply refer to intense fears caused by a specific object or situation. You may have heard of people who have extreme fears of heights or of flying. When these fears get so strong that they cause intense anxiety and get in the way of normal functioning they are called phobias. For example, some people who experienced the coronavirus may be afraid getting sick even if it isn't the virus.

How can I reduce my level of anxiety?

- The breathing technique you will be taught in the next session will help you deal with your symptoms of anxiety.
- The Cognitive Restructuring (CR) skills you will be taught in this program will help you to change many of the thoughts that are adding to your anxiety, and should lead to a decrease in symptoms over time.
- Reduce stress by eating healthy foods, exercising, and getting enough sleep.
- Do something nice for yourself. This might include activities that you would not usually do such as taking a bath, taking time (even 10 minutes) for yourself, getting a massage, or going for a walk.

- Don't judge yourself for having negative feelings. Don't judge the negative feelings themselves. Judging yourself and your feelings tends to make the negative feelings worse.
- Try this "feeling" exercise: Be an observer of your own feelings, watching the painful feelings flow through you, as though they are water flowing through a stream.
- Try this "thought" exercise: Be an observer of your thoughts. As each thought arises, try placing it on a cloud and allowing the cloud to float away.

DRUG AND ALCOHOL PROBLEMS

In the aftermath of a disaster, some people increase their use of alcohol or other substances. While there is nothing wrong with responsible drinking, if your use of alcohol or drugs changed as a result of the disaster, it may be a sign of problems. Some people use drugs or alcohol more because they are trying to avoid thinking about what happened or take away the strong negative feelings like anxiety, sadness, guilt, or anger. Even though using drugs and alcohol can help you escape in the short run, they can actually make these feelings worse in the long run. This boomerang effect is also true for people who use alcohol or drugs to help with sleep problems, which are common after a disaster. Although they may seem helpful with sleep at first, substances can interfere with your body's ability to sleep well, which typically results in even more sleep problems.

For people with a history of alcohol or drug problems, experiencing a disaster can result in strong urges to use again or relapse. You may find that although you were once able to control your drinking or drug use, you have greater difficulty doing so since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. For the same reasons described above, people may use again to try to reduce the negative reactions to the disaster, but the long-term effect is typically negative.

How can I resolve my drug and alcohol problems?

Pay close attention to any change in your use of alcohol and/or drugs. Consider tracking your drug and alcohol use by writing it down. This will help you to accurately measure how often you are relying on drugs and alcohol, and determine the extent of any problems.

- Use all prescription and over-the-counter medications as indicated. Consult your doctor with questions about these medications and their interactions.
- Reduce stress by eating healthy foods, exercising, and getting enough sleep.
- Utilize coping skills and other strategies you will learn in this intervention to cope with strong emotions instead of relying on drugs and/or alcohol.
- Utilize your social supports – friends, family, romantic relationships.
- Utilize community resources such as AA, Rational Recovery or SMART Recovery, if needed.
- If you believe you have a serious problem with substance abuse, talk to your therapist about it. If appropriate, he or she may be able to help you locate specialized substance abuse counseling.

The coronavirus pandemic may have resulted in the death of spouses or partners, children, parents, close friends, and coworkers. If you lost a loved one, you may feel as though your entire world has been turned upside down. Losing someone, whether they are a loved one or an acquaintance, requires a period of adjustment. The amount of time it takes you to grieve varies depending on circumstances of the death, the nature of the relationship, and your own personal characteristics and needs.

While grief is not the same for everyone, there are a number of similarities among people grieving after a disaster. In the beginning you may spend a lot of time thinking about the person who died, longing and searching for him or her. It is not unusual to spend time imagining what it was like for the victim during their last moments or imagining ways in which they could have avoided getting sick from the coronavirus.

You are likely to experience strong feelings of sadness and loneliness. Fear and anxiety are also common, especially as related to the helplessness many experience. It can be even more difficult when feelings of resentment and anger occur. These angry feelings often lead to feelings of guilt. You may start to feel as if you're going crazy or are unable to cope with the loss, even though experiencing any or all of these emotions following the loss of a friend or family member is perfectly normal.

As you start to transition into life without the friend or family member, the intensity of grief typically subsides. In this phase, you start to accept the death and take comfort in positive memories. You recognize that in spite of the loss, you can maintain a sense of connection to the person who died. As you start to re-engage in activities and relationships, you may experience guilt over doing so as if this is a betrayal of the person who died. This guilt is also a normal part of the grieving process that typically subsides as you continue to cope with the loss.

How can I cope with my feelings of grief?

- Try to acknowledge your feelings of loss, rather than avoiding or dismissing them. This might include talking about your loss with a trusted individual. Discussion might include talking about your feelings, as well as discussion of the circumstances of your loss.
- Try to address any feelings of guilt you may have about moving on with your life in the absence of your loved one. Consider what your loved one would say if you could share your feelings with them. What would other people say who knew you both?

SLEEP PROBLEMS/NIGHTMARES

People who experience a disaster often report sleep problems. Common problems include difficulty falling asleep and waking up frequently during the night. These problems may be related to fear and anxiety, which can make your thoughts race and impair your ability to fall asleep. The increased physical arousal that accompanies anxiety adds to this difficulty. Another common sleep difficulty is waking up too early in the morning and being unable to return to sleep or just not feeling rested in the morning. These problems appear to be related to depression. Sleeping too long or too often is another sleep problem people sometimes experience after a disaster. This can also be related to feelings of sadness and depression, as well as to attempts to avoid thinking about what happened. Sleep problems can be exacerbated by the use of alcohol or drugs in response to a traumatic event.

In addition to having difficulty sleeping, some people have nightmares after a traumatic event such as a disaster. Nightmares typically involve memories of the disaster and/or other related frightening themes. When people awoken from nightmares, they typically report feelings of alertness, fear and anxiety, as well as physical symptoms such as a racing heart, labored breathing, and sweating. These emotional and bodily reactions then make it difficult for you to return to sleep and may make you fearful of sleep altogether.

How Can I Improve My Sleep Quantity And Quality?

- Do not use alcohol or other drugs, as they can impair your ability to stay asleep.
- Limit substances that contain caffeine such as soda, coffee, some over-the-counter medications, especially after 12pm
- Try to set a regular sleep/wake schedule. It is especially important that you get out of bed at roughly the same time of morning each day. Don't get in bed until you are tired. Also, although you may feel the need, try not to take naps. They can further disrupt your sleep-wake cycle.
- Make your sleeping area as free from distractions as possible. Try not to do anything in bed that might provoke anxiety (e.g. don't watch the evening news in bed before you go to sleep). The idea is to associate your bed with relaxation and sleep, rather than anxiety and worry.
- If you haven't fallen asleep after 30 minutes, get out of bed and do something relaxing until you feel tired enough to go to sleep. Try going back to bed at that point. Limit lying in bed tossing and turning – again, the idea is to try to associate the bed with restful sleep and not with anxiety and worry. It's better to get out of bed and try returning once you are fatigued. (we know this is difficult!)
- Try to develop a relaxing bedtime ritual that is consistent each night that will be a cue for your body that you are winding down for sleep. Consider a light nighttime snack (free of caffeine) to prevent hunger from waking you during the night.
- Avoid arousing activities (such as exercise) for at least 2-3 hours prior to going to sleep.

