



COPING WITH COVID: WAYS TO ADJUST TO YOUR NEW NORMAL

**A WEBINAR FOR EMPLOYEES FROM YOUR
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

May 11, 2022

INTRODUCTION



OBJECTIVES

- Describe the aspects and effects of a stressful or traumatic event
- Discuss how the pandemic has uniquely impacted our ability to cope
- Understand why anxiety has become a common side effect of the pandemic
- Suggest strategies for reducing stress and increasing resilience
- Recommend daily practices to cope and restore balance

SECTION 1

THE PANDEMIC

A Collective Traumatic Event

CHARACTERISTICS AND TYPICAL REACTIONS TO TRAUMATIC EVENTS

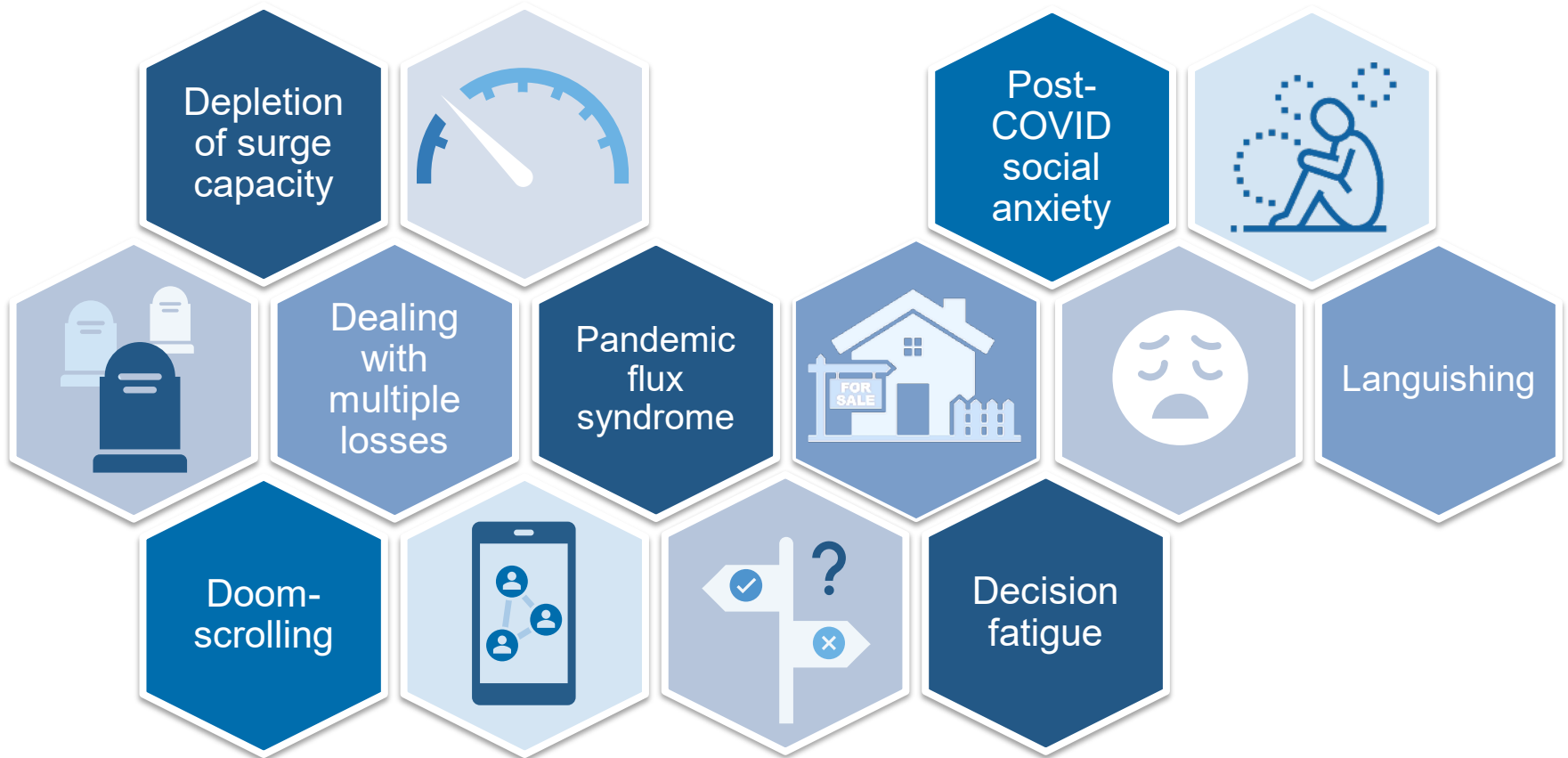
Typical reactions

- Shock, fear, and distress
- A major, involuntary change
- Intense, unanticipated feeling of loss
- Deep uncertainty that challenges our sense of safety and control

