GLOBAL PSYCHOLOGY ALLIANCE

Psychology for Global Challenges

Coping in Times of Geopolitical Uncertainty

The Global Psychology Alliance (GPA) shares the tip sheet, "Coping in Times of Geopolitical Uncertainty," for the sole purpose of translating psychological science to meaningful actions in support of those impacted worldwide. This guidance is intended exclusively to bring evidence-based interventions to current human needs since the link between sustained political stress and widespread and measurable physical and mental health effects is well established. This document is not a political statement.

- Sociopolitical turmoil exacerbates existing psychological symptoms, such as anxiety and depression, and may trigger symptoms for individuals with no history of psychological distress.
    - Attend closely to persons with a history of psychological conditions. Seek available support across a range of levels (professional, community, family) as available for those at particular risk.
        - Reach out to people directly and ask them to share honestly how they are doing.
        - Provide psychosocial support in response to changes in behavior, such as sleep problems, irritability, or expressions of hopelessness that may be signs of significant distress.
        - Where psychological distress is of such significance that an immediate response is warranted, locate emergency services closest to your location.
    - Coping strategies used for distress across a range of challenging life circumstances are also typically effective for managing anxiety associated with political crises, inclusive of:
        - Practicing deep breathing to better regulate one's emotions.
        - Employing tools of healthy distraction, such as refocusing attention and changing conversation topics to manageable themes.
        - Engaging in regular physical activity, from short walks to dancing at home.
        - Increasing social interaction by connecting with friends and family.
        - Continuing to acknowledge and celebrate important dates, such as birthdays, anniversaries, etc.

- Geographical and informational proximity to sociopolitical crises increases one's sense of lack of control and, in relation, anxiety and worry.
    - Limit exposure to media, news sources, and conversations that focus on current crises to the degree possible.
        - Set a specific schedule for attending to the news, such as one hour/daily, and stick to it.
        - Sandwich news exposure with positive, emotion-regulating activities. For example, engage with family prior to seeking updates on the political landscape and plan to take a walk immediately afterwards.
    - Keep in mind that while being in close geographical proximity to the situation can worsen psychological distress, individuals who are not physically located in areas directly impacted by a geopolitical crisis may still experience significant stress and should be encouraged to seek help and utilize coping mechanisms.
        - Respect the experiences and narratives of everyone who shares distress about the situation independent of their location.
- The weight of political uncertainty is not specific to a particular political party nor perspective. While specifics may differ, the mental health impacts for those in favor of or against change are similar.
    - Endeavor to listen to and support the emotional expressions of persons in distress as a human experience and avoid framing the situation across political divides.
        - Ask questions like, "How is this impacting you?" rather than using statements oriented to politics such as, "It's the fault of [name group]."
- Experiencing and acknowledging emotions is critical to being able to later address complex social changes.
    - It is normal to experience anger, fear, frustration, hope, relief, and/or a range of other strong feelings. Remember to address significant emotions in a healthy, productive way.
        - Express understanding for others whose reactions may differ from your own.
    - Acknowledge that simple solutions are unlikely to arise when a system is in turmoil and that the energy required to manage day-to-day tasks amid nervous system overload is not always realistic.
        - If possible, take a break from demands (e.g., emails) that can wait until later and give yourself a moment to regroup.

        - Avoid self-blame. You are not lazy nor ineffective if it's impossible to focus on daily responsibilities in the midst of uncertain changes.
        - Mental health is protected where humans establish reasonable limits, routines, self-care, thoughtful conversation, and mutual support, so seek these options.
    - It is natural for human beings to seek certainty and straightforward explanations in times of crisis, and when these are not available, to fall into a state of apathy.
        - Instead of an "anything goes" mindset, which ultimately leads to fewer positive options, adopt routines that are meaningful and productive, no matter how basic.
        - Accept the discomfort of uncertainty while seeking opportunities to take action within your own family and/or community, for example, supporting food delivery, checking in on colleagues, or providing information to neighbors.
- Youth may be particularly negatively impacted when facing geopolitical uncertainty, since mistrust in economic and social systems aggravates their sense of agency related to change.
    - Check in with youth with whom you are familiar.
        - Send them text messages to check in, or say hello as you see young neighbors on the street.
    - Help children and adolescents recognize how important they are and where they are making an impact.
        - Are they attending school? Are they interested in learning? Are they doing helpful things for their family? These are all positive, pro-social decisions.




Association of Psychologists in Nepal
APN
2016


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