

# How am I doing: Tools to Assess Our Response to Stress

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# Learning Objectives

1. Gain an understanding of our cognitive, emotional, behavioral, physical, and spiritual response to a stressful situation
2. Gain a better understanding of the stress response continuum
3. Gain a better understanding of compassion fatigue, burnout, and grief

# Why Is Today's Session Important?

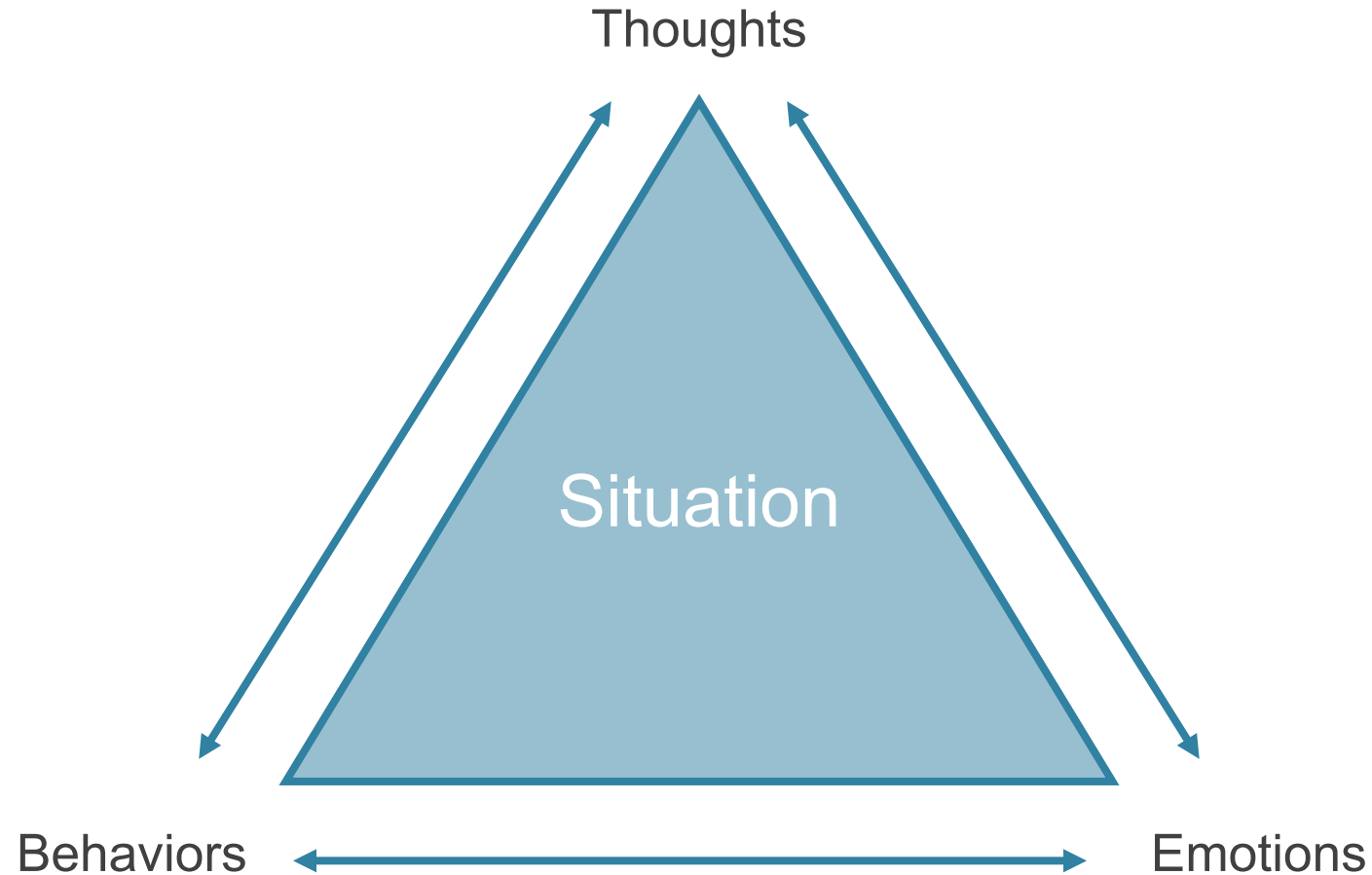
- Everyone has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, but we as Healthcare workers are facing an unprecedented and unique stress since the pandemic is affecting us personally, in our communities, and at work.
- We are trying to keep ourselves and loved ones safe, while coping with the issues in our communities and dealing with the new realities of physical distancing and doing our jobs.
- Knowing how stress uniquely impacts us can help us cope during these challenging times.

