

NARRATIVE BASED WORKSHOP "MY RESILIENCE STORY"

GUIDELINES AND PILOT RESULTS



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GUIDELINES AND STRUCTURE FOR WORKSHOP

MY RESILIENCE STORY



The main aim of the workshop is to develop and test with representatives from the different target groups a format for the implementation of a narrative based workshop "MY RESILIENCE STORY", where participants will be prompted to elicit reflective stories about moments of daily experience which have challenged them deeply in the time of COVID-19 and how they have responded to these challenges in a resilient way.

OBJECTIVES

- Know more about the workshop;
- Getting to know each other;
- Create a climate of trust;
- Becoming aware of own experience, which have challenged them in the time of COVID-19;
- Becoming aware of how they have responded to these challenges;
- Identify the skills they were able to put in practice to adjust to the difficulties they were encountering.

TARGET GROUP

As most exposed to suffer severe distress or to risk social isolation as effect of the pandemic, the main target groups are:

- Older (65+)
- Disabled people
- People with mental health issues
- Health care professionals
- Ukranian refugees
- Family caregivers

SPECIFIC LEARNING OUTCOMES

- self-esteem;
- self-confidence;
- internal locus of control;
- the capacity to respond to stressful events and thrive.

TRAINERS

Psycho-social professionals will work in team with facilitators:

1. Facilitators will input to the workshop in terms of transferring basic creative-writing skills
2. Psycho-educational professionals will help participants in eliciting connections between their experiences and resilience-related skills.

MATERIALS

White sheets, pens, markers, billboard (or something to write on), post-it.

Online: PCs, Smartphones, Tablets, Zoom (or another web platform), etc.

DURATION

60 - 180 minutes

INTRODUCTION ACTIVITIES

10 MINUTES

- Trainers presents themselves and introduce participants to the workshops (aims, practical aspects, the importance of sharing this experience within the other elderly people);
- Participants presentations;
- Ice-breaker to help participants to feel at ease and start to get to know each other.

Note: the intro activity can be adapted to different contexts and the ice-breaker activity can be freely selected.

This first phase aims to break the ice and to help the participants and facilitators get to know each other, to foster a positive group climate and bring out the motivation of the participants to participate.

MAIN ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1 – COLLECTION OF MOTIVATIONS, EXPECTATIONS AND FEARS ABOUT WORKSHOP

5 MINUTES

Facilitator asks participants what their motivations, expectations and fears are about the workshop.

What do they expect to do? To talk about? What and how would they like to do it?

Facilitator write down their answers or can use post-its'



ACTIVITY 2 – TELL ME YOUR STORY

30-90 MINUTES

Trainers make a brief introduction about challenges during COVID 19 and pandemic and gave some questions for participants:

How do participants live during this time?

How do they feel?

What do they do?

How they personally experienced the Covid19 period?

What difficulties and resources they found to cope with it?

What did they think the economic and social consequences of the Covid19 period were and who were the most affected by the pandemic?

What were the solidarity responses and support initiatives they experienced or participated in?

Facilitators offer to participants' creative method to express themselves and tell their story (art therapy, collage, drama, creative writing, etc.)

Participants can write their stories on their own. After explaining the construction of a story in a simple and accessible manner, some writing exercises can be proposed to get over participants' initial block and to encourage the telling of an emotion.

Moments of sharing and discussion in groups can be proposed, to stimulate memories, participation and understanding of the moments experienced during the pandemic period. The facilitators can then invite them to choose one episode that would be the theme of their personal story.

Note: it's possible to use one's own methods, based on specific experience, national context and participants needs.



ACTIVITY 3 – MY RESILIENCE-RELATED SKILL

30 MINUTES

This activity aims to let people reflect on and become aware of their own experiences and resilience-related skills.

Trainer asks participants to explain their story (painting, drama, video, write text, etc.) from 1 activity.

Proposed methods: individual conversation, group discussions.

Trainers support participants in promoting self-expression, in analyzing what they decide to mention and to leave-out in their stories and ultimately to identify the skills they were able to put in practice to adjust to the difficulties they were encountering. Trainers will help participants in eliciting connections between their experiences and resilience-related skills.

Narrative story itself and reflections upon the narrative which facilitates understanding and generates new knowledge in terms of creative responses to crisis and problem solving, together with a stronger self-esteem.

Note: specific implementation factors of the activity such as time, content, method and materials may be adapted in each national context



FINAL ACTIVITY

5 MINUTES

CONCLUSIONS, QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACKS

Facilitators recall what was done during the session and what emerged. They ask if participants have questions and ask for individual feedback about the workshop (it can also be a single word). Feedback can be done in creative ways, such as “Pizza” “sli.do”, etc.

EVALUATION

Please answer the following questions by using the scale 1-5, where

1 = very dissatisfied, 2 = dissatisfied, 3 = neutral, 4 = satisfied, 5 = very satisfied

1. How satisfied were you with the workshop?
1 2 3 4 5 |
2. How satisfied were you the workshop leaders and environment created?
1 2 3 4 5
3. How satisfied were you with the activities of the workshop?
1 2 3 4 5
4. What activity of the workshop did you enjoy more?

5. Why?

6. Was there any activity of the workshop that challenged you or enjoyed less?

7. If yes, why did that happen?

8. Did the workshop help you in processing your experience?

9. Did the workshop help to improve your wellbeing?

10. Did you learn new skills to tell your story? If yes, which ones?

11. Was the duration of the workshop adequate for your needs?

12. Did you appreciate and find useful the creative methods proposed to tell your story?

13. Would you recommend participation in the workshop to other people??
Yes No
14. General comments

STORIES FROM PARTICIPANTS IN PILOT

**The names of the characters in the story
have been changed for anonymity**



NIJOLĖ

ILLNESS EXPERIENCES AND CONSEQUENCES



Nijolė (64 years old) lived in a small house near the city. The woman is a pensioner, so most of her time she spent walking in the park, shopping, attending church and in the garden beside her house. The woman's daughter is living in the same city, her son is living in Norway with his family.

The story happened in November 2020. One evening her daughter came to see her and she realized that Nijolė wasn't feeling well: she was all pale, complaining of dizziness, stomach ache, nausea. The daughter immediately called the ambulance, which brought Nijolė to one of the hospitals in Klaipėda. (Nijolė said that she doesn't remember feeling really bad, as she said : "maybe I felt a little weird").

A couple of hours later, her daughter received a call from the hospital and learned that Nijolė had undergone appendicitis surgery. The daughter was immediately warned that it is not possible to visit Nijolė, because she has also been diagnosed with the COVID-19 virus. Her daughter mourned that she couldn't be with her mom. She knew that the presence of relatives during such a period gives strength.

Nijolė herself remembers the period after the surgery "like in a dream": "In the beginning I didn't understand anything, but when the doctors told me what happened, anxiety and fear grew more and more". When the daughter found out that no one could visit her mom, a feeling of loneliness and hopelessness overwhelmed her. There was a strong anxiety due to the identified coronavirus. She didn't know how it will affect mom's health and when she will be able to see her relatives. Worried about not knowing how long it will last.

Even though she didn't feel the symptoms of the coronavirus at the beginning, blood pressure disorders and tremor appeared. Anxiety could also cause it. After the coronavirus isolation period had passed, she got psychological help and finally Nijolė could see her family.



SKILLS TO ADJUST TO THE DIFFICULTIES

Abilities to use technologies.

The woman had previously taken courses at the library, therefore, it was not difficult for her to call through virtual programs and see her family that way. At first she used it only for conversations, later started watching movies and lectures on the internet.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

Loneliness

Nijolé lived alone, but she had social contacts before the pandemic. Her contacts with people were visits from her daughter and her family (once a week), trips to the store and the church. When the world was hit by the pandemic, when she lost everything, she was oppressed by the feeling of loneliness.

Uncertainty

High levels of anxiety indicate uncertainty about the future. That is fully understandable, because she can't control the pandemic and is forced to wait when the people who are responsible will take action.

RESILIENCE RELATED SKILLS

The help of a mental health professionals

Psychological help was suggested to Nijolé when she was in the hospital. She felt relief and better well-being after the interviews, the psychologist taught her techniques for overcoming stress and meditation. After leaving the hospital, she went to a mental health center, where she was referred for help. The daughter's positive experience also encouraged her to turn to specialists. Even before the pandemic, Nijolé's daughter used the help of a private therapist and the mother herself saw the good effect on her daughter, so she was not afraid to seek help herself.

Hobby

During the pandemic, Nijolé felt the difficulties of performing leisure activities, which arose due to quarantine restrictions. Before the start of the pandemic, in her free time she liked to go to church, the park, seniors' meetings, and the choir. During the pandemic, only the garden remained. As a result, emotional health has deteriorated significantly. Encouraged by a psychologist, the woman tried to revive her old favorite but forgotten activities. In her free time at home, she started watching TV (except for the scary news), cross-stitching and knitting.

FACILITATORS' COMMENTS

Changing the world and its processes is difficult, so it is important to learn to live meaningfully even in a constant state of uncertainty. The last few years have shown that the world is not simple, not easy to understand and predict, and that everything will not necessarily end happily. The fear of uncertainty that emerged during the pandemic forced many to feel extremely unpleasant feelings: fear, anxiety, lack of control of emotions due to tension. When we spend a large amount of time in a state of anxiety, it inevitably affects our health. Therefore, the ability to learn to live with uncertainty has become a very relevant skill.

