



COVID-19 Addendum: Participant Notes

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Covid-19 a global pandemic. This new virus has had unprecedented impacts on populations globally. Provinces to varying degrees and with gradual caution have started to lift COVID-19 restrictions, however it is very possible that subsequent waves of cases could emerge and it is uncertain at this point when the pandemic will “end.”

In a pandemic, people living with severe mental illness, such as schizophrenia and psychosis, and their family caregivers, can be faced with additional issues and problems. Because we simply don't know how long and to what degree we will be impacted by this pandemic into the future, it is important to stay educated, to stay vigilant, and to implement strategies that will keep us to be healthy and hopeful. To this end, information within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic has been added to each of the Family Recovery Journey sessions. We hope that this information will help you to feel better equipped to manage challenges that you may be faced with during this unprecedented time.

Public health restrictions and public health orders across Canada vary from province to province and they will continue to vary as provincial governments make the best possible decisions based on data such as local virus transmission, number of cases, etc. Because of this, it is important to connect with your local public health authority for local information regarding access to services/service delivery changes.

The information in these COVID-19 specific sessions has been gathered from reliable sources, but the content is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice or treatment. If you have any specific questions regarding you or your family member's health issues, always seek the advice of your health care provider.

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Session 1: COVID-19 ADDENDUM

One needs only look at history to see the effects that pandemics and the associated circumstances have on the mental health of populations across the world. The following section provides some additional information on:

- How the COVID-19 pandemic impacts people living with schizophrenia and psychosis
- General information on treatment approaches during the COVID-19 pandemic

Impacts of COVID-19 on people with existing psychosis

A current review of literature suggests that people with psychosis or at risk of psychotic disorder may be disproportionately affected by the effects of COVID-19. There is some evidence to suggest that individuals living with Schizophrenia are at:

1. Increased risk for transmission of COVID-19, due to:

- Higher prevalence of residing in shelters, group housing, other housing, or homelessness that may put them at risk of transmission
- Challenges associated with symptoms of psychosis (including disorganized thinking, poor insight and decision-making) may make it more difficult for someone to recognize the severity of the situation and take the steps necessary to protect themselves against COVID-19^{1 2}

2. Increased risk for adverse symptoms or treatment outcomes of COVID-19, due to:

- Ongoing stigma in health care services that may prevent them from pursuing required health care³, or prevent them from being taken seriously and properly assessed if they report symptoms
- Very high prevalence of co-occurring medical conditions (such as type II diabetes, respiratory illness, heart disease), which have been known to increase mortality rates among COVID-19 patients⁴
- Social isolation and physical distancing making symptoms more difficult for family members to recognize, resulting in delays in seeking care

¹ Morgan VA, Waterreus A, Carr V, et al.. Responding to challenges for people with psychotic illness: updated evidence from the Survey of High Impact Psychosis. Aust N Z J Psychiatry. 2017;51(2):124-140.

² Nicole Kozloff et al., The COVID-19 Global Pandemic: Implications for People with Schizophrenia and Related Disorders. Schizophrenia Bulletin, 2020 Jul; 46(4): 752-757.

³ (Thornicroft G, Mehta N, Clement S, et al. 2016) (Clement S, Schauman O, Graham T, et al. 2015) as cited in Nicole Kozloff et al., 2020

⁴ (Wu Z, McGoogan, 2020) (Guan WJ, Liang WH, Zhao Y, et al. 2020) (Correll CU, Solmi M, Veronese N, et al. 2017) (Ward M, Druss B. 2015) (Zareifopoulos N, Bellou A, Spiropoulou A, Spiropoulos K.2018) all cited in Nicole Kozloff et al., 2020

3. Increased risk for being impacted by the psychosocial impacts of COVID-19, such as

- Social isolation

- Unemployment

- Homelessness

- Relationship breakdown (divorce/separation)

- Domestic violence

- Worsening physical health

- Isolation⁵

The Mental Health System during COVID-19

Due to increased guidelines around social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic, the ways that people are able to access mental health services has changed. Some of the changes to treatment and care may include the following.

Online/virtual mental health services: Many provinces have quickly transitioned and established greater access to online/virtual mental health services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. While we know that telemental health services are evidence based and comparable in effectiveness to in person services⁶, some challenges to accessing virtual services may include:

- **Lack of access to technology.** If your family member does not have access to a computer or cell phone, you may want to assist them in trying to access them from their onsite care provider⁷

- **Privacy concerns.** In some situations, privacy may be an issue (for example, it is hard to have privacy when receiving services online if you live in an accommodation with other people.)

