

## **UAE Government Launches a Mental Wellbeing Campaign to Maintain Mental Health Amidst Covid19 Crisis**

Infectious disease outbreaks, like the current Coronavirus (COVID-19), can be scary and can affect our mental health. Fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in adults and children. Stress during such an outbreak can include worrying about your own health and the health of one's loved ones, changes in sleep or eating patterns, difficulty sleeping or concentrating, worsening of chronic health problems and increased use of harmful and addictive substances. Moreover, a change in working and living dynamics which has accompanied the social distancing element of the containment strategy -which many governments have adopted- will also have an impact on mental health.

To ensure that UAE citizens and residents maintain good mental health in these trying times, the UAE government has launched a campaign with various interventions by experts. The campaign itself is managed in a virtual remote setting, and leverages technology to offer virtual support groups, expert advice sessions, and expert consultations. The campaign went live on social media under the National Program for Happiness and Wellbeing in the UAE at the end of March 2020. The aim of the campaign is to promote good mental health, embrace positive thinking as a core value, build resilience and coping skills, and enhance the quality of bonding and social relations within families and society at large. The campaign also encourages the adoption and focus on quality of life in learning and work environments, and promotes the values of giving, cooperation, solidarity and community service.

The three initiatives under this campaign are (i) a series of targeted educational and mental health videos in the light of the Corona Virus epidemic. These videos have advice and tips from leading experts (ii) socio-psychological support service to different groups through Instagram live (live consultations), and (iii) virtual support groups using Microsoft Teams for diverse societal groups. The target groups for this campaign include children, parents, students traveling back to the UAE, elderly citizens and their caregivers, working mothers and housewives, people of determination and their families, people with chronic illnesses, those who have contracted Covid19 and their families, healthcare personnel (especially frontline workers), and all the people working remotely.

The campaign focuses on how to enable UAE citizens and residents to adjust to the new situation and cope in these stressful times without causing excessive anxiety, panic and phobia, and equip them with the skills to remain positive and empathize with others.

To ensure a holistic approach, the National Program for Happiness and Wellbeing has partnered with experts in mental health and wellbeing from the public and private sector in the country to deliver these sessions. Partners come from various organizations including the Ministry of Education, Community Development Authority (local government), Al Jalila Hospital (specialized Children's Hospital), Dubai Health Authority, Dubai Police, UAE University, among others.