

A Message from the MHPG and ASRM on Coping During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The MHPG joins ASRM in recognizing that the COVID-19 pandemic is a global threat that will affect all ASRM members. Indeed it will affect every single person on our planet. No one will be untouched. The threat of the virus is compounded by the additional challenges of social isolation, governmental mandates, restrictions on travel, financial collapse, and the contagious nature of anxiety, fear, and panic. In some areas, xenophobia, too, has taken a hold as people struggle to find a reason why this is happening. There are dangers of falling into despair and hopelessness. There are opportunities for the development of resilience and post traumatic growth.

We need understanding and acceptance, we need to pull together, and we need a plan.

As human beings, we all have human flaws, we are all social, we all adapt and adjust to our circumstances, and we all create meaning about our experience. With our personal limitations, we need to be kind to one another and to ourselves. With social distancing, we need to ensure that we stay connected. We need to learn new ways to adapt and adjust to our existence. We need to be careful that the meaning we create is not fueled by fear and prejudice, but by hope, the belief in the goodness of others, in our human capacity to change and grow, and in the profound importance of doing our best to maintain continuity for our personal futures and for our loved ones, as well for our planet.

Hope is essential. In times of great threat, loss, uncertainty, and discontinuity, there is the ever-present danger that we may feel hopeless. At these times, we have to depend on the hope of others. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts, and this is true of people, who need social groups with which to connect for social support. As members of our professional groups, as members of the ASRM, we can and must pull together and gain support from leaning on each other and sharing the load during this plague.

We are not alone. This statement, which has been profoundly helpful and life-sustaining to anyone who has, for example, experienced infertility or sustained the double blow of a cancer diagnosis and the need for immediate and truncated fertility preservation, is also profoundly important in this pandemic. We are not alone. We are social distancing, but we must remain social. We may work remotely, but we must not be remote.

We can survive and thrive. We must and can do more than survive. We can learn how to thrive. We can take this time to learn how to recognize and appreciate the interconnectedness of our lives. We can learn how to prioritize and value what really matters.

Recommendations for Coping

- Understand that this is an unprecedented threat which may overwhelm a person's regular capacity to cope.
- Recognize that the invisibility, uncertainty and social isolation may result in normal and expected feelings of panic, fear, terror, helplessness, hopelessness, loss of control, fears for loved ones, financial concerns, and practical issues such as working from home while homeschooling without childcare.
- Validate and accept how extremely difficult this situation is. You are not alone; we are all in this together. Being proactive and having agency is healthy.
- Reach out for (virtual) social support with individuals and groups.
- Initiate regular video conferences with friends and colleagues for Trivia Night, Book or Movie Club, Quiz Night; Consultation and Check-Ins.
- Reach out to old friends and extended family.
- Limit exposure to news and social media.
- Evaluate whether contacts, such as Facebook groups, are helpful or not.
- Limit your contact with people who upset you (if possible).
- Maintain healthy habits of eating, sleeping, and exercise.
- Learn more about the importance of healthy nutrition.

Exercise--Mental and Physical--is Important

- Jigsaw puzzles, sudoku, and crossword puzzles can be calming
- Add yoga and meditation--utilize apps on your mobile devices for these.

Take Time to Do Something You Enjoy

- Develop a daily structure and routine.
- Learn something new, a language or new skill.
- Go on a virtual tour of a museum.
- Be patient and kind with yourself and others. We are all human and we will all experience being at our best and our worst.
- Practice gratitude--one day at a time, one hour at a time.
- Donate money or donate supplies. Help a neighbor.
- Reach out for professional help and utilize hotlines.
- Volunteer. Altruism and giving to others is healing.
- Affiliate with a group (such as ASRM). It is protective and promotes mental health.
- Laugh. Humor helps.
- Lower your expectations of self and others.
- Avoid unhealthy habits (smoking, alcohol, using substances), etc.
- As humans we are social; we adjust and adapt and we make meaning out of our experience. Try to avoid negative and fearful meaning-making.