# I. Basic Responses to Stress

Cognitive, Emotional, Behavioral,  
Physical, and Spiritual



# How Do We Respond to a Stressful Situation?



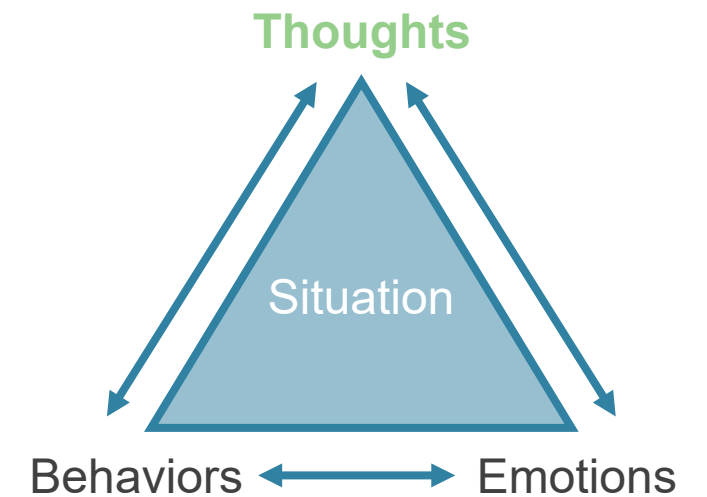
# The Situation: COVID-19

- Situational stressors for frontline workers include:
  - Changing information
  - Staffing shortages
  - Risk of infection
  - Increased workload
  - Physical stress
  - Rising death toll
  - Redeployment
  - Return to work
  - Stigma



# Common Responses: Cognitive

Common Themes	Thoughts
Shortages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Don't have enough staff to do the work</li><li>• Shortages means more mistakes. I can't do it all.</li></ul>
Risk of Infection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I'm going to get sick, I'll make my family sick.</li></ul>
Increased Workload	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I can't do this new critical task. I will let down other members of the team.</li><li>• People will die and I'm responsible.</li></ul>
Physical Stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I can't work while I'm in pain, I will hurt someone if I can't do my job.</li></ul>



# Common Responses: Emotional

## “Negative”

Being anxious or fearful

Feeling depressed

Feeling guilty

Feeling angry

Not caring about anything

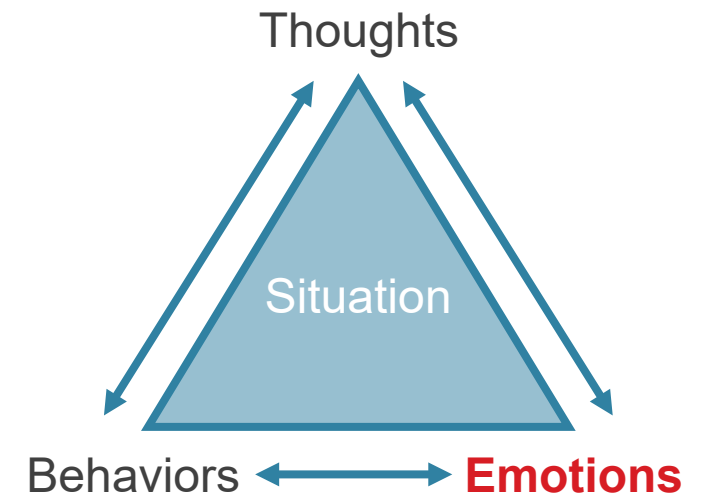
Feeling helpless

## “Positive”

Feeling proud

Camaraderie, new closeness/intimacy with coworkers

Feeling heroic, euphoric, or invulnerable





# Common Responses: Behavioral

## Common Behaviors

Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or illegal drugs

Increase in irritability, with outbursts of anger and frequent arguing

Having trouble relaxing or sleeping

Crying frequently

Worrying excessively

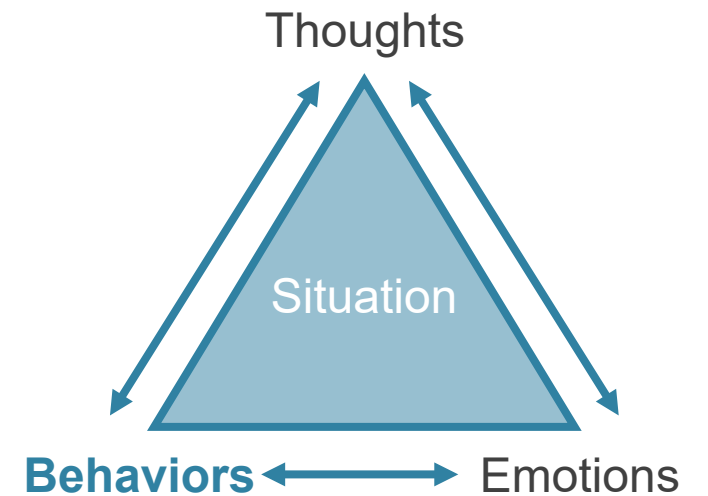
Wanting to be alone most of the time

Blaming other people for everything

Difficulty communicating or listening

Difficulty giving or accepting help

Inability to feel pleasure or have fun



# Common Responses: Physical

- When faced with a life-threatening danger, people often want to run away or, if that is not possible, to fight. The **fight or flight** response is an **automatic** survival mechanism, which prepares the body to take these actions.
- This response may be experienced as uncomfortable when you do not know why it's happening.