We can point out a couple of helpful recommendations that helped Nijolé survive the pandemic period:

Taking care of yourself (giving yourself attention). It is important to take care of yourself, pay attention to your mental health and use a positive coping with stress, like being in nature, physical activities, music, hobbies. Something that does not harm health and helps to rest and recover is useful.

Getting help from mental health professionals.

It is important to understand that high nervousness or anxiety, constant sadness or other long-term reactions to a stressful situation can negatively affect health, interpersonal relationships, and the overall quality of life. Therefore, it is important not only to respond to emotional difficulties, but also not to be afraid to use the services of mental health professionals when needed.

Of course, it is very good when a person with mental health problems can get help in their environment, in the community, with as little "falling out" of their normal life as possible. Unfortunately, the pandemic has shown that support from loved ones may be unavailable or insufficient.

Therefore, residents experiencing stress and anxiety caused by the coronavirus pandemic and experiencing other difficult life situations can contact the Public Health Offices. In order to receive this free psychological help, you do not need a special referral from a doctor, you just need to call the nearest Public Health office, register and arrive at the agreed time or receive the service remotely.

GENOVAITÉ



LOSS DURING A PANDEMIC

The story happened in May 2020.

Genovaitė (67 years old) lived peacefully with her husband Tadas (68 years old) until the pandemic. The husband and wife no longer worked, so they quietly passed the old age pension period. Played sports, actively participated in cultural life. Both had some problems related to health, chronic diseases, but severe health ailments did not affect their lives.

In the spring of 2020, a worldwide pandemic struck and confined them to their homes. The elderly couple, fearing for their lives, took extreme care about themselves and had little contact with other people. The couple's children live abroad, and the pandemic kept everyone at home.

One morning Genovaitė woke up after breakfast and saw that her husband was not feeling well. He complained of weakness, heart failure. The woman immediately called an ambulance. When the ambulance arrived, they were very careful, because it was the very beginning of the pandemic. They measured the temperature, it took some time to take him to the hospital and of course the woman was not allowed to ride with him. A couple of hours later, the woman received a call from the hospital saying that the man had died. The man did not have the COVID-19 virus, according to doctors' conclusions, Tadas died of a heart stroke.

The woman lived through a real nightmare, she felt very angry with the doctors that, due to the restrictions of the pandemic, they did not start reviving the man quickly enough. Grief and pain due to the loss of a loved one, uncertainty, due to the funeral. It was not clear whether it would be possible to bury, how and when to do it. The situation was complicated by the fact that the children couldn't come to support and say goodbye to their father.

SKILLS TO ADJUST TO THE DIFFICULTIES

A sense of duty

Although the woman went through anxiety very painfully, the understanding that anger and despair, due to the situation that happened and is still happening, will not help her survive. First, she felt obliged to bury her husband and continue to survive on her own for the sake of the children, so that the pandemic would not take away both of their parents. "Knowing how to live means knowing how to die, because death is part of life," she says.

Responsibility and experience

The woman had already experienced a loss during her life, she buried her parents and sister. Therefore, she knew that after the sadness (crying) period, it is very important to return to her favorite activities. Although she could not attend theaters, concerts and other cultural events during the pandemic, she started doing it "online". Got involved again in listening to music, watching movies.

She felt a responsibility towards her husband to continue their activities that they had together, all of which enabled the meaning of continuing to live

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

Loneliness

Genovaité was left completely alone. Because before that they did everything together. She and her husband were best friends and supported each other. Suddenly left alone, she could not bear the feeling of loneliness. The children lived abroad, so there were no opportunities for them to come or visit them either.

Fatigue

The woman felt completely powerless to even get out of bed. He was tired, he was in shock from the loss, he didn't have the physical strength to organize a funeral or talk to the authorities. All the household chores and farm work were left to her alone. They used to do everything together, but now all the responsibilities are left on her shoulders alone.

And although she felt a great sense of loneliness, she no longer had the strength to communicate with her children and relatives by phone (or video calls).

RESILIENCE RELATED SKILLS

Hope

The woman rethought her whole life and her environment. For a long time, she searched for the meaning of what is worth continuing to strive for, regaining strength and what is the meaning of life. The loss made her appreciate the remaining time, cherish the people around her. The woman decided that she had to do everything to see her children and grandchildren after the pandemic was over.

Started conversations with loved ones online by doing something together, cooking dinner, reading books to grandchildren or sharing photos, things that evoked pleasant memories and gave hope.

FACILITATORS' COMMENTS

On average, mourning lasts up to 2 years, sometimes longer. Psychological literature states that healthy mourning lasts up to 1 year. During this time, a person goes through five stages - in order, but not necessarily - denial, anger, bargaining, depression and reconciliation.

It is healthy and necessary to go through all stages, it is unhealthy to stay in any one stage for too long. Even denial, non-recognition of loss plays an important role in this chain, protecting the soul from anxiety, sharp sensations and blows of fate. Mourning can be varied, but it does not have to last and affect a person's life. The dead must be remembered, but he must allow the living to live his life

Usually, people survive a naturally occurring loss a little easier, more reconciled with it, than one that occurs unexpectedly - due to illness, car accidents and other reasons. And what do the people who experienced the loss feel during the pandemic? The global pandemic and related quarantine restrictions have made mourning difficult. During this period, bereaved people did not have the opportunity to say goodbye, see, touch, and often come to see off the deceased for the last time, which had a strong psychological effect.

In the case of Genovaitè, it is very good that Genovaitè allowed herself to be sad, did not deny her pain and only then found the strength for her activities. After experiencing a loss, you must allow yourself to cry, grieve, talk about the loss and the pain of the loss. The less we resist the emotions of pain and sadness, the more we become emotionally "permeable", which means that the accumulated feelings are released and the mourning is experienced faster, easier. Often, people who have experienced a loss and gone through mourning are able to look at life, themselves and their environment in a different way: to choose what is meaningful and what is not, to change their thinking, to appreciate time, to appreciate the people around them.

ANTANAS

JOB LOSS



In 2020 Antanas was 65 years old, but he was still working as a car technician, in one of the car services. Antanas loved cars all his life, it was his work and passion. The man didn't have much free time, all he liked was fixing cars and spending evenings and weekends with his wife. His daughter has already created her own family, Antanas had 3 grandchildren. When the pandemic hit in the spring, Antanas was offered retirement as an employee in the risk group, for his safety (the man was already retired, but still working). Antanas himself was very scared of the possibility of getting infected by Covid-19 virus, so at first he thought that it would be better to stay at home and go on a well-deserved rest. For the first few weeks, the man found something to do. The pandemic forced them to spend more time in front of the TV, do long forgotten household chores, and spend more time with his wife. The man dreamed all his life after retirement to travel more. As the pandemic continued for weeks and months, the man was visited by more and more negative thoughts, the mood of anxiety was replaced by a feeling of hopelessness and apathy. The man no longer saw the point in any activities, and there weren't many of them. Antanas brought alcohol more and more often in the evenings and began to increase alcohol amounts. The man was never abstinent, but he always had moderation and drank alcohol only on holidays. Conflicts with the wife became more frequent, because the wife objected to the husband's frequent alcohol consumption. Antanas felt misunderstood, lonely and not needed by anyone, unappreciated. The daughter's attempts to help also ended in conflicts. Antanas, who has worked all his life and therefore felt unappreciated, suddenly did not know how to feel the role of a senior. Over time, he realized that this way of life does not help him and he began to look for other activities, he accepted the help of his wife and daughter in searching for a place where he could feel useful. He started to go for walks more often, exercise at home, started taking care of the garden.



SKILLS TO ADJUST TO THE DIFFICULTIES

Construction and repair skills

Antanas was a very hardworking person. He always liked to repair not only cars, but also repaired the apartment himself, helped friends or his daughter's family in the household. He was well versed in the intricacies of construction, and had accumulated considerable knowledge about mechanics and construction materials.

Planning skills

When the man started to feel emotional emptiness and wanted to solve it, creating an agenda helped. He was always used to planning his days because work required it. After retirement and the pandemic hit, there was a lot of free time and there was no need to rush anywhere, the lack of an agenda annoyed the man quite a bit. The meaning came from creating a clear daily plan: he clearly set the time when he would clean up at home, when he would engage in physical activity, when he would engage in repair work and he discussed with his wife where he could help her more.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

A sense of meaninglessness

The negative feelings intensified because Antanas retired unexpectedly, against his will. For a large part of his life, Antanas felt needed only because of his work. He felt like an experienced, good worker. He always gave advice and helped when he felt needed.

Lack of stress management skills

Antanas lived a quiet, sedentary life all his life. Work was also a hobby for him, a source of livelihood and a tool for relaxation. Therefore, after losing his job, the man began to relieve stress with alcohol.

RESILIENCE RELATED SKILLS

Family support and acceptance

Although in the beginning the man closed himself off and withdrew from his wife and the entire family, over time he accepted their help. He understood that he could be needed not only for his work, but also for other knowledge. He started to enjoy his free time with his wife, discovered walks together, joint activities.