In addition to individual telehealth support, some group sessions or classes may be offered virtually. For example, in Winnipeg, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy classes are currently offered virtually on ZOOM.

Changes to emergency and crisis services: As in pre-COVID-19 times, if you or your family member is in immediate danger or requires immediate medical response, do not hesitate to call 911 or present to your local emergency department.

- **Crisis Centres:** Crisis response (walk in) centres, crisis stabilization units (CSUs), and mobile crisis services are typically the types of crisis services that are available across jurisdictions in Canada. These services continue to operate however in some instances, variations may be in place depending on local public health requirements. It is expected that individuals who are in crisis seeking or needing a mental health assessment would typically be screened for COVID-19 risk factors. Depending on the screening outcome, an appropriate means of assessment would be determined (i.e. in-person vs virtual).

⁵ (Anglin et al., 2020) as cited in Brown et al., The potential impact of COVID-19 on psychosis: A rapid review of contemporary epidemic and pandemic research. 2020

⁶ Gratzler et al, 2020

⁷ Firth et al., 2015

- **Crisis Phone Lines or Online Crisis support:** Crisis services that are already operating remotely should continue to be available. As well, some new phone lines or online crisis supports may be available. For example, the federal government has partnered with other organizations to establish Wellness Together Canada, which offers online resources as well as a number to text for immediate crisis support. (The portal can be found at <https://ca.portal.gs>)
- **Emergency Rooms:** While emergency rooms are still open, there may be additional safety measures that have to be followed, such as mandatory mask wearing and hand sanitizing. Some emergency rooms may put limits on non-essential visitors, or visitors that do not pass the screening questions. Though these extra measures can provide added stress in an emergency situation, try to keep in mind that these measures are in place for your own safety and the safety of others seeking care.

Please contact your local regional health authority for the most up to date details related to mental health crisis services in your area.

Accessing Medication: It is important for individuals to continue to regularly take any prescribed medications to ensure continuity of care. However, there may be additional factors to consider when accessing medication during COVID-19, including:

- **Supply Shortages:** Due to supply shortages, some pharmacies may have limits in place on how much they are able to dispense of certain medications at one time. (For instance, some provinces implemented a 30-day limit on dispensing some medications at earlier points in the pandemic). Speak to your pharmacist to stay updated on changes to pharmacy policies and restrictions. It should be noted that with 30 day limits on some medications comes an overall increase in dispensing fees.
- **Longer Processing Times:** Processing times may be longer than normal and doctor availability may be affected, so it is important to give as much notice as possible to the pharmacy if you require a prescription renewal or refill.
- **Prescription Renewals:** If your family member is unable to speak directly with their regular care provider and require a prescription renewal, the pharmacist can assist them by contacting their doctor to obtain a prescription renewal (at the doctor's discretion).
- **Physical Distancing:** Some pharmacies will deliver medications for free to at-risk or quarantining individuals. If your family member is sheltering in place, they can call their local pharmacy to see if this is an option.
- **Medication Monitoring:** Some medications (such as clozapine) require regular blood testing and monitoring to ensure proper dosage. For additional information on clozapine treatment during COVID-19, you can visit: <https://www.bcsc.org/what-you-need-to-know-if-youre-on-clozapine-during-covid-19/>

Session 2: COVID-19 ADDENDUM

It is important to recognize the additional challenges, demands and stresses placed on you as a family caregiver in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This addendum to Session 2 will provide information on how to:

- Adapt strategies for providing support to your family member during COVID-19
- Effectively manage additional stresses associated with the COVID-19 pandemic
- Reimagine your self care plan in the face of COVID-19
- Pay attention to your own needs and limits, and take care of your own health and hope during this unprecedented time.

The “Treatment Battle” and COVID-19

Providing care for a family member who has schizophrenia or psychosis is an important role, but it can also be challenging. Supporting and encouraging your loved one and collaborating with treatment may be more difficult during COVID-19 for many reasons, including:

- Routines may be disrupted
- Usual ways of communication and support might not be possible
- Physical distancing requirements may hinder ability to provide both practical (doing laundry, preparing meals, etc.) and emotional support
- Family member’s psychotic symptoms may exacerbate
- Access to mental health services for your family member may have changed
- Uncertainty about the availability of mental health services and supports during COVID-19 and/or temporary disruptions to services
- Inpatient units may have reduced or suspended visiting hours, or may only permit essential visitors

While all of the communication and support strategies you have learned in this session still apply, it is important to consider how additional challenges may impact the ways in which you can provide this support. Some additional strategies are listed below:

Strategies for Encouraging Collaboration with Treatment

1. Become knowledgeable about how supports and services will change during COVID-19
2. Help your family member make alternative arrangements to access medication if necessary. (For instance, there may be an ability to sign up for repeat prescription delivery if your family member requires an ongoing prescription medication.)
3. Help your family member make alternative arrangements to access required services and supports.