Characteristics

- Physical, psychological, and emotional effects
- Foreseeable recovery timelines
 - Multiple stressors and waves of COVID has shaken our timeframe for recovery
- Collective and ongoing effects

PANDEMIC-SPECIFIC REACTIONS



PANDEMIC-SPECIFIC REACTIONS

Depletion of surge capacity

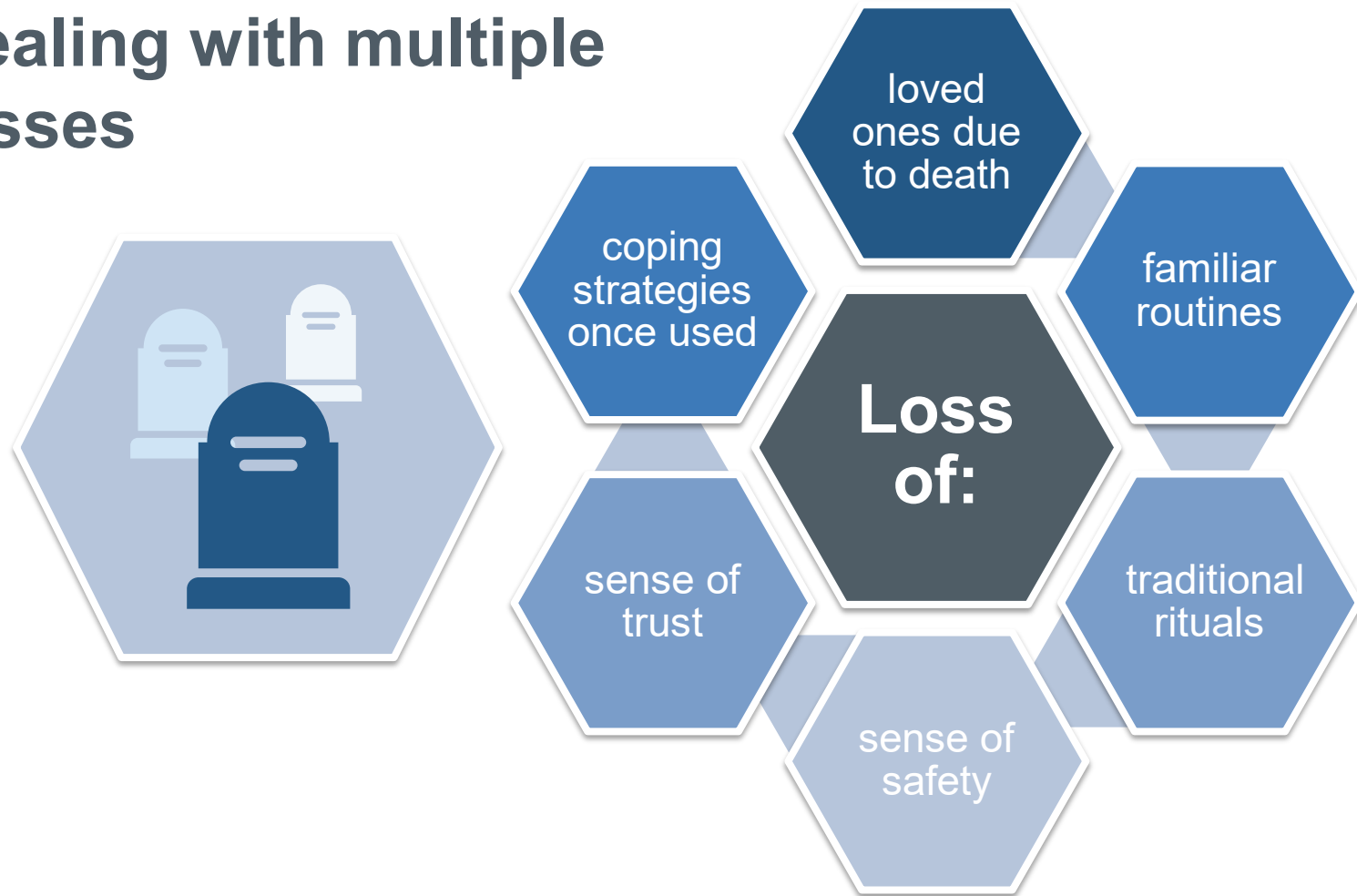


Need time to replenish and renew

Adaptive systems activate in stressful situations

PANDEMIC-SPECIFIC REACTIONS

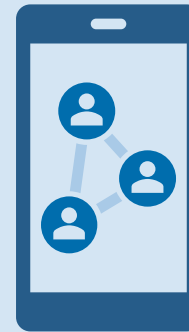
Dealing with multiple losses



PANDEMIC-SPECIFIC REACTIONS

Doomscrolling

