

“Rainbow in the Deluge” – A Model to Teach Coping during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Non-Specialist Primary Care Settings”

The model consists of two short acronyms – ‘DELUGE’, which describes the far-reaching ways in which the pandemic has impacted lives in general and ‘RAINBOW’, which provides a broad framework within which to consider simple, locally-relevant strategies to cope better. The model is not prescriptive in terms of specific interventions but seeks to provide broad headings under which culturally appropriate and locally relevant specific strategies could be incorporated. It seeks to be comprehensive yet simple enough for non-specialists to use in a variety of settings and has been used in online training sessions with various groups including medical staff involved in COVID-19 work, community health teams, non-medical volunteers of organizations and nonprofits in both urban and rural settings, as well as youth groups.

DELUGE: How has this pandemic affected our lives?

D – Death and Disease

This refers not only to the COVID-19-related infections and deaths, but also the terrible burden of mental illness and chronic diseases aggravated by the pandemic. Mental illnesses and chronic diseases were often neglected by healthcare services during the height of the various waves of the pandemic. Access to non-COVID-19 healthcare services was often limited by travel restrictions, and available resources were often diverted to COVID-19 work.

E – Emotions all over the place

A great variety of emotions are experienced by us all in uncertain times like these—including anxiety, fear, sadness, anger, guilt and many more. We often find it difficult to channelize these appropriately, resulting in problems in our relationships, work, social life, and general well-being.

L – Lifestyle changes in every aspect of our life

The pandemic has resulted in sweeping lifestyle changes in our lives, from social distancing and hygiene measures to reduced travel and changes in work / education. No sphere of life has remained untouched, and many of these changes will likely outlast the pandemic. Not all the changes have been negative. Indeed, many have been quite positive – increased family time, reductions in unnecessary travel, and the expansion of the huge potentials of online and blended learning. However, changes are still stressful, and adapting to these remains challenging.

U – Understanding of self is shaken

New demands and stressors have resulted in a devaluation of the sense of self and purpose in life. Many people had struggled with self-esteem and identity issues before the pandemic as well, but these issues have been greatly accentuated now. For example, people who are unable to catch up with new technical skills needed to deal with new working conditions will face even more challenges to their self-esteem and self-image.

G – Grappling with new demands

Adjusting to the new skills and requirements at work and home due to the pandemic has caused stress. For example, the closure of many schools and the move to exclusively online teaching of children put a greater pressure on working parents to

make arrangements for their children's supervision and care, much of which was taken care of in schools before the pandemic. Similarly, several industries had to drastically alter their style of work, leading to new demands on the management and the work force.

E – End of the world as we know it

The world after the pandemic will never be exactly as it was before 2019; some changes will continue beyond it and will require constant readjustment.

RAINBOW: *What can we do to cope better and look ahead beyond?*

R – Rest, Reflect and Renew

- Use the time to pause and look back on life before the pandemic and how we can do things differently; what was good, and what can we do better.
- Practice good sleep hygiene techniques to aid in sleep.
- Remember that 'rest' is not the same as 'sleep'; it includes refreshing and renewing activities while awake as well. Make adequate time for exercise and leisure as well.

A – Accept and Adapt

The pandemic has resulted in several new realities – both challenges and opportunities. It is important to accept the new situations as inevitable changes and avoid constantly wishing for the old situation to return. This is the strategy to deal with the 'L' and 'G' of the 'DELUGE'. Some examples of this could include:

- Using the opportunity to spend more time with family members to develop relationships

- Using the opportunities provided by increased use of videoconferencing and other online platforms to enhance learning opportunities and networking
- Using the opportunity provided by the pandemic to promote awareness of the importance of health and hygiene

I – Identify ourselves as rooted in our worldview

Search for 'meaning' during a crisis is a deeply personal and urgent need. Remember to look for our larger purpose in life and find 'meaning' in our life story. When there is no 'meaning', our sense of self is shattered (the 'U' of the 'DELUGE'). Our worldview provides the lens through which we view all our experiences. When our identity is firmly rooted in our worldview, our experiences are meaningful. This enhances our sense of self and our self-esteem.

N – Normalize emotions

A disruptive event like the pandemic will cause strong emotional reactions. Recognize that in such a context it is perfectly normal to experience distressing emotions (the first 'E' in the 'DELUGE') such as fear, sadness, anger, and guilt. Each of these emotions performs a specific function in our life. For example, anger alerts one to perceived injustice, and fear alerts one to perceived danger. Sadness allows us to recognize and grieve loss, while guilt alerts us to perceived wrongs we have done. Sometimes, they are inappropriately triggered, out of proportion to their triggers, or cause a major disruption in relationships, work or functioning. It is only at such times that they may require specific additional strategies or help (refer the 'O' of the 'RAINBOW' below).

B – Be good stewards of time

Bear in mind that time is limited; establish a regular routine to help us stabilize ourselves during these difficult times. The biggest challenge is often to prioritize what is important and urgent, and what is not. Prioritization will differ from person to person based on the context, but it is essential to establish a regular routine that works well.

O – Open up and seek help

The greatest barrier in finding help is often our own reluctance to seek it. When distress is overwhelming, it is important to seek help from available and culturally acceptable resources to improve coping. In many low resource settings, mental health professionals may not always be available. Non-specialists like religious workers, social workers, nurses, general practitioners, and many others can function as first points of contact in such settings.

W – Work-family balance

Neither should take precedence over the other, as far as possible. This is challenging, and the ideal balance will differ according to one's context. However, remembering that both are important will help to prioritize our time and our tasks.