Making sense of yourself

Antanas found the need for self-evaluation during construction in the garden shed. He built the greenhouse that his wife had wanted for so long and repaired the old garden house. Everyone was happy with his work, so the man felt significant and useful again.

FACILITATORS' COMMENTS

Aging involves various life changes, one of which is retirement. How an elderly person will be able to adapt to a new life situation, the loss of the role of an employee, depends on many factors: individual characteristics of the person, stress coping skills and adaptation abilities, previous life experiences, physical and thinking functioning, environment. Thus, even in similar life circumstances, some elderly people adapt successfully, while others face difficulties. On the one hand, retirement is a life event that can negatively affect a person's psychological well-being, i.e. cause stress, feelings of helplessness and inadequacy, disappointment, sadness, apathy, desire to isolate, anxiety about the future.

When a person retires, his daily schedule, goals and work changes. The activity is probably enough for both a senior citizen and any resident in our country, but what kinds of activity can a retired person replace work with during a pandemic? When no human contact is possible?

Older people who are lonely, who do not receive emotional support and have a harder time adapting to life changes. As in Antanas' situation, family and improving personal relations with his wife helped a lot. Strong personal relationships are essential to human health and well-being. Research has proven that strong relationships contribute to a long, healthy and happy life. Conversely, the absence of personal relationships can lead to health risks. What is communication for a person? The answer to this question is simple: because people can satisfy their most important needs through communication. It is very important, as in every age, in old age retirement to find ways to satisfy human needs: the need for togetherness, security, the need for self-assertion (when a person seeks to find his place in society), the need for self-esteem (the need of a person not to be humiliated and despised by others).

Most older people are able to successfully adapt to age-related changes. Elderly people begin to look for new opportunities to apply existing abilities and competences, or develop new ones. Antanas' example perfectly showed how it is possible to apply one's existing skills in new activities, to feel meaning and success in them.

ALEKSEJUS

ANXIETY ABOUT WAR



The story happened in 2022. in February.

Aleksej is a 67-year-old man with Lithuanian citizenship. Living in Lithuania for 45 years. Although Alexey was born in Ukraine, he came to Lithuania at the age of 20, got a higher education, created a family here, worked all year at his favorite job as an engineer and lived happily all these years.

In 2022 In the spring, he received a call from his brother in Crimea. The brother called him from the basement. The man heard his brother running, breathing hard, explosions thundering around. Alexey's brother said that he did not know if he would survive.

Alexej listened to him, tears running in streams, because he realized it could be words of goodbye. People, who were together, wished for the best and offered medicine. The man said that he has never forgotten this experience and hopes that he will not go through it again. Although Alexej comes from those regions and has experienced war in his life, he was not morally prepared for this war. Before the war, the man communicated with relatives living in Ukraine, and everyone imagined that a difficult situation was ahead, but they really did not expect that it would be so terrible. They did not expect that entire blocks of residential houses would be destroyed, schools and hospitals would be destroyed, and civilians would be killed. This, of course, was a real shock.

What followed was an effort to get their loved ones out of the war zone, but they chose to stay in their homeland, only moving to a safer area. Every day, Alexei contacted the rest, his brother and his family, and every day he felt anxious if they did not pick up the phone.

As the war progressed, Alexej felt strong anxiety, tension, and senselessness. Fear for the safety and future of others increased, survival instincts became stronger. It was difficult for the man to continue living confidently in his usual routine. The man kept looking for ways to help his relatives and all his compatriots. His own health deteriorated due to anxiety, he went to the doctor.



SKILLS TO ADJUST TO THE DIFFICULTIES

A supportive relationship

Alexey's family consisted of his wife and grown-up children who lived nearby. Everyone shared their experiences and worries together. They supported each other, tried to help as much as possible. During the crisis period, the personal resources he had until then were no longer enough for Alexey to deal with complex stressful events and experiences, the man lost his sense of security and control, so the support of relatives became extremely important at such a time.

Faith

Above all, Alexej tried not to let fear take over him. The man had believed in God all his life and at this moment his faith supported him. He turned to God in prayers, especially asking for help from his relatives. They also asked for help in restoring a just peace on the land of Ukraine. He especially prayed for those who defend Ukraine, who in those days are an example of self-sacrifice and devoted service to their nation.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

Anxiety

Constantly experiencing chronic stress caused by multiple impact crisis led to feelings of frustration, isolation, and helplessness. Due to stress, sleep and nutrition suffered, and heart problems got worse. Alexej was no longer able to deal with his emotions, he became irritable, he was unable to concentrate, and he was constantly plagued by anxious thoughts.

Insomnia

Although it may seem as if Alexey has become accustomed to bad news and threats, in fact, the stress has been building up and reacting to new stress (bad news) all over again - not from recovery, but from a certain level of persistent stress already present. This is how chronic stress appeared, because stress hormones were constantly circulating in the body. In the long run, this posed a risk to the man's mental health, with long-term anxiety also contributing to insomnia.

RESILIENCE RELATED SKILLS

The help of a psychotherapist

The man was even angry at the beginning when his daughter suggested that he should see a therapist. He felt that seeking help for insomnia when his family was in immediate danger would be selfish and a waste of money. But eventually, realizing that his problems were only getting worse and could cause even bigger problems, he decided to give it a try.

Volunteering

When the war started, Alexej immediately planned to drop everything and go to his homeland to help the family members who remained there. However, his family did not allow it. Because Alexey is no longer in good health, and because of his age, no organization accepted him. At first, the man was angry and felt powerless to help. However, later, as more and more organizations appeared which helped the victims of the war and supported the Ukrainian population, Alexsej strongly contributed to their activities, devoting all his time.

FACILITATORS' COMMENTS

Both the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing war in Ukraine are multi-impact crises. For example, in the case of Alexei, when it comes to the war, the first impact was the shocking news of the start of the war. The second is the news that close and familiar people are being bombed in the basement of the city. During a military conflict, it is more difficult for older people to adapt, it is not easy to accept changes, and when those changes are a war, the emotions experienced, such as fear, anxiety and hopelessness, are even very understandable. It is very normal and human to take care of your own safety, the safety of your family and loved ones. It is very normal to leave a place where it is dangerous. Ukrainians who are now creating a life in foreign countries should not think that living abroad when there is a war at home is a shameful act.

A person can be in a crisis situation for a certain time. Later, either adaptation to the existing reality or a mental health disorder occurs. The way of responding to a crisis depends on a person's age, existing mental disorders, belonging to vulnerable groups in society (for example, if a person has already experienced a crisis event, suffers from serious illnesses).

It is normal to feel sharp emotions in a crisis situation, the experiences become less vivid over time, but the psychologist advises to monitor your body. If you start to feel discomfort, atypical body reactions and symptoms appear, it means that the experienced negative charge has left its mark and we need to change something.

It is good that Alexei was not afraid to seek help from a therapist, he overcame his shame and understood the need for it.

Lately, many members of the society say that they are going through a psychological crisis. This has long-term health consequences: the risk of developing depression increases, the prevalence of anxiety disorders increases, and more and more people begin to use alcohol and psychotropic substances. Reduced work capacity, conflicts with others, indifference, passivity can also be the consequences of a psychological crisis. These effects should not be considered as the norm. Prolonged crisis can have stronger effects on our psyche. The help of a psychotherapist or psychologist is sufficient when the crisis lasts up to two months, and if it lasts longer, sometimes you may have to turn to psychiatrists.

JONAS

LONELINESS DURING PANDEMIC



Jonas, 67 years old, senior citizen, widower. Previously worked as a physics teacher for 40 years. In October 2021, he fell ill with the covid-19 virus.

The illness started at the end of October with a sore throat. However, after a few days, his muscles started to ache, his sleep was disturbed - only managed to sleep for a few hours, and after a few days, insomnia took over his body. A non-stop headache appeared, the bottoms of the eyes began to hurt.

Soon the man found out that his close friend, whom he had recently met, had fallen ill with the coronavirus. The men registered for a COVID-19 test at a mobile checkpoint and got the answer the very next day - he is sick. The headache got worse - no medicine helped. Constant insomnia, as well as jumping body temperature, exhausted the body. As his health got worse, after four difficult days, he decided to call an ambulance. When they arrived, they advised him to drink more fluids - it should reduce the headaches. It didn't help - the headaches got worse. The man was hospitalized. He was happy that the "corona" that struck him was not so strong that he was transferred to intensive care, he did not need to ventilate his lungs - the pains that tormented his body subsided with regular injections of medication. However, he says frankly: remembering the endless headache, weakness, when you can't even lift your leg out of bed, insomnia and other experiences of a threatening disease, it is terrifying. Having survived the dangerous virus, Jonas has recently been trying to take a walk outside at least a couple of times a day - he trains his weakened body and lungs damaged by COVID-19. The man believes that with persistent work, he will be able to recover his former health little by little. True, even now, he still feels the sudden onset of weakness. Although the man's health is improving little by little, he still feels bad. He says there was a fear of living, a fear of meeting and doing anything at all. Jonas avoids meeting with family members and friends. He spends the days alone and feels his emotional health getting worse.



