



National Institute of Mental Health
and Neuro Sciences
(Institute of National Importance)

**Psychosocial Support to
Persons with Disabilities
During COVID-19 Pandemic**



PSYCHOSOCIAL DIFFICULTIES THAT PERSONS WITH DISABILITY (PWD) MAY EXPERIENCE DURING THE PANDEMIC AND THE LOCKDOWN:

1. Anxiety, apprehensions, sadness and grief, irritability, sleep disturbances and withdrawal, which are common reactions to the pandemic among non-disabled persons, may be exaggerated in some, but not all, PWD. PWD may be more vulnerable to acquire infection; they may have difficulty accessing authentic information. These may contribute to higher levels of psychological distress

2. Other thoughts and feelings, which may be specific to PWD are:

- a. Thoughts of being a burden
- b. Fear about his/her caregiver falling sick
- c. Fear that they may be further marginalized during rationing of supplies or care,
- d. Sadness regarding feeling dependent on caregivers especially the elderly
- e. Thoughts of being worthless, as people do not look up to them or expect them to contribute during difficult times,
- f. Thoughts of being left out of decision-making process
- g. Worries about financial security
- h. Worries about job security when things start to resume

3. PWD face substantial stigma during normal days. Stigma may be compounded if they acquire corona virus infection. Over and above what has been written above, this may cause distress among PWD.

4.Many individuals with severe disability may be spending their time out of their houses in different rehabilitation centers. Due to the lockdown, this may not be happening, and this may cause distress among PWD and their caregivers; interpersonal difficulties between them in this context may further add to their distress.

HOW A PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT PROVIDER (COUNSELOR) MAY HELP: HE/SHE SHOULD:

- 1.Use techniques of active listening (in accessible formats, particularly for those with hearing impairment) to convey a message that he/she is interested in understanding the distress of the person
- 2.Acknowledge the distress and show empathy.
- 3.Provide general mental health advice, which is common to persons without disabilities – these may be derived from programmes which are being run for the general public
- 4.Provide specific advice which is unique to the PWD in terms of his/her disability as well as context
- 5.Refer them to support groups if they exist and are accessible during the lockdown period

ADVICE TO PWD (TO BE PUBLICIZED IN ACCESSIBLE FORMATS)

- 1.Strictly adhere to the WHO-recommended hand hygiene measures. Take care not to touch eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands
- 2.Strictly adhere to Govt initiated lockdown

measures and social distancing recommendations. To the utmost extent, remain at home, avoid public gatherings or crowded spaces even at home.

3.If you have respiratory illness, hypertension, diabetes or any other chronic medical condition along with the impairment, restrict yourself to a small part of the house and limit contact only to 1 health family member.

4.Establish a multilayered support system of neighbors and well-wishers if you are living alone. Seek their assistance in accessing health care services. Keep local emergency helpline numbers with you.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE SYSTEM:

1.GENERAL TO ALL DISABILITIES:

a.All plans and programmes should be inclusive, with specific attention to the needs of and challenges faced by PWD. E.g.,

i.Public communication and education materials should be accessible to PWD with different challenges

ii.Quarantine facilities should be cognizant about challenges faced by PWD

iii.Helplines should be accessible to persons with different disabilities

2.SPECIFIC:

a.Developmental disabilities:

i.Specific efforts should be taken to communicate the significance of the pandemic and measures to

prevent infection

ii. Specific activities should be planned to address boredom and disruption in daily routines

iii. Mental healthcare helplines which address specific needs of PWDD/PWID may be set up

b. Psychosocial disabilities (disability due to mental illness):

i. Distress, anxiety and panic is likely to be higher in them. Helplines to address these should be set up

ii. Measures should be taken to ensure continuity of medications in those who need them

C. HEARING IMPAIRMENT:

i. Masks make routine communication difficult. Alternatives including transparent masks should be considered by people communicating with PWHI

ii. Face-to-face communication may be reduced due to risk of infection – text-based communication should be preferred

iii. All mass communication should be made accessible for PWHI

D. VISUAL IMPAIRMENT:

i. As they may rely a lot on touch-based activities, measures of hand-hygiene should be facilitated specifically for them

ii. Specific stress should be given to sanitize assistive devices used by them

iii. The onus of social distancing should be on

others, as PWVI cannot do that on his/her own.

E.LOCOMOTOR IMPAIRMENT:

i.Accessible hand-hygiene facilities should be provided: accessible wash basins and/or liberal supply of hand-sanitizers

ii.Specific attentions should be given to sanitize assistive devices including canes, crutches, wheelchairs, handrails, particularly in public spaces

F.BLOOD DISORDERS AND NEUROLOGICAL DISORDERS:

Extra support should be given by caregivers in accessing health services. Specific measures to prevent infection with coronavirus should be taken, as they may be more at-risk population.

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IN CASE YOU NEED ANY HELP
Please contact COVID -19 Psycho social
toll free helpline at 080-46110007
or consult your doctor or a
mental health professional