

### **Approaches to Managing stress and tension during the Coronavirus pandemic.**

BASIC Ph, developed by Israeli Psychologist Mhudi Lahat, refers to the different “channels” that people use to process and cope with stress. In a sense they are coping mechanisms for dealing with stress, trauma, grief and general psychological upheaval. This short article will briefly describe BASIC Ph, but its key intention is to highlight different activities under each of these channels that parents, carers and teachers can use to support children and adolescents during this time of extreme turbulence and uncertainty. It can also help adults as well.

Individuals react differently to stress, trauma and grief. From this fact, we can conclude that it is useful to offer activities via different the coping channels of each individual. Given the demands of social distancing and self and family isolation, exploring how you and your children manage these singular demands and stresses is an empowering activity. It will also help to develop and foster resilience.

It is not within the scope of this article to provide diagnostic assessment tools to accurately identify you and your child’s main channels(s) of coping, but you may notice that you or they gravitate to on or more category. If this is the case, then these can be developed, and specific activities included into the daily routine.

### **What is BASIC Ph?**

Research into coping responses identified six main channels, all supported by extensive psychological research. An individual may use one specific channel or may use a range of them.

- **Belief and values.** Not only religious beliefs are meant here, but political, social or spiritual feelings of mission (meaning) are also intended, including the need for self-fulfilment and strong "self" expressions
- **Affect:** the use of expressions of emotion: crying, laughter or talking with someone about their experiences; or through non-verbal methods such as drawing, reading or writing
- **Social:** gaining support from belonging to a group, having a task, taking a role and being part of an organisation. Status attached to performing a useful task for the family/school/ community.
- **Imagination:** the use imagination either to manage difficult facts, by day-dreaming, pleasant thoughts, or divert their attention using guided imagery; or to try and imagine additional solutions to the problem that go beyond the facts -improvisation
- **Cognitive:** cognitive strategies include information gathering, problem solving, self-navigation, internal conversation or lists of activities or preference.
- **Physical:** Ph type people are those who mainly react and cope by using physical expressions together with body movement. Their methods for coping with stress are relaxation, desensitisation, physical exercise and activity. Expending energy is an important component in many modes of coping.

One may also observe that these channels can express worry and stress in more or less appropriate ways. It can be helpful to think about how the same underlying need might be focused in a more useful direct. For example, a person may deal with stress through the Ph channel, which currently presents as physical agitation. The task here is to harness this underlying need to engage in physical

activity in a more acceptable way. Using an app to self-challenge the number of press ups one can do in a minute, for example. The same channel is used in a different way, which reduces social and family tension.

The following is a list of activities under each channel. There will be others and you are encouraged to explore and develop these further.

**Belief: I deal with stress and change through my beliefs, values and meaning making**

Explore religious and family belief systems (your grand-parents survived... so we will get through this".)

Discuss how adversity and difficulties like today can make us stronger in time.

How can kindness, altruism and other values be utilised to help others, including other family members?

What can our responses to the crisis come to tell us about ourselves and who we are?

Use beliefs, reasons and facts to facts to convey:

- My family and I are healthy
- It will be okay again. This has happened before, and people survived
- This is a time to strengthen bonds with family and – virtually – friends.
- People/teenagers/children are resilient.

Activities might include writing a journal to explore one's own thinking and beliefs, or exploring what religions, philosophers and other thinkers might have done in such a trying time.

Mediation, mindfulness activities, prayer (especially for others affected as this strengthens empathy), mantras and other practices inline with one's own orientation and beliefs.

**Affect: I deal with stress through my emotions. I laugh, I cry, I emote**

Information to give:

- It is all right to show feelings.
- People's emotions can be different.
- Ask your child to choose symbols for their feelings in order to allow them to describe them in more detail.
- Write poems, draw pictures.
- Listen to music.
- Identify what you need to feel safe again.

**Social: I deal with stress through social interaction with others, especially my friends**

This is difficulty in the present circumstances and activities should be in conformity with Government guidelines on social distancing and social isolation.

However virtual socialising on X-box/PlayStation, WhatsApp, House party will in some measure meet this need.

**Imagination: I deal with stress through imagination and creativity**

- Writing, painting, drawing, singing, music.
- Imagine yourself in a safe space – it may be helpful to use simple forms of guided imagery, for example, that help a person picture a safe or special place, such as a beach, for example.
- Train people to use their imagination to help them feel better – i.e. to move away from imagining negative or upsetting images. "Imagination is like a television – we can learn to change the channel."
- Envisaging what the future will be like after we have learned from this event.
- Songs, plays, novels movies conveying vision of a good future.

**Cognitive: I manage stress by thinking rationally and logically about it.**

- Inform about facts concerning the incident and where to get support.
- Tell children the facts in a way that does not arouse negative emotions.
- Give up-to-date information.
- Dispel rumours
- Inform about common emotional/behavioural reactions at different ages/stages.
- Inform about coping strategies and resilience.
- Tell children that different emotional reactions are common.
- Devise and adhere to routines. Indeed, this is vitally important to ensure good adaptation to the current set of circumstances.

**Physiological: I manage stress through physical exercise and exertion**

- Calming activities including breathing, stretching, relaxation. The calming app Beathe+ (iOS and Android) is a visual breath timer. For calming breathes, a cycle of 5 seconds in and 5 seconds out is optimal. For working with more extreme anxiety a cycle of 7 seconds in and 11 seconds out (or a version of that with an exhalation longer than the inhalation)
- Playing games and sports. This must be taken under advice. Games such as golf and other distance activities may be possible. Running and bicycling are very effective and can be woven into the fabric of the day (e.g., a bike ride at lunch and a run/walk in the evening)
- Sending him or her out on special mission or tasks. These can be timed: "you have 3 minutes to get me a flower/leaf etc – and don't let anyone see you!"
- Organising jobs: activity reduces tension.
- Making things, including food, drinks, objects and so on.
- Ensuring that basic physiological needs are met: enough water, vitamins, vegetables, protein etc.