SKILLS TO ADJUST TO THE DIFFICULTIES

Physical activity

What Jonas is most happy about is that he has loved physical activity all his life, and walking helped a lot in healing. Although the man started with small distances, now he says that he covers several kilometers a day.

Reading

Jonas was a former teacher, so he loved to read, literature saved him during this period. The man read a lot of new books and read even the books he had read in his youth.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

Loneliness

Jonas has been a widower for 8 years, his children are grown up and have their own families. Throughout the pandemic, Jonas survived alone. At first due to the conditions of the restrictions, then the fear of getting infected again. The man distanced himself from his children and grandchildren.

Having nothing to do

During the coronavirus pandemic, when everyone was forced to isolate themselves, many people lost the opportunity to engage in their favorite activities. Jonas, like everyone else, had to observe social distancing at first, there were bans on visiting relatives, meanwhile also elderly people. The Man had to give up his most important activity, which is communication with relatives, friends, children and grandchildren.

Closure

Loneliness often travels more than alone - it brings with it sadness, despair, and sometimes anger. Jonas started to store all this inside and not share it with anyone, even when it was insanely difficult. That's how he closed it tight.

RESILIENCE RELATED SKILLS

Calling the senior helpline

Jonas accidentally saw an ad on TV about a helpline for the elderly. He forced himself to call and it gave him an opportunity to reduce his loneliness and be together. Surprisingly, one call a week, a new connection, a friendly, non-preaching interlocutor, ready to rejoice and grieve together, gave Jonas hope.

Avoiding negative news

When he interacted with the senior line consultant, encourage him to distance himself from the flow of negative news because he noticed that it was affecting him negatively. This reduced anxiety and created a desire to live the former life.

FACILITATORS' COMMENTS

Leisure activities affect human health through a complex biological, psychological and social component. Spending free time is used as a pleasure to help combat psychological distress. Many studies show that active leisure time reduces stress and depression symptoms. Also, leisure activities have a close connection with social relations. By participating in leisure activities, a person creates meaningful relationships with friends and family members. In addition, leisure activities provide opportunities for older people to meet new people and build meaningful relationships. In this case, it is understandable why John's emotional health was getting worse. Because he cut off all contact with both family members and friends.

The decision to dial a helpline for the elderly is not easy for everyone: some do not dare to call, thinking that no one will be interested in talking to them. Many callers may have loved ones, children, but are oppressed by inner emptiness.

A person can be among people, but still feel misunderstood, lonely, with no one to discuss topics of concern with. The helpline for seniors was intended for seniors experiencing loneliness. As a phenomenon, it is not bad if you know what to do with loneliness, learn to live in it. But if you don't know how, the feeling of loneliness starts to weigh you down. Older people do not want to disturb children, burden them with additional worries. He thinks that if he calls too often, it will disturb him, because the children work a lot, raise their children, and do not have time.

During the pandemic, seniors were plagued by the uncertainty of how long they would have to wait until the pandemic subsided, anxiety, and doubts about their health. Elderly people have questions or doubts about the COVID-19 situation.

DANA

THE LOSS OF HER HUSBAND



Dana is 70 years old. She is a wise, experienced, decided and very helpful person. She has many friends.

She retired after a stormy life of 25 years spent as school secretary and another 20 years during which she worked abroad as a housekeeper and cook in some families in Israel and Germany.

Dana was married twice. Her first marriage lasted for 25 years and was pretty unhappy. She has 2 daughters and 5 grandchildren. When she decided to get divorced, she had to leave the country without any belongings and to start a brand-new life. It was a very difficult period for her to adapt to a new lifestyle, new languages, new cultures, new religions and to work under her education. However, after one year in Israel she met a Romanian man, Cornel, that she felt like her soulmate and that would become her second husband. They lived together for two more years in Israel, then they had to go to Germany, as he found a better job in Germany. Dana and Cornel shared many interests together: religious faith, pleasure to help people around, books, music, crafts, cooking and partying with friends and loved ones.

The very beginning of Covid 19 pandemic was found in Israel where they were visiting some old friends. They succeeded to catch the last flight to Bucharest and then the last flight to Iasi.

The isolation period began. They were not afraid of the Covid 19 virus or the disease itself, but it changed their pleasant daily routine. Cornel used to go shopping during the mornings and meet neighbors, friends or acquaintances in the market, supermarket or neighborhood streets. When returning home, he used to narrate to Dana all the news and stories he found out. Dana was cooking and in the afternoons the daughters' families, friends or neighbors were coming to visit them or to have dinner. Their door was always open and they were very welcoming people.

Covid 19 restrictions did not allow Cornel to go out of the house more than 2 hours, otherwise he was liable to a fine. Dana always had to call him and hurry him to come back. No more visits were possible, not even the family. Their lives became a little sad. Their plans to travel and visit friends in the country or abroad vanished. Watching television became very scary, so they gave up mostly. Dana began to paint and Cornel to read religious books.

They were still not afraid of the disease even if some neighbors and acquaintances died or got seriously ill.

In August 2021, when the number of Covid 19 cases became rare in Romania and restrictions became recommendations, a family friend returned from a business trip and paid them a visit. In a few days both began to feel ill. Their health deteriorated constantly during the next few days. Daughters decided to call the ambulance even if Dana and Cornel did not want it. Cornel had high fever and breath difficulty. He felt much worse than Dana. Covid 19 infection was the diagnosis for both of them. Cornel needed to be intubated and in a short time he became unconscious. After 2 weeks he died in hospital.

Dana, even if she was suffering from asthma, took the treatment and after one week returned home. She recovered slowly but surely. However, being very worried for Cornel. He could not be visited due to restrictions. She suffered a tremendous shock when she found out he died. Everything happened so unexpectedly. They had so many plans together... They had such a pleasant life together...

Cornel`s death left a tremendous whole in Dana`s life. She was also extremely upset also because the burial ritual was much diminished because of Covid 19 restrictions. This was not fair! Such a faithful man and dedicated to the church not to benefit from a normal burial. She could not accept this.

Dana`s life after Covid 19 was extremely different than it used to be.



Photo by Ian Taylor on Unsplash

SKILLS TO ADJUST TO THE DIFFICULTIES

Painting and handcraft

The restrictions interrupted visits so Dana had a lot of spare time. Decision to watch TV a few times a day because it provided only scary news and bad mood also made her find another occupation. She always wanted to paint, so she ordered painting sets. She began to spend whole mornings painting and decided to donate paintings to a day center for children. She was also spending hours making other handcraft objects for which she inspired from magazines. She always wanted to do this but never had the time.

Adaptation to live alone without her husband

Dana`s life became empty and meaningless after her husband`s unexpected death. Her religious faith helped her overcome this tragic event, as she thought ``life has good moments and bad moments. Only Good God knows what is the meaning of all these``. Day after day Dana had to find meaning in small things, events and routines, even if all things painfully remembered about her husband.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

Isolation

Dana had a very active social life. She was traveling in the country and abroad to visit friends. She received guests daily. Pandemic restrictions prevented her to travel and to have an active social life.

Death of the partner

Dana had a good life together with her husband, but Covid 19 took him away unexpectedly and destabilized her completely. An immense whole remained in her soul, painful memories all around her and a lonely routine to adapt to.

RESILIENCE RELATED SKILLS

A hobby/A pleasant activity to practice

Spending time with family or friends who were daily guests and watching TV were replaced by Dana with painting and creative handcraft which represented very pleasant activities to her for which she had waited a long time to practice and never had time. She also felt useful as she decided to donate the paintings for the decoration of a new children's day center.

Religious counseling

Immediately after the unexpected death of Dana`s husband she was offered religious counseling by the neighborhood priest who visited her regularly and told her about cases similar to her and offered her advice.

Strong social support network

After the loss of her husband a very important role in Dana`s life played the large social network she already had and that was very supportive to her. She began to speak on the phone with relatives or friends whenever she felt lonely or overcome by grief.

FACILITATORS' COMMENTS

Dana proved herself a wise and experienced person and despite her huge loss she found resources and ways to keep going. The good relations she had with family and friends proved very useful to her in these hard times.

Her creativity also saved her this time as well. She found resourceful and meaningful ways of investing herself.

She is an example for many people.

Psychologist`s recommendation is to be strong in the long term and to keep relying on several pillars for her inner balance, as mourning grief is a duration process, it heals in time, with much energy consumption and support.