IMPAIRMENTS IN DAILY FUNCTIONING

In addition to the emotional reactions people have after a disaster, many people experience problems in their daily functioning.

Relationship Difficulties

It is very common for survivors of disasters to have trouble with their relationships. Symptoms like anxiety, depression, guilt, and anger can have a negative impact on relationships. These emotions can get in the way of feeling close to others, especially if you feel that no one understands you. You may withdraw from others or not participate in activities that involve other people. Your loved ones also may be giving you the message that you should “get on with life,” and you may not be ready to do so. Separations and divorces may occur as a result of increased tension and arguments.

All of these experiences can be complicated by the presence of children, as you may find it difficult to experience loving feelings in the aftermath of a disaster, and you may be overwhelmed by the stress of parenthood. A perceived lack of support from others can add to all of these stresses. You may find that the people you love the most and expect to be the most supportive are not. They may have difficulty hearing about your traumatic experience, or they may be struggling with their own reactions to the disaster. It is important to get support for what you are going through, even though it may be difficult to find people who can give you this support or hard to let yourself accept the support being offered. This is one of the reasons it can be useful to speak with a counselor. You will experience additional burdens if a spouse or partner died as a result of the coronavirus. This is not only because of the intense grief that you likely experienced but also because of having to take on new roles in your family.

Work and Financial Difficulties

Reactions to a disaster can also have a strong impact on work functioning and job satisfaction. You may find that you have become disinterested in your work. You or a supervisor may be dissatisfied with your performance. You may have lost your job and/or started disability. All of these and related issues would understandably increase the already heightened stress you are experiencing in the wake of a disaster.

Many people have difficulty fulfilling their work obligations after a disaster because of mental health problems like anxiety and depression. This can come in the form of missing days of work, calling in sick more often, being late on specific deadlines, as well as other problems with disorganization or impaired concentration. Some people eventually lose their jobs either because of these problems or because of company lay offs related to a disaster. This job loss can then create a financial burden. You may experience other financial burdens if your spouse or partner died in the disaster or lost a job because of it. This may place more pressure on you to earn money for the family or to return to work if you weren't working before the disaster. In a large-scale disaster, work and finances may be even more unstable because of the impact on the

country's or region's economic status. In addition, work relationships may become problematic because of everyone's increased stress.

Health Problems

In the aftermath of a disaster, many people experience physical health problems. Some people who recovered from the coronavirus may have exacerbations in pre-existing health problems or may now be experiencing new health problems. Also related to physical health are issues of weight control and healthy eating. You may find that your appetite changed after the disaster, either increasing and feeling out of control or decreasing to the point that you're not eating enough to stay healthy. Clearly these problems with physical health have an impact of your mental health and day-to-day functioning.

How Can I Improve My Daily Functioning?

- Follow your doctor's recommendations for remaining health problems.
- Get enough sleep at night, as this is extremely important in your physical and emotional health. Most people need about eight hours of sleep per night, but you must find what your own body needs.
- Eat regular, well-balanced meals and monitor connections between your eating patterns and your emotional state. Healthy eating is important for your physical and emotional health.
- Engage in regular physical exercise to improve your physical health and emotional well being.
- Engage in activities that are comforting or soothing to you, such as spending time with loved ones, engaging in a favorite hobby, or relaxing in a warm bath. These activities increase your sense of pleasure and can also decrease your physical tension.
- Maintain a daily routine. In the aftermath of a sudden, unexpected disaster, you need to have some sense of stability and keeping a regular routine can help with this.

SESSION 1

PRACTICE EXERCISES

We know that practice between sessions makes this program more successful. Try and find a quiet time each day to review what was taught and practice the new skills. With practice, your postdisaster reactions can be significantly reduced.

This week you learned about postdisaster reactions and began to identify your specific symptoms. It is important to be able to identify these reactions because then you will know when to apply the skills that you will be learning.

Suggested practice for this week includes:

- Read Session 1. See if you can identify which of the reactions you are experiencing.
- When you identify reactions that you are having, see if you can identify some of your more specific symptoms. For example, if you identify that you avoid places that remind you of the disaster see if you can make a list of all the places you avoid. Or, if you find that you are not as happy as before, see if you can identify the situations that are making you sad. You may want to write these symptoms in the margins of your workbook.
- For symptoms that you are experiencing try following the suggested tips at the end of the symptom descriptions.

SESSION 2
COPING WITH DISASTER SYMPTOMS

Now that you are aware of the symptoms of postdisaster distress, the next step is to teach you some skills for managing that distress when it occurs. Although cognitive restructuring will be the main skill you learn, it takes time to be able to apply the skill in the moment to reduce your distress. The skills you will learn in this session are quick to learn and easy to apply. You will learn:

- Breathing retraining to reduce your anxiety
- Activity scheduling to increase the joy in your life and decrease depressed feelings
- Positive coping strategies

BREATHING RETRAINING

Breathing retraining is another skill you can use to manage symptoms of anxiety. Most of us realize that our breathing affects the way that we feel. For example, when you are upset, you may think of taking a deep breath to calm down. Or, when you are anxious, you may breathe in quick, shallow breaths. Very often, when people become frightened or upset, they feel like they need more air, and they may hyperventilate (overbreathe) in response to that feeling. Taking a deep breath or breathing quickly often does not help. In fact, hyperventilation *causes* anxious feelings. Unless you are preparing for a really dangerous situation, you often don't need as much air as you take in. When you hyperventilate and take in more air, it signals your body to prepare for danger. If you feel anxious and want to calm down, you need to slow down your breathing and take in *less* air. **You should take a normal breath and exhale slowly.** It is *exhaling* that is associated with relaxation, not *inhaling*.

Breathing fast and taking deep breaths are common responses to stress and anxiety. Such habits can be hard to break. Learning to control your breathing takes daily practice. You will find it helpful to first practice at times when you are not anxious. Later, when you have learned breathing awareness and control, you will find it helpful in more stressful situations.

- Increase awareness of your breathing patterns
- Slow down your breathing
- Practice using breathing exercises to decrease your anxiety

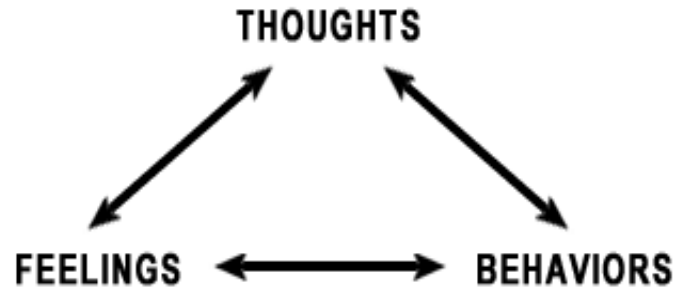
Breathing Instructions

1. Take a normal breath in through your nose with your mouth closed.
2. Exhale slowly through your nose or mouth.
3. When exhaling say the word **CALM** or **RELAX** to yourself (or some other word that you find soothing) very slowly, for example:

“c-a-a-a-a-a-l-m” or “r-e-e-e-e-l-a-a-a-x”
4. Count slowly to four and then take the next inhalation.
5. Practice this exercise several times a day, taking 10 to 15 breaths at each practice.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLEASANT AND MEANINGFUL ACTIVITIES

After experiencing a traumatic event, it can be very difficult to get back in the habit of having fun. But we know that feeling depressed occurs when people have more negative experiences in their life than positive ones. Our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are all related, so if you don't do enjoyable things, then you will have negative thoughts and you will feel bad.