Having stomachaches or diarrhea	Sharper vision
Having headaches and other pains	Release of adrenaline
Losing your appetite or eating too much	Shallow breathing, may lead to dizziness
Sweating or having chills	Dry mouth
Getting tremors or muscle twitches	Muscle tension
Being easily startled	Nausea or feeling “butterflies”

# Common Responses: Spiritual

The experience of responding to a disaster can also alter religious and spiritual beliefs.

Change in relationship with or belief about God/Higher Power

Abandonment of spiritual practice

Inability to practice due to workload issues or social distancing

Questioning beliefs or loss of faith

Rejection of spiritual care providers

Struggle with questions about the meaning of life

Loss of familiar spiritual supports

# What Are **Your** Responses to Stress?

- **Thoughts:** What am I thinking about during this situation?
- **Emotions:** What am I feeling?
- **Behaviors:** What did I do/not do?
- **Physical:** What do I feel in my body? Where do I feel it?
- **Spiritual:** What do I believe? Did my beliefs change after this situation?

# Tools to Manage Your Cognitive Response

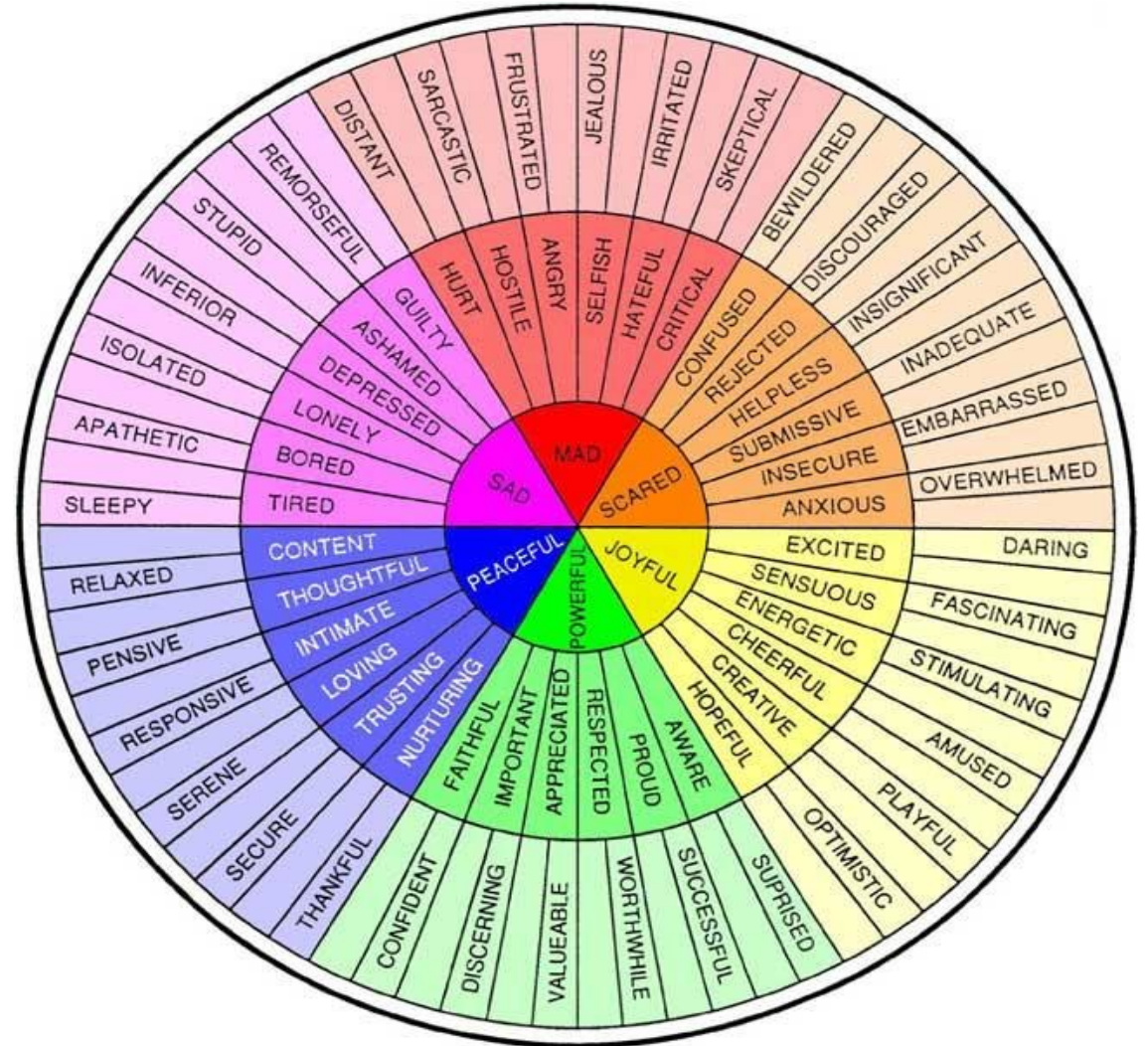
- Be aware of your thoughts
- Identify underlying beliefs
- Examine and challenge your thoughts