ELVIRA

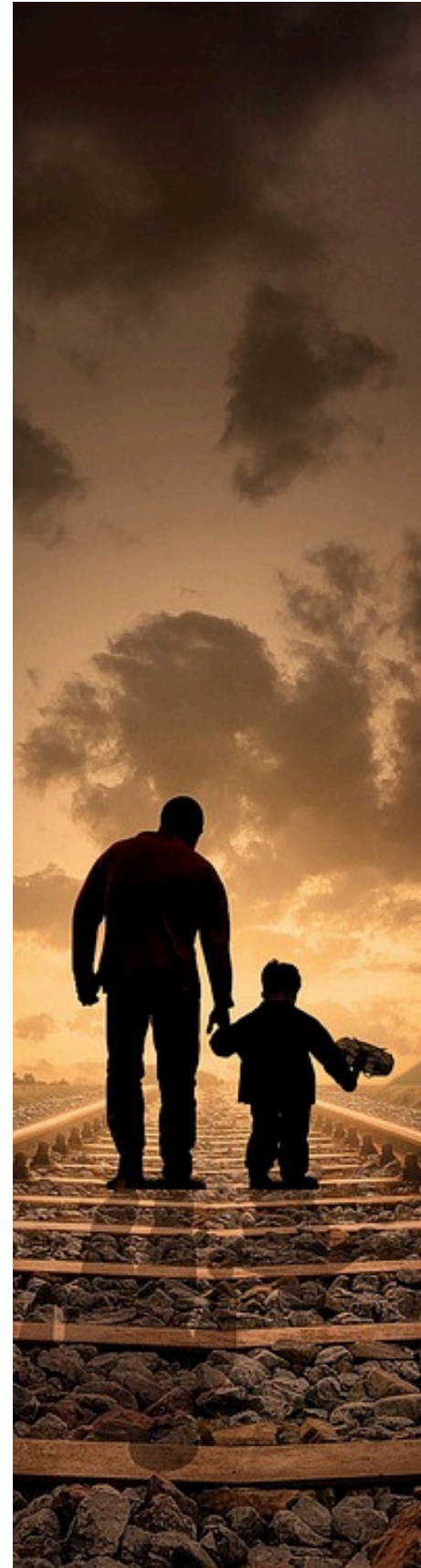
FAMILY DISEASE AND ISOLATION



Elvira is retired already for a pretty long time. She is 73 and she lives together with her husband, her daughter, son in law and grand-daughter. They had a very well-established routine before Covid time. In the first part of the day Elvira was in charge of cooking and 6 years old grand-daughter, while her daughter and son in law went shopping and tidied mostly.

Covid stopped this routine, it scared her a lot, it worried her and her entire family, it isolated them and made them spend hours in front of the TV. Her daughter lost her patience because of staying indoors and they had to invent all sorts of games to cheer her up. They had to disinfect thoroughly all the objects they brought into the flat and live with the fear the virus might have escaped disinfection. They washed their hands until irritation.

Elvira was sad, scared and worried like all her family, when her son in law was diagnosed with Covid and put in quarantine together with all of them. They were not very sick, except for the son in law and the little girl who had severe symptoms but did not need to be hospitalized. The issue was that they were all inside and totally isolated from the rest of the world. None of them could do the shopping or go to the pharmacy to get in charge of any other necessity they might need. It was a very difficult time for Elvira, she was on the verge of breakdown and she was about to believe she would not escape alive. Her daughter and the other daughter that was not living with her helped her go through this tough time. They encouraged her a lot until the situation normalized and for the sake of them, she put herself together. She has always found a way to go through difficult moments. She understood she needed to take care of her granddaughter as her parents were working remotely and this file all her time.



SKILLS TO ADJUST TO THE DIFFICULTIES

Elvira was very shaken by the general situation and left herself contaminated with fear and worry. She also suffered from isolation, disease and lack of material support being totally cut off from the exterior world when being ill, however she did not let herself be dominated by the negative emotions – fear and despair. She was capable of finding her inner strength, to mobilize her inner resources.

Relying on the family network and borrowing some optimism and courage from her daughters also helped her overcome the difficult period. She let herself be contaminated by their lucidity and calm.

Elvira was able to find a purpose for her existence in caring for her granddaughter while her parents were working online at home.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

Fear of catching the disease, worries about the general situation, discomfort about changing the routine and about the new tasks, such as disinfection and washing up all the time.

Total isolation and fear for her health and other family members' health during illness were serious difficulties she faced, especially during their quarantine.

RESILIENCE RELATED SKILLS

Self-trust and self-encouragement based on previous experiences of overcoming difficulties had been important for overcoming the breakdown moments. Openness and sharing emotions with her support network contributed to her revival.

Caring and being responsible for others, respectively for her granddaughter was an important pillar for her overcoming Covid period.

FACILITATORS' COMMENTS

Elvira is not a particularly strong woman or driven by a clear motivation to overcome difficult situations, however she is surrounded by her family which have been a real support to her.

She was lucky she did not have a serious form of Covid and she had to face only the emotional difficulties.

Helped by her two daughters and getting back to her routine of taking care of the granddaughter, with adapted activities for isolation situations put her back on track.

DORINA

FAMILY SEPARATION



Dorina is 66. She is still working even if she could have retired. She lives with her husband, her son and his wife. In her spare time she cooks for money. She would have given up this job but there are clients who call and ask her to cook for them especially for events. She is a good cook for traditional dishes.

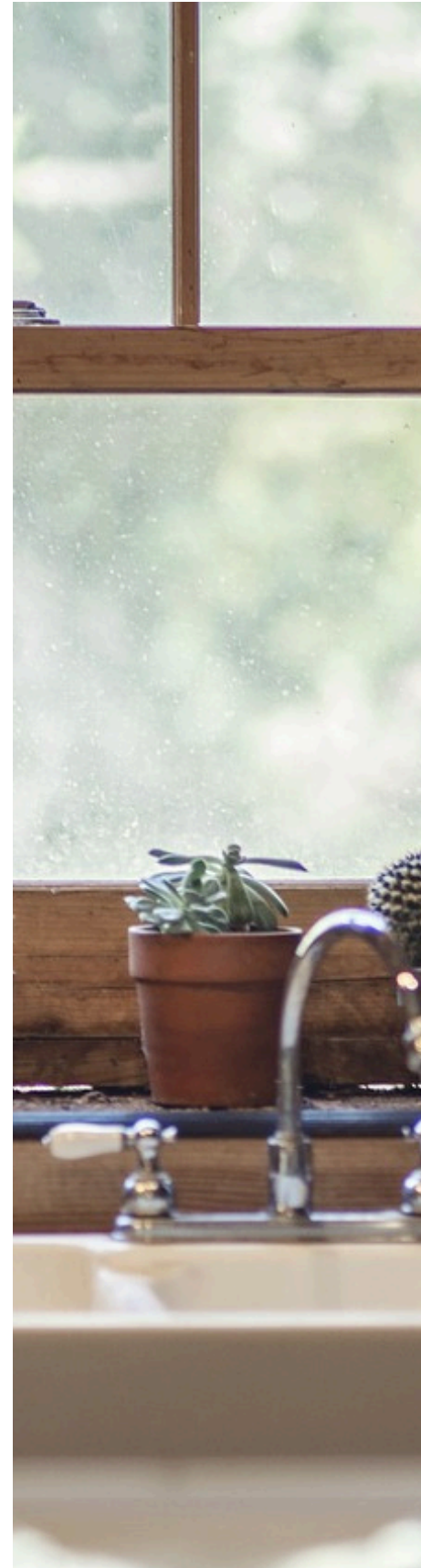
Covid time period was difficult for her. She got scared from the very beginning, she observed all the regulations and recommendations, she went outside very little, she met almost no one, she had all the vaccinations. Her husband and she did not have Covid but very late in the summer of 2022 when coming back by train from the seaside holidays. They had a mild form of Covid.

A strange event happened to her. In the very peak of Covid period, the father of her daughter in law got sick, was hospitalized and he died in a fortnight. He was 88. Her husband and son went to check what was happening to him at the hospital but were not allowed to take over the dead person or to return home so as not to contaminate the others. The dead were buried alone and they had to go for quarantine to his house.

Thus, Dorina found herself at home absolutely alone and not knowing for some time anything about her husband or son. She was very scared to go out and shop for provisions and she lived with what she had in the house until they returned. She was paralyzed with fear and the whole situation seemed to her like a black hole.

She was watching TV all day long and this was turning things worse. The only thing she liked doing was reading recipe magazines and making notes. She had a lot of them but she never found the time to really study them. She was really determined to try some of them and to change her menu.

Later on she realized this saved her for not going crazy until things got back to normality in the family.



SKILLS TO ADJUST TO THE DIFFICULTIES

Strengthening a hobby: cooking

Dorina was alone in a very strange personal situation, death of a relative and sudden separation from the other family members and in this situation she relied on her cooking skills and the desire to update herself in the field.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

Loneliness, fear, anxiety, family separation, death of a relative

Dorina had a normal, usual life with few ups and downs and suddenly she finds herself in the middle of Covid turmoil which moreover directly affects her own family. She lived a very sad period with much fear, but the insecurity of this separation situation and the death of a relative in such a short time made her feel even more anxious.

RESILIENCE RELATED SKILLS

Returning to her hobby

In this challenging period Dorina returned to her main hobby, cooking and she read plenty of cooking magazines which she had collected but never read carefully because of lack of time. Spending the time in such a way she got detached from the general Covid context and from her personal context. During the whole Covid period reading new recipes and cooking became her retreat.

FACILITATORS' COMMENTS

It is clear that Dorina had a traumatic event of her life during Covid 19 period. She lived very acutely in social isolation as she stayed almost only indoors. To this it added the whole separation situation and the quick and tragic death of the father of her daughter in law. She did her best to comply with all the requests and recommendations of authorities and she functioned in the "fight or flight response".

A more detached attitude and information from several sources or different points of view would have helped her see the danger at normal level without exaggeration and useless consumption of energy.

