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# The socioemotional skills necessary to cope with COVID-19

Las habilidades socioemocionales necesarias para hacer frente a COVID-19

As habilidades socioemocionais necessárias ao enfrentamento da COVID-19

**DESCRIPTORS:** Mental Health; Pandemic; COVID-19.**DESCRIPTORES:** Salud Mental; Pandemia; COVID-19.**DESCRITORES:** Saúde Mental; Pandemia; COVID-19.**RECEIVED ON:** 05/20/2020 **APPROVED ON:** 05/20/2020**Bruno da Silva Lourenço**Nurse. Master's in Mental Health Nursing. Specialist in Nursing in Intensive Care by EEAN / UFRJ. Assistant Professor at Estácio de Sá University. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8977-1842>**Janaina Rosa Lourenço da Silva**Nurse. Specialist in Nursing in Intensive Care with Emphasis on the Adult and Elderly Client by UFF and in Neonatal Nursing by UGF. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8391-8471>**Niquêlen Bianca Miller França**Nurse. PhD in Social Psychology. Master's in Psychology from John Kennedy University. Assistant Professor at Estácio de Sá University. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9816-5465>**Teresinha Herdvig Praun**Obstetrical Nurse. Specialist in Pedagogy Applied to Health. Master's student in Education at FUNIBER. Assistant Professor at Estácio de Sá University. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0316-1876>**Kenia Oliveira Barbosa da Hora**Nurse. Master's student in Nursing from EEAN / UFRJ. Specialist in Intensive Care and Oncology. Assistant Professor at Estácio de Sá University. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2887-7408>**Lidiane Dias Reis**Nurse. Master's in Nursing. Specialist in Work Management and Health Education and Family Health. MBA in Health Management. Assistant Professor at Universidade Estácio de Sá. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6577-6545>**Cristiano Saldanha Silva**Nurse. Specialist in Medical Emergencies, Critical Patients and Surgical Center. Master's student in Family Health at Estácio de Sá. Assistant Professor at Estácio de Sá University. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3847-4925>

COVID-19 was initially detected in the city of Wuhan, capital of the province of Central China, in December 2019. Its name comes from the respiratory syndrome caused by the new coronavirus. The World Health Organization (WHO)

declared, on January 30, 2020, that the outbreak of the disease caused constitutes a Public Health Emergency of International Importance - the highest level of alert in the Organization, as provided for in the International Health Regulations. On March 11,

2020, COVID-19 was characterized by WHO as a pandemic. The ease of spread, the lack of knowledge about the virus and the exponential increase in the number of infections contributed to this<sup>(1)</sup>.

Up to May 18, 2020, 4,618,821 ca-

ses of COVID-19 and 311,847 deaths were confirmed worldwide<sup>(2)</sup>. According to the information currently available, the transmission route from one person to another of SARS-CoV-2 occurs through respiratory droplets (expelled during speech, coughing or sneezing) and also through direct contact with infected people or indirectly through contaminated hands, objects or surfaces, in a similar way that other respiratory pathogens spread. In addition, the possibility of transmitting the virus through aerosols (particles smaller and lighter than droplets) generated during direct manipulation of the airway, such as in orotracheal intubation or in other potentially aerosol-generating procedures, has been studied<sup>(3)</sup>.

There is no level of complexity common to all, with the most severe cases suffering from acute respiratory failure that requires intensive hospital care, with the use of mechanical ventilation, in some situation<sup>(4)</sup>. The most common symptoms of these infections may include respiratory manifestations (cough, difficulty breathing, flapping of the nasal wings, among others) and fever, which may not be present in some patients, such as children, the elderly, immunosuppressed or who are taking medication to decrease the fever<sup>(3)</sup>.

In order to reduce the impacts of the pandemic, reducing the peak incidence and the number of deaths, some countries have adopted measures such as the isolation of suspected cases, the closure of schools and universities, the social distance of the elderly and other risk groups, as well as quarantine for the entire population. It is estimated that these measures reach the “flattening of the curve” of infection, by favoring a lower peak of incidence in a given period, reducing the chances that the capacity of hospital beds, respirators and other supplies is insufficient in view of the increase demand, which could result in higher mortality<sup>(5)</sup>.

## MENTAL HEALTH IN THE PANDEMIC CONTEXT

Studies have suggested that the fear of being infected by a potentially fatal virus, of rapid spread, whose origins, nature and course are still little known, ends up affecting the psychological well-being of many people<sup>(6)</sup>.

