

## Coronavirus COVID-19: the role of psychologists in Europe

Guidelines and possible actions for psychologists in Europe related to the Coronavirus.

See: <http://efpa.eu/covid-19>

Brussels, March 16, 2020

The Coronavirus or COVID- 19 is now a major public health issue across Europe.

EFPA, as the European umbrella organisation for psychologists, would like to share with you some guidelines and possible actions for psychologists in its member associations.

- **Provision of first line psychological support**

As psychologists we see our first priority in using our psychological knowledge to assist in communicating correctly about the virus to avoid unnecessary anxiety and to support people who are affected by the virus. Therefore, some useful tips on how to look at communication about the virus and tips in Psychological First Aid are provided below.

1. **Respond to the local situation:** As the situation is very different from country to country, please adjust to your country's specific situation. We therefore encourage our member associations to get into contact with their local health authorities and promote their official assessment and guidelines.
2. **Get the facts:** assist people in making sure they are getting the right facts. Governments are providing objective information about the virus in your country through websites to which you can refer. The European Centre for Disease Prevention (ECDC) and control has a special website on the Coronavirus which gives regular updates: [Covid 19](#)
3. **Communicate with children:** discuss the news coverage of the coronavirus with honest and age – appropriate information. Parents can also help allay distress by focusing children on routines and schedules. Remember that children will observe parents behaviors and emotions for cues on how to manage their own feelings during time.
4. **Keep (safely) connected:** Maintaining social networks can foster a sense of normality and provide valuable outlets for sharing feelings and relieving stress. Encourage people to share useful information on governmental websites with friends and family. In case of quarantine, people can still maintain contact from a distance.
5. **Coping with quarantine:** Prof. Atle Dyregrov, former member of our SC on Crisis, Trauma and Disaster psychology wrote a text that provides very useful information on supporting people who have [to deal with a quarantine situation](#). The Lancet published an interesting review on the [psychological impact of quarantine](#) and how to reduce it.
6. **Support people to seek additional help:** Individuals who feel an overwhelming nervousness, a lingering sadness, or other prolonged reactions that adversely affect their job performance or interpersonal relationships should consult with a trained and experienced mental health professional.
7. **Promote safety:** people can enhance safety by following guidelines on personal protection, environmental countermeasures, social distancing countermeasures and travel – related countermeasures as explained by the ECDC: [Guidelines on non – pharmaceutical countermeasures](#)

Most of these guidelines have been modified by your local health authorities. We would again encourage you to get into contact with them and use these guidelines to support the general population.

WHO has also issued similar and useful guidelines '[The COVID-19 Risk Communication Package for Healthcare Facilities](#)'.



- **Guidance for provision of online consultations as an added value during a period of social distancing of quarantine:** <http://www.efpa.eu/covid-19/provision-of-online-consultation>

Online consultations, particularly via video chat, provide a feasible, online alternative to deliver psychological care and therapy. Most psychologists still prefer face-to-face contact with their clients or patients who seek help or support.

However, to safeguard not only your own health, but also that of those seeking your assistance and the society as a whole, alternatives should be explored as much as possible. Research shows that effectiveness of such teleconsultations are slightly less optimal, yet often manage to obtain similar effects to conventional care.

Some essential points we wish to highlight for short-term implementation are dealt with on [EFPA's website](#).

Guidelines for ethical and effective practice have already been in place for quite some time (e.g. from EFPA <http://ethics.efpa.eu/download/91e1fdcfb3e0879e15620d2decdbd590/> and the American Psychological Association - <https://www.apa.org/practice/guidelines/telepsychology> ).

Discuss the option with your client (preferable over the phone), explaining the rationale and emphasising the importance of relying on online consultations for now. Ideally, only do this with clients or patients with whom you have already met face-to-face, so you know how to optimally intervene in the real world as well, in case of any emergencies, e.g. risks for self-harm or suicide.

1. Make sure both you and your client are in a private space and cannot be disturbed.
2. Assure sufficient time for technical troubleshooting.
3. Rely on professional videoconferencing tools tailored for teleconsultation. Do not rely on programs like Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, Skype or Telegram. In case of any doubt, contact your member association or national authority for suitable tools (e.g., Skype for Business is allowed in Norway, Zoom in Sweden), or consult relevant regulations.
4. Do not make use of a public computer, log off after a session and keep your operating system and/or apps up to date.
5. In case you notice a security breach on your computer, inform your patients, inform the police and seek help from an IT security professional.

- **Keep informed: EFPA website, NewsMag and Workplace**

We will update EFPA's website as soon as we get new information or guidelines that are relevant for psychologists. We will also inform you about [how other MA's deal with the crisis](#) \_ this is an ongoing project and the page is being updated day by day.

For further information or contact with our groups we will create a **Workplace group 'COVID-19 – questions and answers'** where you can ask your question. All EFPA members and groups will have access to the group and will be able to ask questions, start a discussion and get a reply from one of our experts, but we ask you to be patient, most of the colleagues work now from home and are dealing with logistic and organizational issues (installing e-learning, universities and schools are closed, in some countries all restaurants, non-food shops, pubs are (partly) closed, children at home, ....etc..)

On behalf of the Executive council of EFPA

Best regards,

Christoph Steinebach  
EFPA President