A broader and more supportive personal network, psychological or religious counseling would have drawn her attention to other issues and decreased the level of stress.

The fact that she succeeded to rely on her hobby saved her.

MARIA

DEFYING THE DISEASE



Participant story about moments of daily experience which have challenged them deeply in the time of Covid-19 and Russia-Ukraine war. Maria is 67. She used to have a decision job and she enjoyed making decisions all her life. However she is a very flexible, diplomatic and sociable person. She used to enjoy her retired life. She used to meet her friends, to organize and go on trips, to organize and go to parties, to birthday reunions, to cultural activities or to the restaurant. She is part time employed to take care of a lady who is partially disabled.

Covid-19 pandemic took her totally by surprise and changed her daily routine completely. She had to stay inside all day long. She watched TV to be informed. At the beginning she thought that the whole situation would not last but for some days, maybe a week or two. She felt like a prisoner in her own house. She was very happy she had decided to adopt a cat a few months ago. It helped her not feel so lonely. Maria began to speak on the phone for hours with her family and friends. After some time she began to go out in town and follow her own routine previous Covid times with the risk of catching the disease. Of course, she paid attention to observing the compulsory legal laws as much as not to pay fines.

Finally, she got Covid-19, she was hospitalized. She had a pretty serious condition. The medicine she took weakened her body, moreover she had cancer 5 years ago. It took her about a month and a half to recover completely.

After she did, she began her new daily schedule again – to meet friends, to go out as much as possible, to attend events with precaution, of course. The result was that in one year she got infected with Covid19 again, a mild form of the disease.

However she kept her optimistic spirit and joy for life unaltered.

An important issue for Maria was that every year she used to go to Italy where her son lived with his family and have a medical check for her cancer. During Covid-19 interval she could not go to Italy to check her cancer and this worried her. She felt very relieved when the pandemic finished and she finally could go to Italy and find out she was healthy.

However, Covid-19 disease left traces in her body which she feels even today. When she is a bit cold, she begins to cough and a quarter of her lung is definitely affected. But she kept her mental health and she is happy about it.

SKILLS TO ADJUST TO THE DIFFICULTIES

Caring for a pet

Covid-19 offered Maria`s a lot of spare time, a lot of energy unconsumed and a gap in her affective life. Dedicating more time and affection to her new adopted cat was very important to her. She did not feel so lonely and useless.

Strengthening virtually her support network

Maria used to have a very strong support network including family and friends since she recovered after cancer. She worked a lot to have it and to keep it. She used to organize a lot of activities, pay many visits and call all of them. Now all the face to face events she tried to transfer by telephone or Internet, even if it was not the same thing.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

Anxiety and confinement

Maria has a strong character, she is very active, energetic and determined. She is used to fill her day with activities that make sense to her. The obligation to stay inside and not to be able to do her usual activities made her desperate and anxious.

Fearing losing emotional balance and mental health more than fearing Covid

Covid-19 was for Maria a big challenge, as it reactivated her fears and emotional turmoil she lived when she had cancer. She had the feeling she was losing the inner balance and the sense of life she succeeded to establish so difficultly when she recovered after cancer.

Maria decided to follow her usual routine as much as possible with the risk of getting sick. She established clearly her priorities and realized that emotional health was more important to her than the risk of getting ill with Covid 19 and losing her physical health.

RESILIENCE RELATED SKILLS

Caring for others (friends, a pet).

Maria found a way not to feel lonely and useless any more and decided to invest herself in caring for her newly adopted cat. She also made a habit from calling her friends and encouraging the ones anxious, fragile or ill to be strong. She even offered to make commissions to them. Thus she felt strong, active and useful again, in control of her life.

Facing deepest fears

Instead of staying home full of fear and anxiety, Maria decided to be active, as usual, and get out as much as possible, despite the interdictions and recommendations of authorities and the evidence that the number of infections was growing with the number of contacts people were having. She decided to assume conscious risks, to be brave, even if some would consider her rebel or reckless. She was just avoiding depression and anxiety and never recover from them.

FACILITATORS' COMMENTS

Maria assumed important risks for her health especially that she is elderly and she already recovered from cancer, which she still fears and keeps under control with regular medical checks.

She decided to act as she did as she wanted with determination to keep as much unchanged as possible her daily routine and her forms of psycho-emotional support. She offered a reckless and inappropriate model of behavior to others forcing the limits and not taking the cautions enforced and recommended by authorities.

She may have taken psychological or friendly advice which could be to reflect more than act, to accept a change in her daily routine, to broaden her emotional balance mechanisms, to accept her vulnerability, to accept to be saved by others and not to play the "savior" role all the time. She could find more static but rewarding ways of spending time indoors and thus keep healthier.

ADRIANA

CREATIVITY REINVENTED



Adriana is 68 and she had recently retired before COVID-19 time from a lifetime job of theater scenographer.

Covid 19 period was a very difficult time for her as she was about to create a new routine. She lived alone and even though she has a daughter and some good friends she was very much affected. She felt very scared, anxious and depressed as the isolation went on. Everything seemed very unexpected to her. She felt manipulated by authorities and televisions. This virus seemed to her so unreal and, however, so dangerous.

Many people around her got sick, with severe or milder forms of disease, some acquaintances even died. She remembers confusion, antagonist discussions and conflicts regarding Covid, protection measures, vaccination, treatment protocols, etc. It was a very sad time, as trees were blossoming and she had to stay indoors all spring, summer and autumn, even.

At a certain point she began to paint subjects she wanted to approach during all her life and never had the time. She began to try new techniques, collage, for example. Little by little she rediscovered herself, she reconnected with her inner self. She was surprised how much she changed during all these years without even paying attention to it. It just happened.

Then she began to keep a diary about herself, her wishes, fears and other people. It replaced communication to peers.

Looking back she is amazed how much people changed because of isolation. They are more distant to each other, less communicative, more indifferent and colder. She also changed. She speaks less, she has changed her rhythm of life, she is slower now, less energetic. However, she feels like a survivor, happy she lived and now can tell others about it.



Photo by Rudy and Peter Skitterians from Pixabay

SKILLS TO ADJUST TO THE DIFFICULTIES

New artistic skills

Adriana decided to fill in her spare time and keep her mind busy by drawing, painting and making collage. She was a professional artist all her life, but she never had time and energy left to create her own works. Covid 19 restrictions and isolation gave her this opportunity. At least she felt this way.

Writing skills

Not going to work, not going shopping, not meeting friends and family produced disturbances in Adriana`s system of communication. She decided to accompany her artistic approach with a writing one. She began to write daily in her diary in order to feed her need to communicate. She noticed a therapeutic result, as she felt less tension regarding what happened in the world and more peace and self-understanding.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

Confusion, fear, loneliness

The beginning of Covid 19 period destabilized Adriana pretty much. Too much fear, too much confusion, isolation, contradictory news and information on TV, contradictory opinions and behaviors in people she talked to on the telephone. She did not know what to believe. She was afraid of being ill, of dying so unexpectedly because of this Covid.

Too much spare time

The problem Adriana had was too much time to worry, to make dark scenarios: what she will do if she gets ill, who will take care of her, will she recover, what if she dies, what will happen with people she knew and loved? She was a little fragile because she had recently retired and she had to change her daily routine. From a busy person she had so little to do now.

RESILIENCE RELATED SKILLS

Reinvent herself through art

Adriana took advantage of her artistic skills and took the time to put in practice her unfulfilled artistic dreams. She began to draw, to paint, to make collages etc. She approached topics she always wanted to or spontaneous ones and new artistic techniques. She felt refreshed and distanced herself from the scary and grey reality.

Written self-reflection (keeping a diary).

Adriana replaced the need to communicate to peers, to written self-reflection. The telephone communication increased her fear and anxiety, as always, the main topics were about Covid situation, who got ill and who died, what new restrictions were the authorities preparing, as she tried to avoid it. Writing a diary helped her concentrate on what was of real interest for her, about her artistic evolution and it gave her peace and fulfillment.

FACILITATORS' COMMENTS

Adriana found out two very efficient resilience enforcing techniques which are appropriate to her personality and to her artistic professional background. They helped her resist and rediscover herself during Covid time. However, they may have unwanted consequences for Adriana if not appropriate counseling asked for, as unsocial and peer distant behaviors may be continued. Variation in activities, outdoor activities, socialization and close contacts are recommended together with continuation of artistic activities and diary writing.



Emily, a resident in a rehabilitation unit, faced the challenge of restricted visitation during the COVID-19 pandemic. She had been looking forward to the support and presence of her family and friends during her recovery journey. However, due to safety protocols, visitations were limited, leaving her feeling isolated and lonely. Despite this challenge, the therapeutic team stepped up to provide emotional support. They organized virtual meetings with Emily's loved ones, facilitated video calls, and even arranged window visits. Through the team's efforts, Emily found comfort and connection during a difficult time.



Photo by Priscilla Du Preez on Unsplash

SKILLS TO ADJUST TO THE DIFFICULTIES

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to adapt and bounce back from adversity, trauma, or significant life changes. Dealing with the stress and fear associated with the COVID-19 pandemic has required individuals to draw upon their resilience to endure the changes in everyday life.

