

# Emotional impact of the pandemic on families

Dr Alex Reed – Systemic Family Therapy Trainer & Supervisor

Alix Bowler- Systemic Family Psychotherapist

Dr Kirsty Charlton – Systemic Family Psychotherapist and  
Counselling Psychologist

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## Aims

- To give a context of the emotional impact the pandemic might have had on families
- Identify the pile up of stresses that may be traumatising to families
- Offer participants a reflective space to identify how they might support and be supported by other family members

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## Resilience (Walsh, 2020)

- Resilience: the capacity to overcome adversity.
- Family resilience is capacities in family functioning to withstand and rebound from adversity.

*“The COVID-19 pandemic is a perfect storm of stressors, involving acute crisis and loss events, disruptions in many aspects of life, and ongoing multi-stress challenges with evolving conditions.” (Walsh 2020)*

# Potential sources of stress for families

(adapted from F. Walsh, 2020)

In pandemic many families may experience an ongoing, pervasive sense of anxiety and / or loss:

- Loss of physical contact with family members & social networks
- Loss of pre-pandemic ways of life
- Loss of a sense of normality / increased uncertainty
- Feeling trapped/ angry
- Loss of vital roles
- Loss of employment / financial security / livelihood
- Possible or actual loss of loved ones
- Sense of injustice (Inequality & increased risk for some)
- Pile-up of stressors

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## Resilience & relationships (adapted from F. Walsh, 2020)

Barriers to adaptation:

- The cultural ethos of the “rugged individual” who is self-reliant & fiercely independent may lead to ordinary feelings of vulnerability or reliance on others seeming like weakness
- May lead individuals to feel they should “tough it out alone” (*“I don’t want to be a burden to others”*)
- This may lead to burn-out

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## Resilience & relationships (continued)

(from F. Walsh, 2020)

A family systems perspective reminds us that:

- Vulnerability is part of the human condition
- Distress is normal in abnormal times
- We are relational beings. Recognition of our mutual dependence on one another is vital for well-being
- In turning to others for help, we can pay it back and pay it forward.
- As a society we are all going through this crisis together. We need and depend on each other for our lives and for our future.

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# Adapting to shock & Loss

(adapted from F. Walsh, 2020)

- In families, tolerance is needed for different reactions
- Adaptation requires our attention moving back & forth between a focus on loss and present demands / future challenges
- Requires 'realistic hope' (Weingarten 2010)
- For some, spiritual / religious belief may support adaptation
- Music & creative arts can foster resilience
- Healing and resilience take place gradually, over time

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## References

- Walsh, F. (2020) Loss and Resilience in the Time of COVID-19: Meaning Making, Hope and Transcendence. *Family Process*. Vol. 59, No.3: pp.898/911.

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## Time for reflection

If you were to look back on 2020 / early 2021 in 5 years' time:

- What will family members / friends have done to support each other through that time? (these may have been things like a regular phone call, sending a child's drawing, doing online calls, someone getting shopping for you when isolated, creating access to the shower when home from work, a friendly loving word or smile)
- What would your family / friends notice that you have you done to support others?
- Despite all the difficulties you may have faced, what will have been the best moments for your family?
- What did you learn about yourselves as a family that will continue to be important to you?

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