Strategies for Social Withdrawal and Isolation (While Physical Distancing)

1. Agree to connect at certain times, either over the phone or via a video call

2. Encourage your family member to take part in online social activities, such as online peer support

3. Suggest other online activities for you to do together, such as playing online games or sharing your favorite photos

4. When safe to do so, certain in-person physical distancing activities may be appropriate, such as meeting outside in an open space or going for a walk (while maintaining a safe distance).

Strategies for Encouraging Protection from COVID-19

Family caregivers often need to anticipate the level of assistance and encouragement their family member will need to take care of themselves and to keep themselves safe, especially during COVID-19. Many of the strategies previously discussed apply to assisting your family member with taking the appropriate safety precautions for COVID-19, including:

1. Use the LEAP (listen, empathize, agree, partner) approach to discuss the benefits and drawbacks of taking safety precautions

2. Remind your family member to wear a mask, wash their hands, and physical distance when appropriate

3. Provide support for accessing the equipment required to stay safe (mask supply, hand sanitizer). In some situations you may have to provide these to your family member yourself.

4. Encourage learning about COVID-19 and prevention strategies

5. Follow the tips you learned for supporting good personal hygiene

Self Care During COVID-19 – Tips for Family Caregivers

In addition to causing challenges for supporting your family member, the additional stress due to change and uncertainty can have a negative impact on your own mental health. With the addition of these extra stressors, it is even more important to ensure that you pay attention to your own mental health and self care. The following provides a few additional tips related to COVID-19 and emphasizes some tips that you have already learned about:

- **Be media mindful:** try to limit the amount of COVID-19 news you consume, and only seek information from trusted sources that allow you to make informed plans to protect yourself and your family member. Avoid inaccurate or overly sensational news stories and outlets.

- **Have a routine:** as much as possible, try to keep to the routines you were used to before COVID-19. If some of your daily routines have been disrupted, try to find alternatives or develop a new routine.

- **Stay healthy:** Try as much as possible to keep a regular exercise routine, and maintain healthy eating

habits. In addition, try to take time to engage in activities that you find relaxing and that you enjoy.

- **Stay connected:** Though at times you may not be able to share the same physical space, try to stay connected and in regular contact with people in your social network. Make sure to reach out to your own support network if you are feeling overwhelmed.
- **Check in with yourself:** Though it is perfectly normal to feel anxious or overwhelmed during this challenging time, try to be mindful of your thoughts and mental states, and challenge unhelpful thinking.
- **Be patient with yourself:** If you feel that you are not doing enough or operating at your usual capacity, remind yourself that you are doing your best in this uncertain and difficult time! Celebrate your resilience and what you have been able to accomplish, and give yourself space to adjust to this new and unpredictable situation.

Reimagining your Self-Care Plan

You learned a lot about self care and making a self care plan in session 2 today. In your previous self care plan, you may notice that some self-care activities that you previously engaged in are no longer available to you due to social distancing measures. Taking some time to think of some similar alternatives may help you to feel more prepared to manage your self care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pre-COVID-19 Self-Care Activity	Alternative Activity

Additional Supports for Family Caregivers During COVID-19

The specific supports available for caregivers will vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, and it is important to reach out to your regional health authority and local organizations to understand what supports are available to you. In addition to the resources provided in the participant notes for this session, an extra collection of online resources that can help caregivers deal with stress during the COVID-19 pandemic is included below.