Dealing with the stress and coping mechanisms to endure the changes in everyday life and the fear that came with the virus.

Like expressing feelings, sharing feelings with a trusted friend, family member, or therapist. Expressing your emotions can be a healthy way to release stress and fear.

Digital Literacy:

Improving digital literacy skills to stay connected with loved ones via virtual means has become crucial during the pandemic.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

Isolation

The prolonged isolation can result in feelings of loneliness, boredom, and a sense of being disconnected from the world. Human beings are inherently social creatures, and being cut off from social interactions can take a toll on mental health.

Compliance with Health Guidelines

Ensuring that all residents comply with public health guidelines, such as mask-wearing and hand hygiene, can be a challenge in a communal living setting.

Symptoms during Covid-19 and stress and fear for their loved ones.

The fear of COVID-19 can be emotionally distressing, especially when you or your loved ones are at risk of infection. Concern for the health and safety of family and friends can lead to significant stress and anxiety.

RESILIENCE RELATED SKILLS

Expression through arts, making fun of the difficulties, learning to live with the changes.

FACILITATORS' COMMENTS

Though some were more hesitant and others were more relaxed, all the participants were open to the process of the workshop. All engaged qualitatively and respected each other's boundaries and ideas. They started the workshop with questions about what was going to happen and, in some moments, needed the coordinator to reassure them that it was going to be ok



Alex, a resident in a rehabilitation unit, had been making significant progress in their physical therapy sessions before the pandemic hit. However, with the sudden suspension of in-person therapy sessions due to safety concerns, Alex faced a setback in their recovery journey. The therapeutic team recognized the challenge and quickly adapted to provide remote therapy sessions. They guided Alex through exercises and provided video resources to continue their progress at home. Despite the distance, the team's dedication and ongoing support helped Alex regain momentum and continue their rehabilitation journey.



Photo by Dizzy Roseblade from Pixabay

SKILLS TO ADJUST TO THE DIFFICULTIES

Resilience

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Dealing with the stress and coping mechanisms to endure the changes in everyday life and the fear that came with the virus.

Like relaxation Techniques:

Engage in activities that help you relax, can serve as a respite from stress and fear.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

Isolation

The prolonged isolation can result in feelings of loneliness, boredom, and a sense of being disconnected from the world. Human beings are inherently social creatures, and being cut off from social interactions can take a toll on mental health.

Symptoms during Covid-19 and stress and fear for their loved ones.

The fear of COVID-19 can be emotionally distressing, especially when you or your loved ones are at risk of infection. Concern for the health and safety of family and friends can lead to significant stress and anxiety.

RESILIENCE RELATED SKILLS

Expression through arts, making fun of the difficulties, learning to live with the changes.

Communities and individuals have found innovative ways to maintain connections while adhering to social distancing guidelines. Virtual gatherings, online game nights, and creative use of technology have allowed people to stay in touch with loved ones.

FACILITATORS' COMMENTS

Though some were more hesitant and others were more relaxed, all the participants were open to the process of the workshop. All engaged qualitatively and respected each other's boundaries and ideas. They started the workshop with questions about what was going to happen and, in some moments, needed the coordinator to reassure them that it was going to be ok

DANIEL



Daniel, a resident in a rehabilitation unit, had been making steady progress in his therapy sessions before the pandemic. However, when the lockdown measures were implemented, access to the rehabilitation facility became limited. Daniel faced the challenge of maintaining his momentum and progress towards recovery. The therapeutic team recognized the importance of continuity in his rehabilitation and developed a personalized at-home exercise program for him. They provided detailed instructions, video demonstrations, and regular check-ins to ensure Daniel stayed on track. Despite the physical limitations imposed by the pandemic, Daniel remained determined and committed to his recovery journey, with the unwavering support and guidance of the therapeutic team. Together, they adapted to the new circumstances and found innovative ways to overcome the challenges presented by the pandemic.



Photo by Jordan Steranka su Unsplash

SKILLS TO ADJUST TO THE DIFFICULTIES

Resilience, dealing with the stress and coping mechanisms to endure the changes in everyday life and the fear that came with the virus.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

Isolation and Loneliness

Isolation or quarantine in a boarding house can be mentally taxing. Individuals may feel lonely and cut off from their support networks due to social distancing measures.

Healthcare Access: Access to healthcare services and information can be a challenge due to quarantine and COVID-19 limitations.

Symptoms during Covid-19 and stress and fear for their loved ones.

The fear of COVID-19 can be emotionally distressing, especially when you or your loved ones are at risk of infection. Concern for the health and safety of family and friends can lead to significant stress and anxiety.

RESILIENCE RELATED SKILLS

Expression through arts, making fun of the difficulties, learning to live with the changes.

Adaptation and resilience have been critical to learning to live with the changes brought about by the pandemic. This includes adjusting to remote work, online learning, and altered social interactions.

Problem-Solving: Dealing with the challenges of communal living during a pandemic has likely honed residents' problem-solving skills. They may have found creative solutions to issues related to shared spaces and resources.

FACILITATORS' COMMENTS

Though some were more hesitant and others were more relaxed, all the participants were open to the process of the workshop. All engaged qualitatively and respected each other's boundaries and ideas. They started the workshop with questions about what was going to happen and, in some moments, needed the coordinator to reassure them that it was going to be ok.

SARAH



Sarah, a resident in a rehabilitation unit, experienced heightened anxiety and emotional distress during the COVID-19 pandemic. The uncertainty and fear surrounding the virus affected her mental well-being, adding an additional layer of challenge to her recovery process. The therapeutic team recognized the importance of addressing her mental health and introduced virtual counseling sessions. They provided a safe space for Sarah to express her concerns and fears, offering coping strategies and support. Through the team's guidance, Sarah found resilience and gradually regained her emotional balance alongside her physical recovery.

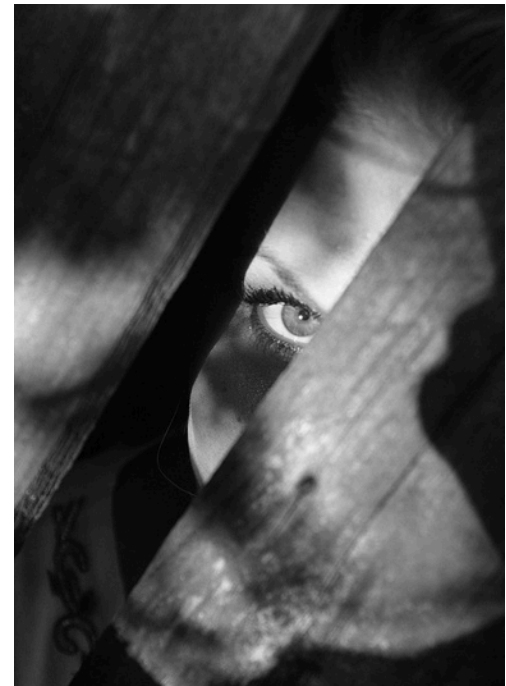


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SKILLS TO ADJUST TO THE DIFFICULTIES

Dealing with the stress and coping mechanisms to endure the changes in everyday life and the fear that came with the virus.

Effective Communication

Open and honest communication with fellow residents and boarding house management is vital for sharing information, concerns, and solutions related to COVID-19.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

Isolation

The prolonged isolation can result in feelings of loneliness, boredom, and a sense of being disconnected from the world. Human beings are inherently social creatures, and being cut off from social interactions can take a toll on mental health.

Symptoms during Covid-19 and stress and fear for their loved ones.

The fear of COVID-19 can be emotionally distressing, especially when you or your loved ones are at risk of infection. Concern for the health and safety of family and friends can lead to significant stress and anxiety.

RESILIENCE RELATED SKILLS

Expression through arts, making fun of the difficulties, learning to live with the changes.

Humor can be a coping mechanism during challenging times. People have used humor to find relief from stress and anxiety, often through memes, jokes, and satirical commentary related to COVID-19. These forms of humor can help individuals feel a sense of connection and shared experience.

FACILITATORS' COMMENTS

Though some were more hesitant and others were more relaxed, all the participants were open to the process of the workshop. All engaged qualitatively and respected each other's boundaries and ideas. They started the workshop with questions about what was going to happen and, in some moments, needed the coordinator to reassure them that it was going to be ok.

MICHAEL



Michael, a resident in a rehabilitation unit, faced delays in accessing specialized medical consultations and treatments due to the strain on healthcare resources during the pandemic. This posed a significant challenge to his recovery progress and added uncertainty to his rehabilitation journey. The therapeutic team took an active role in advocating for Michael's needs, coordinating with external healthcare providers, and exploring alternative solutions. Their dedication and persistence ensured that Michael received the necessary medical attention, contributing to his overall well-being and progress.



Photo by [Deniz Altindas](#) on Unsplash

SKILLS TO ADJUST TO THE DIFFICULTIES

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to adapt and bounce back from adversity, trauma, or significant life changes. Dealing with the stress and fear associated with the COVID-19 pandemic has required individuals to draw upon their resilience to endure the changes in everyday life.

Adaptability

Flexibility and adaptability are essential during a crisis. Residents have likely learned to adjust to changing circumstances and guidelines, such as new safety measures and restrictions.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

Isolation

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Symptoms during Covid-19 and stress and fear for their loved ones.