When too many serious problems are happening, it's hard to remember to take time for yourself. Sometimes we feel we don't have any more energy. But taking the time to engage in pleasant and meaningful activities is important. It's really important to fight against the urge to "veg out" or turn to other negative coping habits. It may take some time, and it may not even feel fun at first, but if you stop doing rewarding activities then you will continue to feel bad, and if you feel bad you won't want to engage in rewarding activities. Reversing the downward spiral takes extra effort.

Another thing that can make us feel bad is failing to be productive or engage in meaningful activities. There are some activities that aren't fun but are important such as housework like laundry or paying the bills; going to work; or taking care of ourselves. Failing to engage in these activities can also have a big impact mood.

Making pleasant and meaningful activities a part of your daily lifestyle is an important first step toward healing. Handout 7 contains a list of activities that people sometimes enjoy. Please identify at least five different activities that you will commit to doing before the next session. This list is intended only as a way to give you ideas about things that you might enjoy. You do not need to stick to the items on the list. Handout 8 contains a list of personally meaningful life areas you may want to focus on.

ACTIVITIES LIST

The following list contains a list of many activities to choose from. Feel free to either select activities from the list, or add your own ideas.

1. Doing yoga
2. Dressing up for fun
3. Giving money to religious, charitable, or other groups
4. Talking about sports
5. Taking tests when well prepared
6. Playing baseball or softball
7. Buying things for myself
8. Doing artwork (painting, sculpture, drawing, movie-making, etc)
9. Reading the Scriptures or other sacred works
10. Taking part in military activities
11. Rearranging or redecorating my room or house
12. Reading a “How to Do It” book or article
13. Reading stories, novels, poems, or plays
14. Watching lectures or hearing speakers online
15. Driving skillfully
16. Breathing clean air
17. Thinking up or arranging a song or music
18. Meditating
19. Reading a book
20. Saying something clearly
21. Pleasing a friend or family member
22. Restoring antiques, finishing furniture, etc.
23. Watching TV
24. Doing positive self-talk
25. Working in politics
26. Working on machines (cars, bikes, motorcycles, tractors, etc.)
27. Thinking about something good in the future
28. Playing cards
29. Completing a difficult task
30. Laughing
31. Solving a problem, puzzle, crossword, etc.
32. Shaving
33. Taking a shower
34. Woodworking, carpentry
35. Writing short stories, novels, plays, or poetry
36. Being with animals
37. Having a frank and open conversation
38. Singing in a group
39. Working on my job
40. Attending a zoom party
41. Going to church functions online
42. Speaking a foreign language
43. Going to services, civic, or social club meetings online
44. Going to a business meeting or a convention online
45. Playing a musical instrument
46. Making snacks
47. Being helped
48. Wearing informal clothes
49. Combing or brushing my hair
50. Acting
51. Taking a nap
52. Being with friends
53. Canning, freezing, making preserves, etc.
54. Making art
55. Solving a personal problem
56. Taking a bath
57. Singing to myself
58. Making food or crafts to sell or give away
59. Being with my grandchildren online
60. Playing chess or checkers
61. Doing craft work (pottery, jewelry, leather, beads, weaving etc.)
62. Putting on makeup, fixing my hair, etc.
63. Designing or drafting

64. Cheering, rooting
65. Watching wild animals
66. Having an original idea
67. Gardening, landscaping, or doing yard work
68. Reading essays or technical, academic, or professional literature
69. Wearing new clothes
70. Dancing
71. Sitting in the sun
72. Riding a motorcycle
73. Just sitting and thinking
74. Seeing good things happen to my family or friends
75. Talking about philosophy or religion
76. Planning or organizing something
77. Listening to the sounds of nature
78. Having a lively talk
79. Listening to the radio
80. Introducing people I think would like each other
81. Giving gifts
82. Watching the sky, clouds, or a storm
83. Buying something for my family
84. Photography
85. Giving a speech or lecture
86. Reading maps
87. Gathering natural objects (wild foods or fruit, rocks, driftwood, etc.)
88. Working on my finances
89. Wearing clean clothes
90. Helping someone
91. Getting a job advancement (being promoted, given a raise, or offered a better job; getting accepted to a better school, etc.)
92. Hearing jokes
93. Winning a bet
94. Talking about my children or grandchildren
95. Talking about my health
96. Seeing beautiful scenery
97. Eating good meals
98. Improving my health (having my teeth fixed, getting new glasses, beginning an exercise program, changing my diet, etc.)
99. Playing in a musical group
100. Going virtually to a museum or exhibit
101. Writing papers, essays, articles, reports, memos, etc.
102. Doing a job well
103. Having spare time
104. Fishing
105. Lending something
106. Pleasing employers, teachers, etc.
107. Counseling someone
108. Exercising
109. Learning to do something new
110. Complimenting or praising someone
111. Thinking about people I like
112. Being with my parents
113. Talking on the telephone
114. Having daydreams
115. Kicking leaves, sand, pebbles, etc.
116. Seeing famous people
117. Watching movies
118. Kissing
119. Being alone
120. Budgeting my time
121. Cooking meals
122. Being praised by people I admire
123. Feeling the presence of the Lord in my life
124. Doing a project in my own way
125. Doing "odd jobs" around the house
126. Crying
127. Being told I am needed
128. Washing my hair
129. Coaching someone
130. Seeing or smelling a flower or plant
131. Receiving honors (civic, military, etc.)
132. Using cologne, perfume, or aftershave
133. Having someone agree with me
134. Reminiscing, talking about old times
135. Getting up early in the morning
136. Having peace and quiet
137. Doing experiments or other scientific work
138. Writing in a diary
139. Playing football
140. Being counseled