Obsessively
checking online
news and
media,
expecting that it
will be negative



PANDEMIC-SPECIFIC REACTIONS

Pandemic Flux Syndrome

(not a clinical term)

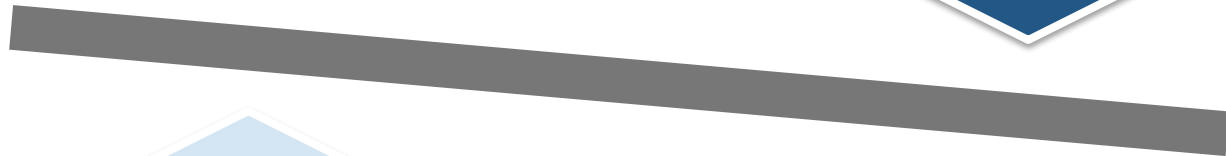


- May include:
 - Urges to make drastic life changes
 - Feelings of whiplash, confusion, and disappointment
- Emerged in August 2021 to describe the emotional impact due to the change in direction of pandemic

PANDEMIC-SPECIFIC REACTIONS

Post-COVID Social Anxiety

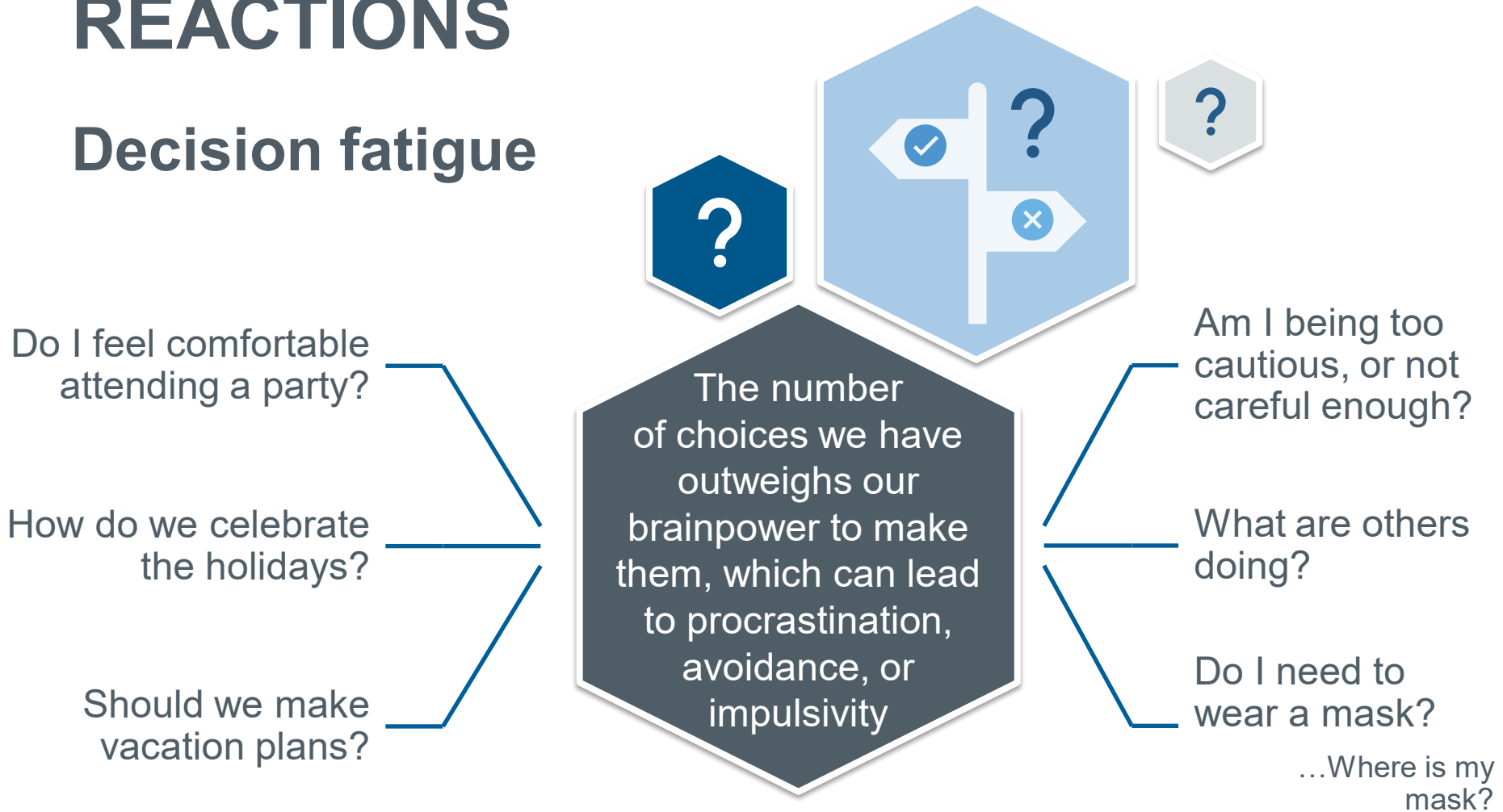
Socializing and reintegrating back to in-person gatherings can lead to