Recommended Online Resources

- https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/2020-04/fact_sheet_caregivers_eng.pdf

- <https://www.iamentalhealth.ca/Find-Support/Resource-Hub/Support-During-COVID-19>

- <https://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/covid19-infosheet-help-when-feeling-worried-pdf.pdf?la=en&hash=9599BDB0FC3DFDCF4AF57A4555E11D9461D8A83C>

- <http://howrightnow.org/>

Additional Notes

Paranoia about COVID-19 in People with Schizophrenia

There is little literature available, (other than a few case examples), regarding the presence of and impacts of COVID-19 related paranoia in people with schizophrenia. One case study recorded the experience of an individual with schizophrenia presenting with COVID-19 related delusions and hallucinations which illustrated “the potential of COVID-19 to precipitate entry into a psychotic phase and impact symptom manifestation.”¹ In this case, the individual was more paranoid about the people around him getting COVID-19 than himself. The authors of this case study suggest that “media coverage of extraordinary circumstances may influence the content of delusional thoughts, especially in a crisis such as a pandemic.”

Another recent number of cases in a similar case study reported on four individuals who presented with acute psychosis in response to the various psychosocial stressors associated with COVID-19.² These individuals did not specifically have a pre-existing psychosis, but several had pre-existing anxiety or depression, etc. This study further referenced an observational study that suggests a “25% increase in acute psychosis for individuals living in areas with a high prevalence of COVID-19 cases (Hu et al., 2020)”.

The above illustrates the important job that media has in presenting “balanced and responsible” reporting on COVID-19 so as to reduce the potential of overreaction in people who are at risk, (including people with pre-existing schizophrenia), and to prevent potential psychotic episodes. As well, it is important as we have already discussed, that individuals try to limit the amount of COVID-19 media coverage that they watch/read and to try to consider information only from credible sources.

¹ COVID-19 Paranoia in a Patient Suffering from Schizophrenic Psychosis – a Case Report. M. Fisher et al. Psychiatry Research. 2020 June.

² Valdes-Flórida et al., 2020)

How to Help a Family Member who Experiences “Technology Paranoia”

During COVID-19, the use of technology for medical, treatment, crisis, and support related services for people with serious mental illness has increased. We know that several provinces as well as the federal government has increased virtual and telephone therapies, crisis services and supports since the onset of COVID and that some in-person services have had reduced access in some circumstances.

Research regarding how people living with schizophrenia use and relate to technology is very limited. However, one study involving a web-based survey of 457 individuals who identified as having schizophrenia schizoaffective disorder, or schizophrenia spectrum disorder looked at the positive and negative feelings regarding the use of mobile devices amongst those surveyed.

The study results found that while positive feelings toward mobile devices were more common, “individuals with schizophrenia, like the general population, have both positive and negative feelings toward their mobile devices”.³ Of the survey respondents with schizophrenia, 25% reported feeling “frustrated,” 24% “paranoid,” and 19% “angry,” which were similar to the feelings caused by use of technology in the general population. One limitation of this survey, however, was that some who are afraid of technology may not have participated in the web-based survey.

So what does a caregiver do if a family member is afraid of using technology for medical treatment, recovery oriented supports, and other necessary and important services during this time of COVID? There are a few possibilities:

- If the person is more comfortable with a phone vs a computer, they could be encouraged to undertake their appointments via phone.

- A person close to the individual whom they trust could demonstrate the use of an Iphone (with Facetime) or an android phone (with skype).

- A person close to the individual and someone they trust could have a computer/laptop side by side with the family member and they could have a virtual chat together in the same room so they can reinforce the reality of the use.

- Your health care provider may have other ideas as to how to facilitate needed appointments.

³ Digital Technology Use Among Individuals with Schizophrenia: Results of an Online Survey. Katrina Gay et al., JMIR Mental Health, Apr-June 2016.

Session 3: Covid-19 ADDENDUM

You have just learned in session 3 today about various skills and strategies you can use to help your family member through a crisis should one emerge. You have also learned about various types of resources that are available for mental health crises and emergencies. During COVID-19, you can draw from these same skills, strategies, and resources, though there may be additional factors to consider. This addendum provides:

- Information about substance use during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Additional considerations about handling suicidal or aggressive behavior during COVID-19
- Guidance around making a crisis plan if you or your family member contracts COVID-19

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Substance Use

There is evidence to suggest that the risks associated with substance use have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Centre for Disease Control outlines some additional risk factors associated with substance use during COVID-19, which include:

- Inability to obtain drugs due to supply shortages or social distancing, which in turn can lead to withdrawal symptoms
- Illicit drug supply disruptions could also lead individuals to consume drugs they are not used to, which might increase risk of overdose or other adverse reactions due to contaminated supply
- Reduced access to harm reduction services and in-person treatment options
- Physical distancing guidance and stay-at-home orders may lead to higher numbers of people using substances alone, without others around to administer naloxone, perform life-saving measures, or call for help in case of overdose.
- Bystanders to an overdose might be reluctant to administer naloxone or perform CPR or other life-saving measures because of fear of COVID-19 exposure.
- People may be afraid to seek medical attention in the Emergency Department (ED) or from other healthcare professionals for fear of infection. (Centre for Disease Control, 2020)