141. Saying prayers
142. Doing favors for people
143. Talking with people on the job or in class
144. Being relaxed
145. Being asked for help or advice
146. Thinking about other people's problems
147. Playing board games (Monopoly, Scrabble, etc.)
148. Sleeping soundly at night
149. Doing heavy outdoor work (cutting or chopping wood, clearing land, farm work, etc.)
150. Reading the newspaper
151. Being in a body-awareness, sensitivity, therapy
152. Dreaming at night
153. Playing ping-pong
154. Brushing my teeth
155. Swimming
156. Running, jogging, or doing gymnastics, fitness, or field exercises
157. Walking barefoot
158. Playing Frisbee or catch
159. Doing housework or laundry; cleaning things
160. Being with my roommate
161. Listening to music
162. Arguing a point
163. Knitting, crocheting, embroidery, or fancy needlework
164. Amusing people
165. Being with someone I love
166. Reading magazines
167. Sleeping late
168. Starting a new project
169. Playing soccer, rugby, hockey, lacrosse, etc.
170. Preparing a new or special food
171. Bird watching
172. Watching people
173. Building or watching a fire
174. Winning an argument
175. Selling or trading something
176. Finishing a project or task
177. Confessing or apologizing
178. Repairing things
179. Working with others as a team
180. Bicycling
181. Giving direction to others
182. Being with happy people
183. Playing party games
184. Writing letters, cards, or notes
185. Talking about politics or public affairs
186. Asking for help or advice
187. Talking about my hobby or special interest
188. Smiling at people
189. Playing in sand, a stream, the grass, etc.
190. Talking about other people
191. Being with my husband, wife, or partner
192. Having people show interest in what I have said
193. Expressing my love to someone
194. Caring for houseplants
195. Having coffee, tea, etc., with friends
196. Taking a walk
197. Collecting things
198. Playing handball, paddleball, squash, etc.
199. Sewing
200. Remembering a departed friend or loved one, visiting the cemetery
201. Doing things with children
202. Being complimented or told I have done well
203. Being told I am loved
204. Eating snacks
205. Staying up late
206. Having family members or friends do something that makes me proud of them
207. Being with my children
208. Thinking about an interesting question
209. Doing volunteer work
210. Receiving money
211. Defending or protecting someone; stopping fraud or abuse
212. Hearing a good sermon
213. Winning a competition
214. Making a new friend
215. Talking about my job or school

216. Reading cartoons, comic strips, or comic books
 217. Borrowing something
 218. Teaching someone
 219. Using my strength
 220. Playing with pets
 221. Looking at the stars or moon
 222. Being coached
 223. Eating a favorite food
 224. Cooking a healthy meal
 225. Sitting in a peaceful place
 226. Listening to educational tapes, relaxation tapes, or audio books
 227. Taking a long weekend
 228. Playing a video or computer game
 229. Surfing the internet
 230. Listening to music
 231. Gardening
- Other ideas:
232. _____
 233. _____
 234. _____
 235. _____

PERSONALLY MEANINGFUL LIFE AREAS

In selecting activities to engage in, it can be helpful to consider personally meaningful life areas. In addition to scheduling pleasant activities, take some time to review the list of life areas and consider which areas might benefit from increased attention. If there is a life area that you feel you need to work on, consider selecting an activity that would help with that area. A few suggestions are provided.

Family relationships: How are things with your children, parents, or other relatives?

- Read to your son or daughter at night
- Call your parents
- Tell your family member you love them
- Other: _____

Social relationships : How are things with your friends?

- Invite a friend to a video call
- Call a friend
- Other: _____

Intimate relationships: How are things with your partner?

- Say I love you
- Spend quality time together
- Hold hands
- Other: _____

Education/training: What are your educational goals?

- Register for an online class
- Study more
- Learn about other educational opportunities
- Other: _____

Employment/career: What are your career goals?

- Ask your boss to work on a specific project
- Set a goal at work
- Post your resume online
- Other: _____

Hobbies/recreation: What hobbies would pleasant you enjoy?

- See activities list (Handout 7)

Volunteer work/charity/political activity: Are there meaningful ways you want to contribute to society?

- Volunteer for your church or school
- Make calls for a political candidate
- Help someone
- Other: _____

Physical/health issues: Are you as healthy as you would like to be?

- Cook a healthy meal
- Take an online exercise class
- Other: _____

Spirituality: Do you feel spiritually connected?

- Read a religious book
- Pray
- Practice meditation
- Other: _____

Personal Care: Do you feel like you are taking good care of yourself?

- Clean your house
- Take a shower
- Pay the bills
- Other: _____

ACTIVITIES LOG

Each week complete one Activity Log. At the beginning of the week, fill in your 5 or more planned activities and the date planned. After you have accomplished the activity rate how enjoyable and Important it was as well as any observations.

Activity: Week # __	Date Planned	How Enjoyable? 0= not at all 10 = the most	How Important? 0= not at all 10 = the most	Observations
Call my parents	Monday night			Didn't do it
Go for a walk	Wednesday lunch	7	8	Made the work day go by faster

COPING STRATEGIES

Below are useful strategies for coping with difficult emotions. Although you have probably used several of these strategies at various times in your life, you may not have really thought about them as “coping skills” or specific strategies. We have written them out here because some people find it helpful to have a written reminder of coping skills when they are feeling distressed. Often, people forget to use these strategies at times when they need them the most. You will find that certain strategies work better for you than others. We encourage you to experiment with all of them to see what works best for you.

- Breathing Retraining** The breathing exercise described in the workbook is a quick way to reduce anxiety. Remember to practice it often when you are *not* anxious. Then, when you are anxious, it will quickly reduce your anxiety to a more manageable level so that you can cope more easily.
- Schedule Activities** Remember that one way to feel better is to engage in more positive activities. Identify some things that you find enjoyable and then schedule them into your day. Although being active and engaged is often the *last* thing you want to do if you are feeling depressed, it is actually a very effective way to combat a depressed mood.
- Talk to Someone** Sometimes it can be useful to talk through upsetting thoughts and feelings with a trusted friend. At times, when you are distressed, you may decide to spend time talking with a friend about *other* topics, in an effort to get your mind off of the distressing thoughts and feelings for a time.
- Challenge Your Thinking** Once you have learned cognitive restructuring (CR), you can try challenging your thinking to see if your upsetting feelings are triggered by inaccurate thoughts. If so, develop an alternative thought and action plans.
- Positive Coping Statements** Sometimes saying things in a different way can help you feel better. Try and tell yourself positive things instead of negative, hopeless things. Remind yourself that you can get through the

situation and that you are learning new skills for dealing with upsetting situations. Remember that the feelings will pass with time. No feeling is final.

Exercise/Nutrition/Sleep

One way to feel better is to take better care of yourself. Sleep, diet, and exercise are some of the first areas to suffer when people are under stress. Try eating better and getting regular exercise. If sleep is a problem for you, review the Sleep Problems/Nightmares section to learn about specific changes that may improve your sleep quality.

Spirituality

If you have a spiritual or religious practice, drawing on these beliefs, traditions, and practices may prove useful in times of stress.

Distraction

This is a coping strategy that can be useful *in moderation*. It can also be useful for situations in which it is not appropriate or possible to fully experience or express your emotions (such as when you are in a business meeting, a class, etc.). Although distraction is a useful coping strategy, you should be sure that you are not relying on distraction to avoid your painful emotions *all* of the time. Distraction might include a scheduled event or something more unplanned such as calling someone on the phone to chat, going for a walk, going shopping, etc.

SESSION 2

PRACTICE EXERCISES

We know that practice between sessions makes this program more successful. Try and find a quiet time each day to review what was taught and practice the new skills. With practice, your postdisaster reactions can be significantly reduced.

This week you learned about postdisaster reactions and began to identify your specific symptoms. It is important to be able to identify these reactions because then you will know when to apply the skills that you will be learning.