feelings of awkwardness, stress, and anxiety

PANDEMIC-SPECIFIC REACTIONS

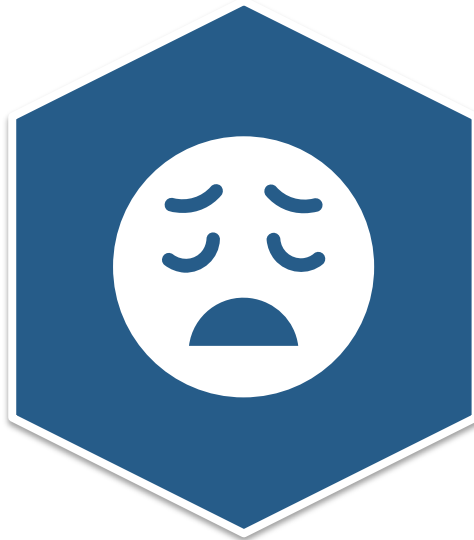
Decision fatigue



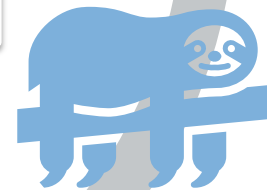
PANDEMIC-SPECIFIC REACTIONS

Languishing

- While it involves a series of emotions like depression, it is different
- Languishing is not a diagnosed mental illness



A sense of feeling stuck and/or unsettled



Having decreased motivation and/or lack of meaning or joy

SECTION 2

ANXIETY AS A PANDEMIC SIDE- EFFECT

DEFINING ANXIETY

Anxiety is:

“Part of your healthy, adaptive alarm system. It alerts you to threats and motivates you to respond.”



“An emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes like increased blood pressure.”

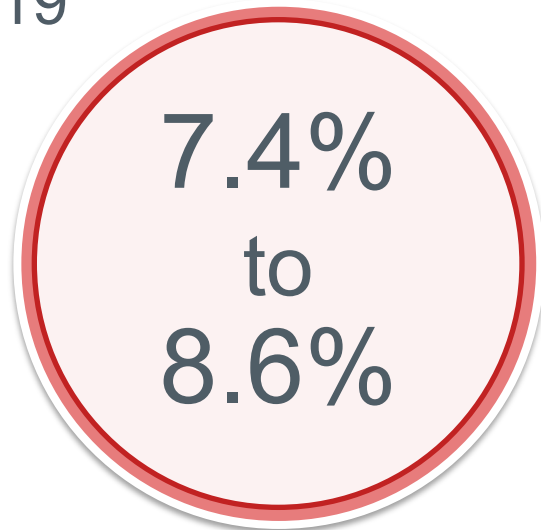
“Fear or nervousness about what might happen.”