Helping Your Family Member with Problematic Substance Use During COVID-19

You have learned in this session today how to communicate with your family member about alcohol and substance use. While these tools still apply, you may notice some additional challenges relating to helping your family member manage their substance use challenges, including:

- **Disruptions to service:** Due to COVID-19, there may be changes or reductions in services for people experiencing substance use challenges. It is important to talk to a healthcare provider to learn more about what services will be available during COVID-19. As some in-person treatment options may not be available, you may also consider encouraging your family member to connect with available virtual recovery meetings or local treatment services and supports.
- **Identifying the signs of problematic substance use:** As you may not be having as much in person contact with your family member, it may be more challenging to identify if an increase in substance use is occurring. Through your regular virtual check ins with your family member, it is important to keep the lines of communication open regarding this, especially if your family member has experienced problematic substance use in the past, and/or if they are in a recovery program.
- **Coping with stress:** People in Canada who are staying at home more because of COVID-19 and consuming more alcohol indicated that they are doing so because of having no regular schedule, boredom, and stress, followed by loneliness.⁸ For these reasons, it is important to encourage your family member to maintain their regular schedule as much as possible, and to tap into their coping skills and healthy stress management options, such as hobbies, exercise, and connecting with support systems.

Information on Specific Substances

The resources included below provide further information about COVID-19 and some key points to keep in mind in relation to different substances.

General: Centre for Disease Control's FAQ about drug use and COVID-19: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/other-at-risk-populations/people-who-use-drugs/QA.html>

Alcohol: Drinking alcohol does not protect individuals from COVID-19, and can decrease the body's ability to fight off infections. https://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/437608/Alcohol-and-COVID-19-what-you-need-to-know.pdf

Marijuana: The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) notes that there is current evidence that smoking cannabis can negatively affect people's respiratory and immune systems. Further, CCSA notes that "there is no evidence that smoking or vaping cannabis can prevent, alleviate or treat COVID-19 symptoms", and in fact that "cannabis smoking or vaping could worsen the respiratory symptoms of COVID-19". https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2020-04/CCSA-COVID-19-Cannabis-Smoking-and-Vaping-Report-2020-en_1.pdf

Cocaine and Methamphetamines: Using drugs such as cocaine and methamphetamines affects health and puts users at a greater risk of COVID-19. <https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2020-05/>

⁹ (Chan et al., 2006)

¹⁰ <https://medicine.umich.edu/dept/psychiatry/michigan-psychiatry-resources-covid-19/specific-mental-health-conditions/suicide-risk-recognizing-responding-risk-during-covid-19-pandemic>

¹¹ Montross LP, Zisook S, Kasckow J. Suicide among patients with schizophrenia: a consideration of risk and protective factors. *Ann Clin Psychiatry*. 2005;17(3):173-182.

¹² University of Michigan, Department of Psychiatry, 2020

¹³ (Volavka J, Citrome L. Pathways to aggression in schizophrenia affect results of treatment. *Schizophr Bull*. 2011;37(5):921-929).

¹⁴ Volavka, John, Aggression in Psychosis, February 2014

[CCSA-COVID-19-Methamphetamine-Cocaine-Health-Risks-Infographic-2020-en_0.pdf](#)

Opioids: The intersection between COVID-19 and the “opioid epidemic” has been noted by various medical personnel and academics. Several urgent actions have been called for. <https://www.acpjournals.org/doi/10.7326/M20-1210>

Suicide Risk of People with Psychosis During COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic, people with mental illness or mental health challenges may be at increased risk of suicide. There is some evidence that more suicides occur after previous pandemics⁹, which means there is a possibility for this to occur after COVID-19. Additional stressors can lead to feelings of hopelessness and despair¹⁰, and social isolation may increase the risk of suicide in people with schizophrenia¹¹.

Family members who are already receiving treatment for suicide risk including those who are having suicidal thoughts and those who have had recent suicidal thoughts or a suicide attempt, may need additional support¹².