Suggested practice for this week includes:

- Read Session 2.
- Practice breathing retraining once a day. It is best to begin practicing breathing on a regular basis when you are not distressed. Once it becomes more automatic, you will be able to use it in distressing situations as well. You may want to actually schedule in a regular time to practice the breathing retraining for just a few minutes every day.
- Read through the list of activities. Identify 5 activities that you will do this week. Then, schedule them into the calendar that is provided.

SESSION 3

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

Now that you are aware of the reactions you are having and have learned some basic skills for coping with your distress, it is time to begin to explore the relationship between thoughts and feelings. We will focus on four basic feelings: fear and anxiety, sadness, guilt and shame, and anger. Most people know when they are upset and what they are feeling, but it can be more difficult to know what thought is connected to each feeling. You will learn that certain thoughts are related to each of these feelings. For example, fear is usually driven by the thought that you are in danger. You will then learn to identify your own specific upsetting feelings and figure out the thoughts that are related to them.

UNDERSTANDING COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING

Cognitive restructuring or “CR” is a skill that you can learn to help challenge upsetting thoughts that may not be accurate and replace them with more adaptive and helpful thoughts. By changing problematic thoughts, our feelings can often change.

Thoughts and Feelings are Connected

Our upsetting feelings are usually linked to our thoughts. So, what we think when something happens determines, in large part, what we feel. Take the example of a friend walking past you on the street who does not say hello. If you think, “my friend must not like me anymore,” you would likely feel hurt. But if you thought, “my friend must really have a lot on his mind” you probably would feel okay. This is an example of how different thoughts can lead to very different feelings - even though you may not be fully aware of the thought you are having at the time. We call these kinds of thoughts automatic thoughts.

Life Experiences Shape Thoughts

So, what makes people think the way they do? Why might two people look at the same situation very differently? One important reason why each person thinks the way he or she does is personal life experiences. People's experiences shape their thoughts and beliefs about themselves and the world including upsetting life experiences. People who have lived through traumas may develop thoughts and beliefs that might have been accurate at one point in time but are not accurate over the long term. Like a child who was abused feeling that the world isn't safe or a person surviving a bad car accident thinking it's unsafe to drive at all. Changing inaccurate beliefs that come from traumatic experiences can lead to relief from anxiety, depression, and other PTSD symptoms.

GUIDE TO THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

Feeling	Ask Yourself	Related Thoughts
Fear or anxiety	What bad thing do I expect to happen?	<p>Thoughts that something bad will happen:</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am going to be attacked or hurt • Something terrible is going to happen • I am going to be rejected or abandoned • I am going to lose control or go crazy
Sadness	<p>What have I lost hope in?</p> <p>What is missing in me or my life?</p>	<p>Thoughts of loss:</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am worthless • I don't have anyone I can depend on • Nothing will ever get better
Guilt or shame	<p>What bad thing have I done?</p> <p>What is wrong with me?</p>	<p>Thoughts of having done something wrong:</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am inadequate • I am to blame for what happened to me • I am a bad person • I am a failure
Anger	What is unfair about this situation?	<p>Thoughts of being treated unfairly:</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am being treated unfairly • I am being taken advantage of • This situation is unfair or unjust.

MY CORONAVIRUS THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

Use this worksheet to help you figure out your Coronavirus related thoughts and feelings. See if you can come up with at least one thought for each of the four feelings.

Feeling	Ask Yourself	Coronavirus Related Thought
Fear or anxiety	What bad thing do I expect to happen?	1. 2.
Sadness	What have I lost hope in? What is missing in me or my life?	1. 2.
Guilt or shame	What bad thing have I done? What is wrong with me?	1. 2.
Anger	What is unfair about this situation?	1. 2.

UPSETTING SITUATIONS LOG

Upsetting Situation	Feeling	Thought
<i>Ex. 1: Partner late for dinner</i>	<i>Fear</i>	<i>"I thought my partner was in a terrible car accident"</i>
<i>Ex. 2: I hear a loud noise outside my window at night</i>	<i>Anger</i>	<i>"I am being treated unfairly"</i>
	<i>Fear</i>	<i>"Someone is trying to get inside my house to hurt me."</i>

UPSETTING SITUATIONS LOG

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<i>Ex. 2: I hear a loud noise outside my window at night</i>	<i>Fear</i>	<i>"Someone is trying to get inside my house to hurt me."</i>

SESSION 3

PRACTICE EXERCISES

We know that practice between sessions makes this program more successful. Try and find a quiet time each day to review what was taught and practice the new skills. With practice, your postdisaster reactions can be significantly reduced.

This week you learned about ways to cope with postdisaster reactions.

Practice for this week includes:

- Read Session 3
- Continue to:
 - Practice breathing retraining once a day. It is best to begin practicing breathing on a regular basis when you are not distressed. Once it becomes more automatic, you will be able to use it in distressing situations as well. You may want to actually schedule in a regular time to practice the breathing retraining for just a few minutes every day.
 - Identify 5 activities that you will do this week. Then, schedule them into the calendar that is provided.
- Using the Upsetting Situations Log, record at least one upsetting situation, feeling, and thought each day. Pay close attention to upsetting situations that you think may be related to the coronavirus pandemic.

SESSION 4

CHANGING PROBLEMATIC THOUGHTS

In the last session you learned that thoughts and feelings are connected. Over the past week you have been trying to recognize when you are upset, identify the upsetting feeling, and then identify the thought related to that feeling. This week you will learn how to examine your thoughts, judge the accuracy of the thoughts, and then change those thoughts when needed. Learning how to examine and challenge the thoughts and beliefs that lead to your negative feelings is an important tool that will help you deal with your feelings and process your life experiences.

PROBLEMATIC THINKING STYLES

Problematic Thinking Styles are thinking patterns people often have in reaction to everyday events. If you can identify a problematic thinking style, it is very likely that your thought may not be accurate. Listed below are some of the most common problematic thinking styles and some suggestions for what to do if you are using one of these styles of thinking. Don't worry if some of the thinking styles seem similar. There is some overlap. Just try and pick out the ones that seem the most like you.

All-or-Nothing Thinking

You see the world in all or none terms. Things are either black or white, instead of gray.

- “No one can be trusted” vs. “Some people can't be trusted.”
- “The world is completely unsafe” vs. “Some places are less safe than others.”

If you think this way, try to find the gray area.

Overgeneralization

You believe that because something happened once it will happen again and again.

- “The next virus that happens will be just as bad as the coronavirus.”
- “Bad things have *always* happened to me, and they *always* will.”

If you think this way, try to come up with an example that does not fit the pattern.

“Must,” “Should” or “Never” Statements

These are unwritten rules or expectations for how you behave that are based on myths rather than facts. They are standards that you feel you must or should live up to.

- “I must stop thinking about the pandemic.”
- “I should be able to handle this.”
- “I should have known something like this would happen.”
- “I will never feel better.”

If you think this way, try to be flexible with the rules.

Catastrophizing

You expect the worst to happen. Many times they are triggered by “what if” thoughts.

- “What if I die the next time a virus strikes?”
- “I’m sure I’ll lose my job and we will be broke and homeless.”
- “The noise outside my window is someone to break in and harm me and my family.”

If you think this way, try to change the pattern by asking yourself what is the most likely result if the event were to occur, rather than the worst result.