“Distress or uneasiness of the mind caused by fear of danger or misfortune.”

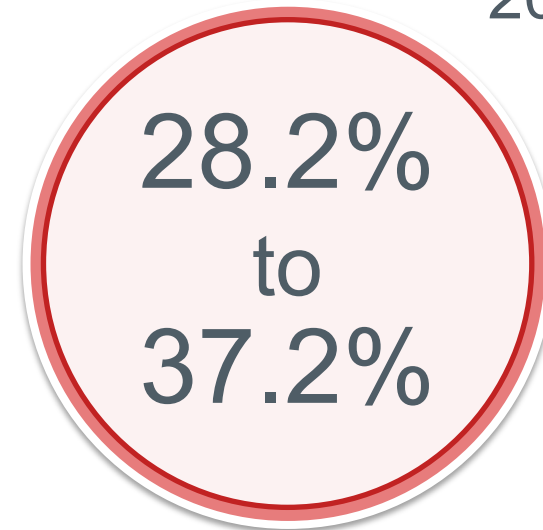
UNDERSTANDING THE RISE IN ANXIETY: STATISTICS

Monthly average of U.S. adults reporting symptoms of anxiety

January – December
2019



April 2020 – August
2021



ANXIETY AND UNCERTAINTY

How anxiety relates to uncertainty



As humans, we are wired with the desire to feel safe, secure, and have a sense of control



Uncertainty can leave us feeling stressed, powerless, and disoriented

Distinguishing between degrees of anxiety

- **A trait** is considered part of someone's personality, or a long-term characteristic or attribute
- **A state** is a temporary condition experienced for a short time
- **A disorder** is a condition lasting 6+ months that disrupts daily life and includes excessive worry and physical symptoms

SECTION 3

RESILIENCE

DEFINING RESILIENCE

Resilience is:

Resilience is the human ability to adapt in the face of tragedy, trauma, adversity, hardship, and ongoing life stressors.

In other words, it's the ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.

THE VALUE OF RESILIENCE DURING A PANDEMIC

Resilience can be built upon and improved – it's the ultimate life hack! It helps us:



Smooth our reactions to the pandemic's various disruptions



Regain our sense of control



Improve our focus and our ability to stay flexible

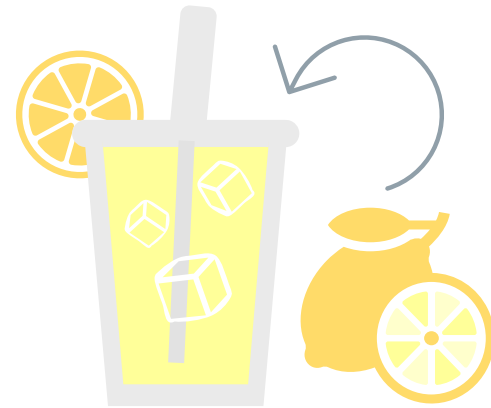


Reduce our fears of new experiences or an uncertain future

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING RESILIENCE

Change your perspective and reframe thoughts

- Acknowledge or define the situation
- Develop self-awareness:
 - Am I seeing the big picture, distorting facts, or making assumptions?
- Cultivate a mindset of realistic optimism, not toxic positivity



STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING RESILIENCE


Take action



STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING RESILIENCE

Maintain relationships and stay connected

We are social creatures:



Eases stress, boosts mood, and lessens feelings of isolation

Feeling like, *"We're in this together"* is invaluable

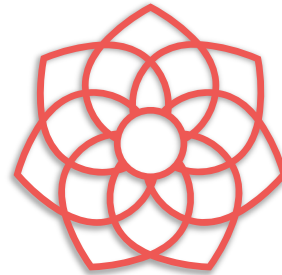
There are friends for a reason, and friends for a season

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING RESILIENCE

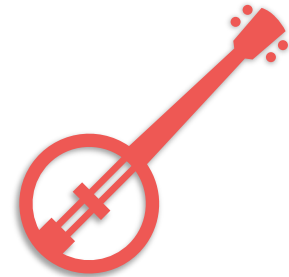
Preserve a sense of purpose and meaning



Help others



Maintain a
spiritual practice



Pursue activities that
are uniquely
meaningful to you

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING RESILIENCE

Invest in self-care

“If you are in a bad mood, go for a walk. If you are still in a bad mood, go for another walk.”