In the event of pandemics, people's physical health and the fight against the pathogen are the primary focus of attention for managers and health professionals, so that the implications for mental health tend to be overlooked or underestimated. Therefore, discussing issues that guide the preservation of this mental component can be of great importance, so that psychic illness does not generate greater impacts than COVID-19 itself, generating greater losses in different segments of society<sup>(7)</sup>.

During a pandemic, it is expected that a good part of the population will be on alert, worried, confused, stressed and with a feeling of lack of control in the face of the uncertainties of the moment. With this, it can be predictable that a part of the same exposed population may suffer some psychopathological manifestation, if no specific care intervention is made for the reactions and symptoms manifested. The factors that influence the psychosocial impact are related to what surrounds the pandemic and the degree of vulnerability in which the person is at that moment. However, it is important to highlight that not all psychological and social problems presented can be qualified as diseases. Most will be classified as normal reactions to an abnormal situation.

COVID-19 impacts human beings in general and specific ways, due to a series of factors and determinants, starting with the need to adapt to the new biosafety protocols, the distrust in the management and coordination of biosafety protocols by authorities, the risk of being infected and infecting others,

the families that separate due to work activity in frontline situations to combat the new coronavirus, the mistaken perception that symptoms that may be linked to other health problems (such as headaches, sneezing and fever, for example) can be confused with COVID-19, the concern for their children to be without references for care and social exchanges, that is, without coexistence in schools, universities, meetings with friends and great distancing themselves from their socio-affective network (grandparents, friends, neighbors, etc.) and the risk of worsening the mental and physical health of children, people with disabilities or the elderly who have been parents or caregivers due to quarantine. Are sufficient reasons to impact mental health.

In a literature review on quarantine, it was identified that the negative effects of this measure include symptoms of post-traumatic stress, confusion and anger<sup>(8)</sup>. A study with the general population in China, including 1,210 participants in 194 cities, during the initial stage of the pandemic, demonstrated the impacts on mental health in the face of the new coronavirus pandemic. This study revealed moderate to severe symptoms of anxiety, depression and stress in 28.8%, 16.5% and 8.1% of respondents, respectively. In addition, 75.2% of respondents reported fear of their family members contracting the disease. Being a woman, student and having physical symptoms linked to COVID-19, or previous health problems, were factors significantly associated with higher levels of anxiety, depression and stress. In contrast, receiving accurate information about the local situation of the disease, forms of prevention and treatment, consisted of factors significantly associated with lower levels of anxiety, depression and stress<sup>(9)</sup>.

## SOCIOEMOTIONAL SKILLS IN PANDEMIA

As time passes and the virus advances, claiming millions of human lives,

in people far from family and friends, feelings of helplessness, insecurity, fear, anguish and anxiety begin to emerge in the face of this invisible threat. In this sense, socioemotional skills, described as a cognitive and behavioral structure capable of encompassing their ability to control their emotions in the face of situations and people, for a responsible life, freely and for a life with the realization of values, must be employed in everyone's daily life<sup>(10)</sup>.

Socio-emotional skills are a grouping of behaviors performed by a person in a socio-cultural context, so that they can expose their feelings, attitudes, desires, opinions in a way that is not offensive to the other members of the group, in

order to minimize conflicts and resolve problems with assertive conduct<sup>(11)</sup>. The context experienced by professionals on the front lines and by society is strongly impacted by the transformations that the world is experiencing at that moment. Performing these skills in balance can be an important ally in facing the challenges that arise.

In short, the development of socio-emotional skills for a fulfilled existence requires an epistemological basis for education to learn to be and learn to be in a globalized world, in favor of health promotion and the prevention of comorbidities, in a responsible manner with attitudes reframing and transformation to face COVID-19. Once the

person decides, through healthy behaviors and habits, if he can bear the setbacks of life in a balanced way in any socio-cultural situation<sup>(12)</sup>.

Thus, in the face of the phenomenon of the new coronavirus, which emerged from the global pandemic crisis, fear and insecurity have dominated everyone's feelings and sensations, mainly due to the lack of ability to overcome this issue and still not knowing for how long this situation will last. However, these circumstances, which are still immutable, will not be eternal, and can be used for a transformation into new opportunities to clarify and realize values, beliefs, relearning family life, caring for others and for oneself. ■

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