Emotional Reasoning

This happens when what you feel controls what you think. Feelings are important, but your feelings can play tricks on you. In fact, if you are anxious most of the time, your feelings are almost certainly sending you the wrong message.

- “I feel sad, so things must be hopeless.
- “I feel panic; the world must be dangerous.”
- “I feel ashamed, so I must be a bad person.”
- “I feel guilty, so I must have done something wrong.”
- “I feel afraid, so I must be in danger.”

If you think this way, ask yourself if there are ever times when your emotions are misleading or not to be trusted.

Overestimation of Risk

This occurs when you assess risk to higher than it is in reality. This way of thinking can lead to feeling a lot of anxiety.

- “I’m not going to take a walk even if I maintain social distancing because I will likely get the virus.”
- “I need to move my family out of the state to keep them safe.”
- “I’m not going to drive because I might get into a car accident.”

If you think this way, try to figure out the true risk that the event will happen.

Self-blame

This style of thinking involves blaming yourself when bad things happen. People who blame themselves take responsibility for things that they often had little or no control over.

- “It’s my fault that I was abused.”
- “If I had social distanced sooner none of this would have happened.”
- “A better parent would have protected their children from all this.”

If you think this way, ask yourself if there is anyone else who might have some responsibility.

Adapted from Burns, D.D. (1989). *The feeling good handbook*. Penguin Books, New York.

Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Do any of these problematic thinking styles sound like you?
2. Can you think of an example of when you used one of these thinking styles?
3. When you are using one of these thinking styles, how does it make you feel?
4. Can you change your thinking using the suggestions above?

5 STEPS OF COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING (CR)

Now that you are able to identify the thoughts that are causing you distress. The next step is to learn how to judge the accuracy of those thoughts and then how to change them when needed with thoughts that are more helpful. We have developed a 5-step method for evaluating and changing your thinking called the 5 Steps of Cognitive Restructuring (CR). We think the best way to work through the 5 steps is on paper and we have included CR worksheets for you to use. However, some people prefer to do the steps in their head.

STEP 1: THE SITUATION

In Step 1, you write down the upsetting situation. The situation might be an actual event, such as watching a story about the coronavirus on the news, or going to the grocery store, or it could be a memory of an event such as thinking about the virus. In either case just write one sentence.

STEP 2: THE FEELING

In Step 2 you want to figure out what feelings you are having in the situation. Sometimes you may have more than one feeling in a situation, but we want you to focus on the strongest and most upsetting feeling. We find it easiest to focus on four primary feelings:

- fear and anxiety
- sadness
- guilt and shame
- anger

Pick one of these four feelings and work through all 5 steps with this feeling. If you have more than one strong feeling about a given situation, complete a CR on the first feeling and then a second CR on the next feeling.

STEP 3: THE THOUGHT

In Step 3 you want to figure out what you are thinking in the situation. Remember, thoughts lead to feelings; so in order to deal with upsetting emotions, you need to understand more about what you're thinking in different situations.

If you know what you are feeling, but are unsure of what your upsetting thought is, there are ways to help you figure it out. Remember, there are certain types of thoughts that are associated with certain types of feelings.

If you feel **fear and anxiety**, ask yourself “what bad thing do I expect to happen?”

If you feel **sad**, ask yourself “what have I lost hope in? What is missing in my life or in me?”

If you feel **guilt or shame**, ask yourself “What bad thing have I done? What is wrong with me?”

If you feel **anger**, ask yourself “what is unfair about this situation?”

Usually the answers to these questions will help you come up with a thought to examine. So, if you feel sad when watching a TV show about the coronavirus pandemic you may have lost hope for the future and be thinking “things will never get better.” If you feel angry when you get a letter from your mortgage company saying you owe money you may think, “It’s not fair. The government should be helping more.”

Thoughts should be as specific as possible. Very broad or general thoughts can be harder to challenge. Thus, the thought “I’ll never find a job” is easier to challenge than “things will never get better. And that thought, “It’s unfair that my housing is going to end” is easier to challenge than “life is unfair.” If you find that you keep getting stuck with very general thoughts that you can’t challenge, ask your therapist for help with this.

After coming up with the thought, see if you can figure out if it fits with one of the problematic thinking styles. Remember, if you can, it is likely that the thought is not accurate and can be modified or changed. In the case of watching the news story on the coronavirus pandemic, the person might be using all or none thinking by thinking that things will never get better. Things are either bad or good.

For more help on identifying thoughts and feelings refer back the Guide for Thoughts and Feelings.

STEP 4: CHALLENGE THE THOUGHT

In Step 4 you want to come up with as many facts as you can for and against your thought. There is a reason you think the things you do. What are they? In the example above, why do you think that things will never get better? Begin by writing down the anything that feels like it lends support to the thought. Then try and come up with facts against the thought. You will find this is much harder. If it were easy, you would not have the thought in the first place. If you are having trouble coming up with facts against the thought, here are some questions to ask yourself. Not all of these questions will apply for each thought.

1. Is there any other way of looking at the situation?
2. Is there any other explanation?
3. How would someone else think about the situation?
4. Am I using all or none thinking? Is there a middle ground?
5. Are my thoughts based on how I felt rather than what I did?
6. Am I expecting more of myself than I do of other people?

7. Am I overestimating how much control and responsibility I have in this situation?
8. What is the most realistic thing that would happen if my thought came true?
9. Do I have other ways of handling the problem?
10. Am I over estimating the risk involved?
11. What are the advantages of holding on to this belief?
12. What are the disadvantages of holding on to this belief?

In the case of watching the news story about the coronavirus pandemic and feelings like things will never get better, support for the thought might include:

- Coronavirus pandemic was the worst virus ever
- I lost my home
- I have no job

Facts against the thought might include:

- I have a place to live right now
- People are helping me look for new housing
- People are helping me look for a job
- Things are better now than they were in the first week
- I have someone to talk to about how I am feeling

STEP 5: MAKING A DECISION

Step 5 involves making a decision. Once you've come up with facts for and against your thought, it's time to decide whether the facts support or don't support your thought. Consider all the available facts and decide if the thought or belief is accurate or not. Ask yourself if you could convince another person that your belief is true.

If the evidence <u>doesn't</u> support your thinking: Develop a new, more accurate or helpful thought to replace your old thought.

If the evidence <u>does</u> support your thinking: Develop an action plan for dealing with the upsetting situation.
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In this example of the person who watched the news story about the coronavirus pandemic, the facts DO NOT support the thought that things will never get better. There are lots of facts that suggest that things are getting better, even though it may not feel that way yet. So, the person can now change or modify that thought to one that is more accurate and less distressing. For example, the new thought might be "Even though I still feel sad, things are slowly improving."

If the evidence had supported the thought, then you would need to develop an action plan. An action plan is a plan for how to handle the situation. If the person's life was really not getting better, then they would need a plan for dealing with that. For example, they might find out if there are any other places where they could get help. Maybe the action plan would have been to seek out a friend or relative to talk to for support. Another possible, but more extreme option, would be to consider moving to a place where it might be easier to find housing and a decent-paying job.