You learned much about suicide and responding to suicidal thoughts in Session 3 that can be applied during COVID-19 as well. Some additional points to keep in mind include:

- **Crisis and Emergency Services:** As we learned previously, crisis supports, emergency departments and 911 lines are still operating. Don't hesitate to call or visit your nearest emergency departments when necessary.

- **Safety Plans:** Review your family member's personal safety plan with them and adapt any information that needs to reflect the COVID-19 context. For example, have them brainstorm ideas about how to stay connected with supports and how to reach out to supports when physical distancing is at play. Discuss the new crisis lines that have been established due to COVID-19. Encourage them to add these additional ideas to their safety plan. As in pre-COVID-19 times, this should be done when your family member is not experiencing suicidal thoughts.

- **Stay Connected:** Having open lines of communication with your family member is more important than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic. Create a network of family and friends who can stay connected with your family member especially during times of social isolation.

- **Surround yourself with supports:** The support of other family caregivers can make a huge difference in terms of how you cope with the stresses and worry of a suicidal family member. Seek out virtual family caregiver communities/peer support groups that may have been established with the onset of COVID-19, or which may have existed pre-COVID-19.

A Note on Aggressive Behaviors

Among people with schizophrenia, stress has been associated with aggressive behavior.¹³ Co-existing problematic substance use can exacerbate aggressive behavior in people diagnosed with schizophrenia¹⁴ as well. Maintaining treatment and recovery routines are important for reducing potential triggers of aggressive behaviors in people with schizophrenia or psychosis.

Completing a Family Crisis Plan for COVID-19

As you will remember, having a family crisis plan will help everyone to manage whatever crisis may occur. It is important to review your family crisis plan with your family member and consider if any aspect of that plan needs to be adapted to the COVID-19 context.

As well, it is important that your family crisis plan includes a plan should you become ill with COVID-19. If you are a primary caregiver for your family member, the adapted plan should identify who would play the roles you currently play if you become ill for an extended period of time.

Recommended Online Resources

https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/2020-03/Tips_Active_Listening_COVID_eng.pdf



Session 4: Covid-19 ADDENDUM

The stresses associated with COVID-19 can make coping with the symptoms of psychosis difficult, and at times it may seem impossible for a person with psychosis or schizophrenia to stay on course with their recovery plan. This session talks about strategies for promoting recovery during the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

- How to support your family member to continue on their recovery journey
- How to recognize the warning signs of a relapse, and how to deal with relapses if they occur
- How to continue to instill hope in your family member and yourself during this difficult time

Strategies for Encouraging and Supporting Recovery During COVID-19

The strategies you've learned in this session are important to continue to practice, even though it may seem especially difficult to do during COVID-19. Remember that hope is essential to recovery.

The following summarizes three key things that the University of Michigan Department of Psychiatry suggests to emphasize during COVID-19 to promote and support recovery.

Supporting regular recovery activities: It is easy for our family members to fall away from healthy habits when they are stressed, however keeping up with their routines and focusing on their recovery goals puts them in a better position to manage the stresses they are experiencing. You can encourage your family member to keep in contact with those involved in their recovery plan by telephone, face to face technology, or even in person if public health guidelines permit.

Supporting coping skills: Part of a recovery plan often includes practice healthy coping and relaxation skills. As we've learned, even small stresses can affect a person with psychosis so it is imperative that your family member engage in activities that they enjoy to the greatest degree possible while of course, following public health guidelines. This could include a safe physical distance walk, deep breathing, reading, listening to music, etc. Perhaps now is a time where you could help your family member discover new interests as well, such as taking an online yoga class or learning a new skill on the computer.

Encourage connections: While there are times when face to face connections will not be possible, it is still important for your family member to maintain connections. These may be connections with people that they have already established in their lives, and/or it may be new connections that may be available in your community such as online groups, peer supports, etc. It may also be an opportunity for you to encourage your family member to connect with other family members that they may not have connected with in a while. As well, you can encourage your family member to have a "check in" buddy to connect with every day.

Some other tips for you as a family caregiver to consider:

Maintain a calm atmosphere: Due to the additional tensions and anxieties associated with COVID-19, it may be difficult to maintain a calm atmosphere at home. Try to avoid acquiring habits that may increase that level of anxiety, such as excessively playing negative news coverage on the television, or constantly discussing what is going wrong or what could go wrong in the world. Continue to practice calming activities together, and draw from your self-care plan in session 2 to help yourself stay calm.