– Hippocrates

Practice daily, not just in challenging times



Exercise and move



Get creative and find 'flow'



Maintain balance and healthy living practices
(Diet, sleep, calming activities)



Learn to recognize when you are stressed

SECTION 4

DAILY HABITS TO REWIRE FOR HAPPINESS

Mindfulness • Gratitude • Laughter

DEFINING MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is:

“Maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment through a gentle nurturing lens.”

“The awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally.”

THE BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS



Increases positive emotions and reduces stress

Improves memory, concentration, and decision making

Enhances relationships and fosters compassion

Shifts from reacting to responding

PRACTICING MINDFULNESS



Through
mindfulness
meditation



Tuning in to bodily
sensations



Awareness of
thoughts



Recognizing
feelings



Focusing on
breathing



While walking,
eating, drinking

DEFINING GRATITUDE



“An emotion that reflects our deep appreciation for what we value, what brings meaning to our lives, and what makes us feel connected to ourselves and others.”



– Brene Brown, 2021

THE BENEFITS OF GRATITUDE



“Gratitude allows us to participate more in life. We notice the positives more and that magnifies the pleasures you get from life. We become greater participants in our lives as opposed to spectators...”

– Robert Emmons, 2010

Increases happiness and life satisfaction, boosts optimism, helps recovery from traumatic events

Strengthens relationships and promotes forgiveness

Health benefits include strengthened immune system and decreased blood pressure

PRACTICING GRATITUDE



Notice and savor
your experiences



Keep a daily
gratitude journal and
write down three
good things



Express
appreciation with
written thank-you
notes

LAUGHTER

“Everybody laughs the same in every language because laughter is a universal connection.”

– Yakov Smirnoff



“The most wasted of all days is one without laughter.”

– Nicholas Chamfort

THE BENEFITS OF LAUGHTER

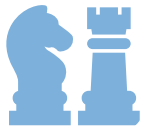


Is laughter really the *best medicine*?
There are numerous physical and
mental health benefits!

Relieves stress, has lasting effects,
and is a gateway for social
connection

Use any time as a coping strategy
during the pandemic and for other
stressful events