# Tools to Manage Your Emotional Response

- Name your feelings
- Be in touch with your feelings
- Talk about your feelings

# Name Your Emotions

- In the center of the circle are some **primary emotions**. Primary emotions are automatic responses to an external event.
- The outer circles show some **secondary emotions**. Secondary emotions are reactions to primary emotions. For example, feeling shame because you are feeling angry.
- The most intense emotions are primary emotions and they get less intense as you move out from the center.





## II. Advanced Responses to Stress

Compassion Fatigue, Burnout, Grief



# The Stress Continuum

## Stress

- Happens to everyone, every day
- General response to stressful situations (tough commute, work problems, moving, etc.)
- Most people develop coping mechanisms (tools to get us through the experience)

## Distress

- Sometimes life is harder than we expected
- We experience deep loss: death of a parent or best friend
- We experience a life change: divorce, change in health status
- Requires additional support, some people seek counseling, spiritual guidance to learn additional coping skills
- Some take medication to help get through a rough patch

## Disorder

- Mental disorders are also known as mental illness or psychiatric disorders: PTSD, Depression, Substance Use Disorder
- Mental disorders are brain disorders
- Are assessed and treated by behavioral health clinicians
- With a variety of medications available as needed

# Compassion Fatigue

## Definition:

- The emotional residue of exposure to working with those suffering from the consequences of traumatic events.
- Compassion fatigue can occur due to exposure on one case or can be due to a “cumulative” level of trauma

# Assessing Compassion Fatigue

<b>Cognitive</b>	Intrusive thoughts, disturbing dreams, thoughts of self-harm or harm to others, reduced sense of safety
<b>Emotional</b>	Powerlessness, anxiety, anger, survivor guilt, numbness, sadness, emotional roller coaster, irritability
<b>Behavioral</b>	Snappy, appetite changes, accident prone, rigidity, poor work performance, tardiness, withdrawal
<b>Spirituality</b>	Questioning meaning, loss of purpose, anger at God, skepticism
<b>Physical</b>	Sweating, rapid heartbeat, breathing difficulties, tremor, aches and pains, exhaustion

# Burnout

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Cumulative process marked by emotional exhaustion and withdrawal associated with increased workload, and institutional stress.





# Burnout

- Physical
  - Loss of energy, chronic fatigue
  - Frequent and prolonged colds
  - Sleep problems
  - Weight loss or gain
  - Worsening of pre-existing medical conditions
  - Headaches, migraines
  - Muscle pains (neck, back)
- Emotional
  - Hopelessness
  - Helplessness
  - Irritability and anger
  - Frustration
  - Over/under reaction

# Grief

- Grief is a **natural** response to losing **something** or **someone** important to us.
- Each loss is unique. Everyone experiences grief differently.
- There is no right way to grieve. But there are healthy ways to deal with the grieving process.
  
- Common symptoms and reaction to grief:
  - Feeling empty, numb, angry or guilty
  - Wondering if there is something that could or should have been done differently
  - Physical reactions such as trembling, nausea, exhaustion and weakness
  - Nightmares
  - Being distracted and behaving absentmindedly
  - Struggling to return to usual activities



# Grief During COVID-19

- Because of its novelty and enormous losses it brings, the COVID-19 pandemic is uniquely stressful.
- Everyone is likely to experience some form of loss.
- Grieving is even more complex as it involves grieving for individual and collective losses.
- COVID-19 and the losses it brings affects frontline workers both personally and professionally.

# Complicated Grief

- Intense longing for and intrusive thoughts/images of the loved one
- Denial of the death or sense of disbelief
- Imagining that their loved one is alive
- Searching for them in familiar places
- Avoiding things that act as reminders
- Extreme anger or bitterness over the loss
- Feeling that life is empty or meaningless

# Ask for Help

- Make sure you are familiar with resources at your workplace: hotlines, employee assistance program, special support programs (Example: Helping Healers Heal at NYC Health + Hospitals)
- Make sure you are familiar with resources in your area
- Share wellness information and resources with your peers
- Come back on Thursday for tools on how to cope with stress.