In some situations, coming up with a new thought and coming up with an action plan are both needed. That is, even though the thought is not supported by the evidence, the situation might still be helped with an action plan. For example, in the case of the news story about the coronavirus pandemic, even though the thought that things will never get better is not supported by the facts, there may still be things the person can do to feel better. An action plan might involve doing something nice for oneself, calling places the person has called before to see about any new job openings, or thinking about looking for a different kind of job.

THE ACTION PLAN

There are two situations in which you would use an action plan. We will review both below. The first is when you decide that the thought is supported by the facts. The second is what to do about the situation when your thought is not supported by the evidence and you still feel upset.

YOUR THOUGHT IS SUPPORTED BY THE FACTS

You evaluate your upsetting thought and decide it is true. In this case, you need to develop a plan for coping with the upsetting thought or situation. Almost always you will want to use coping skills such as breathing retraining to manage the distress. However, you also will want to put a plan in place for handling the upsetting situation. For example, maybe you are afraid because you hear about people getting sick from the virus on the news. Over the next few days it becomes clear that the virus will likely increase in an area near your home. You use the 5 Steps of CR and decide that your thought “It’s not safe to stay in my house” is true. In this case you want to use your coping skills, calm yourself down, and then develop a plan for how to cope with the situation. You may want to brainstorm all possible solutions and then pick the one that you think makes the most sense. In this case, you may want to make sure you have enough food to stay in your home, increase your social support systems and self-care activities.

YOUR THOUGHT IS NOT SUPPORTED BY THE FACTS, BUT YOU STILL FEEL UPSET

You evaluate your thought and decide it is not accurate. In this case, you come up with a new, more balanced thought. Nevertheless, you find that you are still upset. You could develop an action plan to help you manage your anxiety. As above, you may first want to consider using your coping skills such as the breathing retraining. You could also write the new thought on a card and include some of the evidence against your thought as well. Then every time you think the old thought, you could remind yourself of why it is not accurate and replace it with the new one. But you may also want to do something to help challenge your fears. If you get stuck, ask your therapist for help developing an action plan to face your fear.

SESSION 4 – PRACTICE EXERCISES

We know that practice between sessions makes this program more successful. Try and find a quiet time each day to review what was taught and practice the new skills. With practice, your postdisaster reactions can be significantly reduced.

This week you learned how to examine and challenge thoughts and beliefs that lead to your negative feelings.

Practice for this week includes:

- Read Session Review – Session 4.
- Continue to:
 - Practice breathing retraining once a day. It is best to begin practicing breathing on a regular basis when you are not distressed. Once it becomes more automatic, you will be able to use it in distressing situations as well. You may want to actually schedule in a regular time to practice the breathing retraining for just a few minutes every day.
 - Identify 5 activities that you will do this week. Then, schedule them into the calendar that is provided.
- Identify one upsetting situation each day that is related to the coronavirus pandemic. Complete a CR sheet for each situation. If you cannot come up with a coronavirus related situation or thought, it is okay to do the CR on another upsetting situation. When you review with your therapist you may find that the situation is more related to the coronavirus pandemic that you initially thought. You may find that it is difficult at first to come up with evidence against your thoughts. Just do your best. You and your therapist will review the CR sheets in your next session. The CR sheets are found at the back of your handbook starting on page 53.

SESSIONS 5-9

PRACTICING COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING

Now that you have learned the 5 steps of CR you have a new way to judge your thoughts and change them if necessary. With practice you will be able to use CR in the moment and without the help of the worksheet. Included in this section are tips as well as other strategies to try if the 5 steps aren't working.

PRACTICING CR

Last week you learned the 5 steps of CR. You and your therapist should have reviewed your CR sheets and problem solved around any issues that may have come up. This week the goal is to keep practicing.

USING CR IN THE MOMENT

Once you feel that you have the basic knack of CR, try doing a couple of CR sheets when you are actually going through an upsetting event. The goal is for you to be able to use the CR in the moment, rather than realizing later that you were in a situation in which you could have used your CR. If you cannot complete the form right then, try to complete the CR sheet as soon afterward as possible.

USING CR TO CHALLENGE DISASTER THOUGHTS

In addition to trying to do CR “in the moment” try and complete a few CRs related to your coronavirus pandemic experience. We know that many people try and avoid thinking about their traumas. This avoidance can get in the way of challenging some of the strongest and most troublesome beliefs. For example, a child sexual abuse survivor may feel worthless. So, she would want to make sure that she challenges that thought whenever it comes up. This thought might come up in a variety of situations such as when a boss corrects work, in an argument with a spouse, when a child is not listening, or more directly when reminded of the sexual abuse. If you have trouble identifying which thoughts are related to your trauma, make sure to discuss with your therapist.

USING CR WITHOUT THE WORKSHEETS

A final step in learning CR is to be able to work through the 5 steps without the help of the worksheet. Obviously, the skill is less useful if you have to have the sheets with you. Once you feel that you understand the 5 steps, see if you can work them in your head. You may even find that, over time, you are able to skip some steps and move from upsetting thought to new thought.

IDENTIFYING DISASTER RELATED THOUGHTS

Since this program is designed for people who have postdisaster distress, it is important that at least some of the thoughts that get challenged are related to the coronavirus pandemic. For some people it may be easier to identify disaster related thoughts than for others. For example, if your primary feeling is fear and the thought is that another virus will hit, then whenever you feel afraid of another virus you should do a CR on what triggered that fear.

For other people, it may be more difficult to know if a thought is coronavirus-related. For example, if your main reaction to the virus was anger, you may find that there are lots of situations that trigger your anger that may not be related to the virus. You might get angry at family members, co-workers, or even strangers. While you could do a CR to each of these upsetting situations, it would be better to challenge the coronavirus related thought that is making you angry.

Here are a few questions that you can ask yourself to help identify coronavirus related thoughts:

1. In the past week, did you find yourself thinking a lot about the coronavirus pandemic? What triggered these thoughts?
2. Do you find that you are often reminded about what happened? What reminds you of the coronavirus pandemic?
3. Have you been very afraid, sad, guilty, or angry in the past week? What triggers these feelings?
4. Have you felt keyed up or on guard? What situations cause these feelings?
5. Do you avoid any people, places, or situations that remind you of the virus? What are they? What are you thinking in these situations?
6. Have you had any postdisaster symptoms over the past week? What are they?

WHEN THE 5 STEPS AREN'T WORKING

For the past 2 to 3 weeks you have been practicing CR. You have worked to use it in the moment and to address coronavirus related as well as other upsetting thoughts. For some people, CR just seems to click and they find that they do it in their heads without having to write it down. This is what we want to happen as it is not very practical to carry around your workbooks all the time! You should continue to use CR with a specific focus on challenging beliefs that are specific to your coronavirus experience(s). For others, the 5 steps may seem to long and difficult. If you are one of those people who get lost in the 5 steps here are a few other suggestions.

THE PROBLEMATIC THINKING STYLES

One option is to go back to using the Problematic Thinking Styles. This is a good option if there were one or two thinking patterns that you felt you could really relate to. In this case, all you have to do is “catch yourself” using one of the thinking styles and then try and come up with a more accurate thought. For example, say you know that you are someone who tends to catastrophize or expect the worst. If you can catch yourself when you are doing this, you can try and think of a more balanced thought.