ADDING MORE LAUGHTER TO YOUR LIFE



Connect with friends, play games, spend time with pets



Watch comedy

Videos, TV shows, movies, stand-up



Attend laughter yoga or groups



Don't take yourself too seriously; see the absurdity of things

SECTION 5

POSITIVE CHANGES FROM THE PANDEMIC

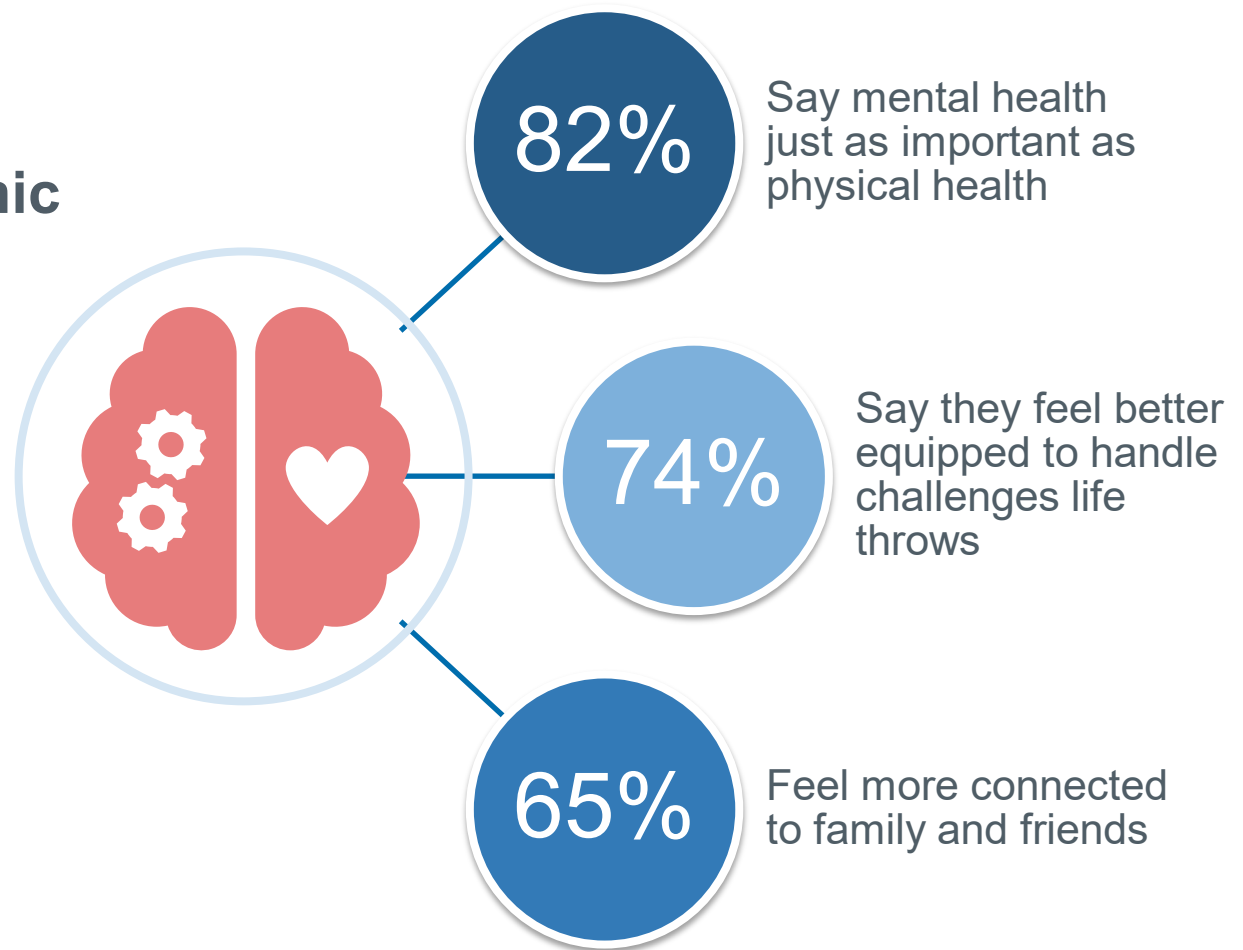
POLL

What are some positive changes that have occurred in your life due to the pandemic?

- Enjoyed more quality time with partner/kids
- Gained more control over time management
- Reevaluated priorities (i.e., what's really important)
- Got more involved in my child's education
- Worked on home projects
- Connected (virtually) more often with friends/loved ones
- Spent more time outdoors
- Other
- Adopted better sleep habits

POSITIVE CHANGES FROM THE PANDEMIC

A 2021 survey by the Cleveland Clinic found increased awareness and acceptance of mental health:



SUMMARY

The pandemic has been a collective, continuously-changing, and traumatic experience that resulted in unique reactions and ways to cope.

The persistent uncertainty has been a contributing factor to the rise in anxiety.

- Cultivate resilience using strategies that help you face difficulties and everyday life
 - Shift your perspective
 - Take action
 - Reach out for support
 - Practice self-care
- Use the three habits for well-being – mindfulness, gratitude, and laughter – to help you:
 - Create beneficial changes to combat stress
 - Boost resilience
 - Improve your sense of presence and enjoyment in daily living

RESOURCES

Books

- ***10% Happier: How I Tamed the Voice in my Head, Reduced Stress Without Losing my Edge, and Found Self-Help That Actually Works***
 - D. Harris, 2014
- ***Life is in the Transitions: Mastering Change at Any Age***
 - B. Feiler, 2021

Websites

- Great Good Science Center
 - greatergood.Berkeley.edu
- Mental Health is Health
 - mentalhealthishealth.us

Online Articles

- Here's What Happens to Your Body When You Laugh
 - bestlifeonline.com/laughter-effects
- Surviving Tough Times by Building Resilience
 - helpguide.org

Podcasts

- [A Slight Change of Plans](#)
 - Maya Shankar
- [The Happiness Lab](#)
 - Dr. Laurie Santos
- [Unlocking Us](#)
 - Brené Brown

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