Recognise your limits: Due to the additional stress that you may be feeling due to COVID-19, take some time to reassess the level of care and support you can reasonably provide. If you need to temporarily step back from providing some type of support, explain this to your family member and the health professionals involved in their care so that alternative supports can be arranged.

Relapses and Warning Signs During COVID-19

As we learned in session 1, there is a relationship between psychosis and stress and people who experience psychosis can be particularly sensitive to stress. Within the context of COVID-19, individuals with schizophrenia or psychosis may be vulnerable to relapse due to fear of COVID-19, increased stresses generally, or even the “boredom” of social isolation.¹⁵ As such, it is important to be able to anticipate your family member’s reactions to stress, and look out for warning signs that may indicate that your family member is at risk of a relapse.

The warning signs of a psychosis relapse vary between individuals. A family caregiver is often aware of their family member’s relapse “signature” which is a personal set of early warning signs. (Some examples of potential warning signs can be found in the previous section of these notes.)

During COVID-19, due to social isolation and not being able to have face to face contact at some points, it may be more challenging for family caregivers to recognize or notice some of these symptoms. It is important to remember that you can only do what you can do right now...that some things are not within your control. Continue to connect as best you can through phone calls or online venues such as facetime or skype.

It is important to take time to encourage your family member to review their personal relapse prevention program, to ensure it is feasible to follow during COVID-19. If there are any items that are not feasible, you can support your family member to come up with alternative strategies.

If a crisis does occur, refer back to your Family Crisis Plan and follow the additional measures that you outlined to account for the COVID-19 context.

A Word About “Normal” Reactions

When faced with an “abnormal” situation such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to remember that feeling anxious, sad, or afraid are all “normal” physiological responses.

¹⁵ Lais Fonseca, Schizophrenia and COVID-19: risks and recommendations, Brazilian Journal of Psychiatry, April 2020

Some common feelings may include:

- Fear of getting COVID-19 or infecting others
- Fear of being apart from family members
- Boredom or loneliness related to having to isolate or physical distance

As well, a sense of loss that comes from the COVID-19 pandemic may be experienced. This may include losing a loved one, a job, a routine, a hobby or anything else that we have “lost” during this time.¹⁶ Grief is a normal experience following loss but it can be very difficult.

Your family member may experience these feelings, as may you. It is important to respond to their COVID-19 related concerns in a supportive way by listening, reassuring them, and again, encouraging them to maintain their recovery routine to the greatest degree possible.

Recommended Online Resources:

- <https://medicine.umich.edu/dept/psychiatry/michigan-psychiatry-resources-covid-19/specific-mental-health-conditions/psychosis-spectrum-disorders-managing-stress-during-covid-19-pandemic>
- <https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-health-and-covid-19/loss-grief-and-healing>
- <https://cpa.ca/psychology-works-fact-sheet-psychological-impacts-of-the-coronavirus-covid-19/>

¹⁶ Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2020

Session 5: Covid-19 ADDENDUM

Even in times of significant stress, we can look to our strengths to build our resilience and to inspire us with hope. This session talks about using our strengths during the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

- Building on our internal strengths
- Building on our external strengths
- Advocating for additional mental health services and supports

Building on our Internal Strengths During COVID-19

The six strengths of families mentioned earlier in this session can continue to be practiced during times of COVID-19:

1. **Appreciation and Affection:** While we may not always be able to physically hug our loved ones during COVID-19, things like smiles and jokes are easy to offer over the phone or during facetime. Even sending small notes to loved ones through the mail can demonstrate that you are thinking of them.
2. **Positive Communication:** It is easy to focus communication on COVID-19 and the stress and worry that it brings, but it is also important to talk about other things that we can feel positive and hopeful about. What are some of the things you enjoyed talking about before COVID-19 came to be? Recall fun memories, talk about something new you learned today, or about some of your dreams you have for when this is all over.
3. **Adaptability (flexibility):** In these times of COVID-19 our ability to adapt to change and to be flexible are certainly challenged. And this can be even more challenging for people who don't like change to begin with. The following nine tips from the New Zealand Department of Health can help you adjust to our "new normal":
 - > Be accepting of the situation
 - > Respond instead of reacting
 - > Give yourself time to process new information
 - > Allow yourself time to adapt to change. Everyone reacts to new things differently
 - > Be flexible and open to relinquishing control over the situation
 - > Go easy on yourself and manage expectations at work and at home
 - > Focus on what you can do, not on what you can't
 - > Set new routines that work for you and don't pressure yourself
 - > Practice mindfulness. Be in the moment and focus on what you can achieve today.¹⁷
4. **Unity:** while there are times during COVID-19 when we cannot come together physically to

¹⁷ <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/update/Pages/adapt.aspx>

do the things we used to do, we can still endeavor to do those things “virtually”. We can still have a meal together or play a favorite game via skype. Do not forgo some of your traditional and favorite family times altogether. Try to use your imagination and creativity to continue to do some things together!