MULTIPLE ALTERNATIVE THOUGHTS

A second option is to come up with as many new thoughts as you can to a situation. Ask yourself, is there any other way to look at this situation? What would someone else think? See if you can come up with 3 or 4 possibilities. By coming up with new thoughts you can teach yourself that there is more than one way of understanding the situation.

2 STEP CR

A third option is to try and go from thought to new thought and skip coming up with facts for and against. In some cases it is obvious that the original thought is not true and they just need to work on coming up with a new, more accurate thought.

PAYOFF MATRIX

A fourth option to the 5 steps is the payoff matrix. The payoff matrix is most useful when you are aware that there are some advantages of holding onto a certain thought. For example, it is often the case that people feel justified in their anger and therefore don't want to let it go. However, the anger may be getting in the way of moving on in their lives and it may be important to work through it. In this case it can be useful to complete the payoff matrix (see Payoff Matrix below).

PAYOFF MATRIX

	Keep the Thought	Change the Thought
	In what ways does <i>holding on</i> to your thought or belief make your life seem more manageable, safer, or easier to handle? Does the thought or belief provide you with a sense of control, security, or predictability?	How could <i>changing</i> your thought or belief improve your life? Consider whether changing your thought or belief would reduce negative feelings and free you up from concerns about past events.
Advantages (Pros)		
	In what ways does <i>holding on</i> to your thought or belief make your life more difficult? Consider the effects of the thought or belief on negative feelings that prevent you from doing things you would like to do.	What are the possible disadvantages or costs of <i>changing</i> your thought or belief? Would changing the thought or belief lead to your feeling less control, security, or predictability?
Disadvantages (Cons)		

SESSIONS 5-9

PRACTICE EXERCISES

We know that practice between sessions makes this program more successful. Try and find a quiet time each day to review what was taught and practice the new skills. With practice, your postdisaster reactions can be significantly reduced.

This week you learned how to examine and challenge thoughts and beliefs that lead to your negative feelings.

Practice for this week includes:

- Read Session 5-11.
- Continue to:
 - Practice breathing retraining once a day. It is best to begin practicing breathing on a regular basis when you are not distressed. Once it becomes more automatic, you will be able to use it in distressing situations as well. You may want to actually schedule in a regular time to practice the breathing retraining for just a few minutes every day.
 - Identify 5 activities that you will do this week. Then, schedule them into the calendar that is provided.
- Identify one upsetting situation each day that is related to the coronavirus pandemic. Complete a CR sheet to each situation. You and your therapist will review the CR sheets in your next session. The CR sheets are found at the back of your handbook starting on page 53. At first it is important to make sure you complete the sheets. That way you and your therapist can review your work and identify any areas where you may be having difficulty. After a few weeks, you may find that you no longer need the CR sheets because you are challenging the thoughts in your head. In this case you may just want to make a note of the thoughts you challenge so you can remember to share them with your therapist.

SESSION 10 (OR LAST SESSION)

PROGRESS REVIEW AND PLAN

You have worked hard to learn new skills to reduce your postdisaster distress. It can be useful to review your progress and identify plans for coping with situations that you may still find difficult. For some people, their postdisaster reactions may be almost gone, for others they may be present but manageable with the skills they have learned, and for still others they may still be experiencing significant symptoms.

REVIEW AND PLAN

Think about how you were feeling at the beginning of the program. What were your postdisaster reactions? How have they changed over the course of the program? Do you see any improvements? Are there any situations, thoughts, or feelings that are still difficult (or could be difficult for you in the future)? Develop a plan ahead of time for these situations.

USE YOUR WORKBOOK

Another tool you have to help you cope with upsetting situations in the future is your workbook. In this workbook you have worked through some of the most common and difficult thoughts that you have. If you get into an upsetting situation in the future, it is likely that it will be similar to a situation you have worked through in the past. Review passed CR sheets to help you cope with similar situations.

OBTAIN SOCIAL SUPPORT

If you are still experiencing symptoms, consider asking for social support from a friend or loved one. Immediately after a disaster, social support and good will is often high. However, over time social support naturally decreases as people who were not involved in the disaster tend to forget about the impact it may have had on survivors. If you are still having difficulty, try connecting with an old friend or a family member. Consider sharing the workbook with them so that they can better understand what you are experiencing. Another possibility is that you try to re-establish old friendships or make new ones. Remember, when you are engaging in activities you will feel happier.

OBTAIN A REFERRAL

A final piece of your plan may involve obtaining a referral for longer term therapy. If you don't feel that you have made enough progress in this program, then you should ask your therapist for a referral for a more specific therapy. This program is intended to be an intermediate step between crisis counseling and formal mental health treatment. It is expected that some people may need more specific therapy for a given problem. Your therapist can help you evaluate your progress and make a referral if necessary.

THE 5 STEPS OF COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING

1. SITUATION

Write down a brief description of the situation. _____

2. FEELING

Circle strongest feeling (if more than one, use a separate sheet for each):

Fear/Anxiety Sadness/Depression Guilt/Shame Anger

3. THOUGHT

What thought is leading me to feel this way? Use the Guide to Thoughts and Feelings handout to identify the thought that is most strongly related to the feeling circled above.

Thought: _____

Does a Problematic Thinking Style apply? Circle below.

All-or-Nothing Overgeneralizing Must/Should/Never
Catastrophizing Emotional Reasoning Overestimation of Risk
Self-Blame

5. MAKE-A-DECISION

Next, ask yourself, “Do things mostly support my thought or do things mostly NOT support my thought?”

NO, the facts do *not* support my thought.

If the facts do NOT support your thought, come up with a new thought that is supported by the facts. These thoughts are usually more balanced and helpful. Write your new, more helpful thought in the space below.

New Thought

In some cases, even if you decide that the facts do not support your thought (or only somewhat supports it) you may also want to come up with an action plan. This is to help you cope with upsetting feelings that arise even though you have come up with a more balanced thought. For example, you may decide to use your breathing in the situation, have a friend accompany you to a feared situation, or develop a plan for confronting feared or avoided situations. If you have an action plan for this situation, write it down below.

Action Plan:

YES, the facts *do* support my thought.

If the facts DO support your thought, decide what you need to do next in order to deal with the situation. Ask yourself, “Do I need to get more information about what to do?” “Do I need to get some help?” “Do I need to take steps to make sure I am safe?” Write down your action plan for dealing with the upsetting situation.

Action Plan:

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Action Plan:

YES, the facts *do* support my thought.

If the facts DO support your thought, decide what you need to do next in order to deal with the situation. Ask yourself, “Do I need to get more information about what to do?” “Do I need to get some help?” “Do I need to take steps to make sure I am safe?” Write down your action plan for dealing with the upsetting situation.

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Action Plan:

YES, the facts *do* support my thought.

If the facts DO support your thought, decide what you need to do next in order to deal with the situation. Ask yourself, “Do I need to get more information about what to do?” “Do I need to get some help?” “Do I need to take steps to make sure I am safe?” Write down your action plan for dealing with the upsetting situation.

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