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5. **Spiritual Well Being:** However you think about life and its meaning, continue to spend time to find peace and hopefulness within your heart. You can do this with your family member or you may find solace in being a part of a family caregiver community. Find solace in your traditional ways, or perhaps a new possibility to find solace will emerge as part of your personal COVID-19 experience. If you belong to a specific religious denomination, you may want to look into available live stream worship services.
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6. **Commitment:** Commitment to stay emotionally connected when may not be able to be physically connected can be a challenge. COVID-19 has forced us to be even more committed to staying connected than before COVID-19. But we also need to be committed to self care even more than previously.
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Building on our External Strengths During COVID-19

During times of self isolation and social distancing during COVID-19, social support becomes even more important for family caregivers as anxieties and stresses increase. In addition to the suggestions provided earlier in the session, here are some additional tips to keep in mind:

- It is still important to reach out to family and friends by whatever means are possible to tell them what kind of support you need from them. From providing a listening ear, to assisting with grocery shopping for your loved one, there are many things that you may need help with from time to time so don't be reluctant to ask!
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- In many areas of the country, support groups have gone virtual. Search out your local health authority and mental health organizations to determine what online family caregiver support groups/communities are available and make connections if this is something that you find helpful.
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- Many family therapists offer sessions either over the phone or via facetime or skype. Virtual therapy is still a very effective way of getting support if needed.
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Housing and Financial Support During COVID-19

Information related to housing and financial support during COVID-19 can change from month to month, and differs according to region. For specific information about what supports are available in your region during COVID-19, please refer to the regional resources provided by your facilitator.

Governments responded quickly to COVID-19 by providing rent, income, and employment relief to those struggling. Some examples of the types of relief provided include the following: (while some supports are no longer available, it is important to keep up to date on what is available, as COVID-19 continues to be so dynamic.

¹⁸ CMHC, 2020; Government of Canada, 2020; Government of Ontario, 2020

- The federal government announced the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) in the early months of COVID-19. CERB is a benefit of \$2000 per month over four months for workers who lost their employment, or who are ill or quarantined due to COVID-19. As well, people who were looking after someone with COVID-19 or who couldn't work because they had to stay home with their children were also eligible for CERB. CERB has been widely applauded. Unfortunately, however, it has not been accessible to some vulnerable people. To keep up to date on CERB, please see the following link: <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/cerb-application.html>
- In addition, the federal government announced a one-time \$600 payment in recognition of the extraordinary expenses faced by persons with disabilities during COVID-19. The following link provides further information on this: <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/covid19-emergency-benefits/one-time-payment-persons-disabilities.html>
- To address the risk of homelessness during COVID-19, some new housing initiatives have been put in place very quickly.

Advocacy for your Family Member During COVID-19

COVID-19 raises many opportunities to advocate generally for better mental health services and supports, as well as improved income and housing programs. Some areas to consider focusing advocacy efforts on include¹⁹:

- The relative success of CERB has led to calls to make this a permanent replacement to the antiquated income support programs. You may want to advocate for a basic income guarantee with your local government which can improve social and health outcomes.
- You may also want to advocate for making the recent expansion of virtual mental health services permanent following COVID-19. Telemental health and other virtual supports are effective, convenient, and particularly relevant for people living in rural, northern, and remote communities, not just during COVID-19 but always.
- Continued advocacy for increased housing options (particularly supported housing options) needs to occur. The response to COVID-19 in this regard has demonstrated that enhancements can occur quickly when needed, and this needs to be continued.

The response to COVID-19 in general has demonstrated both the need for drastic improvements to our health and social support systems, and that enhancements to programs and services can occur quickly when needed. Though many new additional supports may be phased out, the impact of the pandemic will not go away so quickly. The energy for change needs to be maintained as we move beyond COVID-19.

Recommended online resources:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/what-matters-most/202003/coronavirus-coping-6-ways-your-strengths-will-help-you>

¹⁹ Mental Health in Canada: COVID-19 and Beyond CAMH Policy Advice, July 2020