The fear of COVID-19 can be emotionally distressing, especially when you or your loved ones are at risk of infection. Concern for the health and safety of family and friends can lead to significant stress and anxiety.

RESILIENCE RELATED SKILLS

Expression through arts, making fun of the difficulties, learning to live with the changes.

Adaptation and resilience have been critical to learning to live with the changes brought about by the pandemic.

FACILITATORS' COMMENTS

Though some were more hesitant and others were more relaxed, all the participants were open to the process of the workshop. All engaged qualitatively and respected each other's boundaries and ideas. They started the workshop with questions about what was going to happen and, in some moments, needed the coordinator to reassure them that it was going to be ok.



FIGRELLA MEMORIES

February 2020

Fiorella lives together with her father affected by dementia in the quarantine period due to the Covid-19 health emergency. For two months, it was not possible for all of them to leave their homes and for everyone it was a complex situation; for those who were already in a fragile and caring situation, however, the difficulties were added to and exacerbated by the previous ones.

Fiorella relates the disorientation of those moments, where she felt enclosed and without the possibility of sharing her difficulties with the outside world.

Fatigue and fear pervade her thoughts and days and she feels the responsibility to reassure her loved one and protect him from possible infection with the virus.

She wonders what good could come from what is happening and tells of an intimate and tender moment with her father in which he is able to recognise her and this gives her much strength. The story ends with a sweet thought towards her father and a hope that she will always be able to be the best version of herself.



Photo by Andre Ouellet su Unsplash

SKILLS TO ADJUST TO THE DIFFICULTIES

Sense of responsibility

Awareness of what would happen to their loved one if they took Covid-19 and were isolated

Having realised that she is not allowed to 'give in', she feels she cannot afford to and is required to 'fight'.

Awareness of being fundamental to her father's serenity

Care

She acts supportive and caring for her father, calms him down and briefly 'finds' him in a moment where she feels him listening and able to understand her, a moment of tenderness and closeness

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

Self-understanding

Difficulties in understanding her emotions

Changing habits

Being cooped up in her own home, each with her difficulties and without having the opportunity to share the difficulties with others

Daily rhythms cancelled

Communication barriers

Difficulties in communicating with a family member what she is experiencing

Concern

Fear for her and for her loved ones, fear of not being able to give him serenity, difficulties that add to the already existing difficult condition of dealing with her father's illness

RESILIENCE RELATED SKILLS

Self-reflection

Ability to reflect on what is happening and what could be gained from it, desire to want to give her best and be committed

Sense of hope

Seeks intimacy with her father despite illness

Courage

She showed the ability to be courageous

Consideration of limits

Understanding boundaries and keeping within them

Sharing

Fiorella participates in peer support groups

FACILITATORS' COMMENTS

Fiorella was participative, interested in the activities and put herself out there with interest and poise, showing high resilience skills



MARGHERITA

TEARS AND SMILES

At the time of the Covid-19 pandemic, Margherita lives with her mother who suffers from dementia. When sharing her story, she makes an excursus of previous memories corresponding to the time of the pandemic.

Margherita tells of her relationship with her mother, with whom she went through different periods in life and whom she cared for once she was ill. She describes the happy moments of youth of both of them in which there was a beautiful complicity and mutual support, the beginning of the illness and the concern for her mother with the arrival of Covid. Margherita reports the emotions and feelings she felt during this last period when her mother was infected and ill with Covid in October 2022 and the pain of feeling responsible for her health.



Photo by James Chan from Pixabay

SKILLS TO ADJUST TO THE DIFFICULTIES

Care

Margherita is very present for her mother and takes care of everything concerning her well-being and daily life

Keeping memories alive

Margherita was able several times to recall memories with her mother to feel her close

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

Fatigue

Difficulties in caring for her mother
Suffering to see her mother ill and in a moment of pain

Guilt

Sense of responsibility for what happened to the mother

Lack of feedback

Difficulties in not having the opportunity to receive feedback from the mother on her fears and feelings

RESILIENCE RELATED SKILLS

Self-analysis

Ability to reason about her moods, realises that brooding over the event will not do one any good in the long run

Awareness

Awareness that facing difficult moments with a person, sharing her own experience can lighten them

Sharing

Margherita participates in peer support groups

FACILITATORS' COMMENTS

Margherita was able to go through and re-elaborate her experience, sharing in a very incisive way what she felt



GINEVRA

CLOSE, MY LOVE

February 2020

Ginevra places the Covid-19 virus at the centre of the story, describes its arrival in Italy and how it has had a major impact on the social fabric: mistrust among citizens, inability to communicate, erasure of family memories.

In particular, she recounts a scene that took place in spring 2020 where, while watching a news report, she realised how certain ritual gestures that characterise the population (such as dealing with an illness or greeting a deceased person) had been disrupted. Those images reminded her of the last period of her husband's illness and led her to reflect on what she had experienced.



Photo by Ri Butov from Pixabay

SKILLS TO ADJUST TO THE DIFFICULTIES

Empathy

Ability to empathise with others

Understanding the pain and difficulties that other people were experiencing

Relief

Ability to reflect and find strength in the memory of her husband

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

Isolation

Distancing from the rest of the community

Confusion

Feeling of desolation and bewilderment in dealing with the situation

Concern

Sense of unease and sadness at what she felt

RESILIENCE RELATED SKILLS

Reprocessing.

Re-elaboration of pains experienced shortly before Covid

Being here and now

Ability to grasp similarities and differences between the difficult situation experienced before the Covid-19 emergency (illness of her husband and subsequent bereavement) compared to what other people were going through at the time of the health emergency.

Seeing the positive aspects

Rereading her story from a positive perspective.

Sharing.

Ginevra participates in peer support groups

FACILITATORS' COMMENTS

Ginevra showed excellent skills of self-reflection and empathy towards others, showing herself as a sensitive person capable of creating deep bonds between herself and other people and promoting connection between people



SERENA

SEE YOU TOMORROW

Spring 2020

Serena is a teacher and recounts her days during the quarantine period due to the Covid-19 health emergency, allowing to enter into her everyday life during that period. In particular, she describes how the situation strongly impacted on her work as a primary school teacher, forcing her to use digital tools to reach her students, who like her were forced not to leave their homes.

She then describes the following weeks and the associated changes: trips cancelled, Easter holidays spent at home, no end-of-year party. But the creative proposals that Serena puts forward to involve her students as much as possible are also shared. Serena emphasises her willingness to adapt to new tools and methods, albeit with the difficulties involved. The story ends with a description of the last lesson held at a distance where the students, at the end of their five years of primary school, say goodbye to each other by reciting a song proposed by her.



Photo by Chris Montgomery on Unsplash

SKILLS TO ADJUST TO THE DIFFICULTIES

Adaptation

Ability to experiment with new coping strategies (such as new digital knowledge and skills)

Self-analysis

Ability to evaluate her work from a positive perspective

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

Concern

Concern for family members

Digital Barriers

Difficulties in using electronic tools and distance learning

Sudden changes

Disruption of working and living patterns

Sadness

Sense of sadness and incompleteness in realising that even the end-of-year greeting will be at a distance and not in presence.

RESILIENCE RELATED SKILLS

Growth and capacity-building

She reports awareness of her limited digital skills but the period allowed her to develop them, with the support of family and friends, to be able to communicate and transmit knowledge to her pupils, albeit from a distance.

She is satisfied with these 'digital' results

Ability to find alternatives and creative ways to greet her students, who are forced to greet each other at the end of the five years of primary school at a distance

Commitment to relationships

Serena shows how she felt connected to her students even though they were at a distance and the affection for them helped her a lot to overcome difficulties

Sharing

Serena participates in peer support groups

FACILITATORS' COMMENTS

Serena put a lot of effort into identifying a fact from her everyday life at that time and reworking the experience in a positive spirit, despite feelings of regret about the course of events.



RICCARDO

COVID AND BEYOND

Riccardo shares his experience by referring to the contents of a few pages of a diary written during the health emergency period by Covid-19, which presents an excursus from quarantine to when they returned to relative 'normality'.

It emerges what Riccardo was feeling at that time, his days and new habits, his thoughts and concerns. Concerns make particular reference to his family members, both those in need of care and those not. She recounts her moments of 'break' from the rest of the world and the family context, her subsequent gradual return to her mother's caring relationship, her first encounters with her neighbours after weeks of complete isolation, her mother's placement in a facility and the subsequent bereavement she experienced.

Riccardo concludes with a greeting to his parents and a greeting to himself, as if to wish them well.



Photo by Ahmed Zayan on Unsplash

SKILLS TO ADJUST TO THE DIFFICULTIES

Awareness

Awareness that when the lockdown period ends there will be difficult situations to deal with

Greater understanding of the mother, thanks to a moment of sharing with her

Processing through writing.

Expression of his feelings and difficulties through diary writing

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

Limitations

Inability to go out and perform daily care and support activities for loved ones

Concern

Concern for his family and friends: the sick mother, the brother caring for her, the granddaughter in need, the caregivers his friends

Excessive liability

It is often the venting point for various family members

Loneliness

Feelings of lack for meetings and sharing activities with others caregivers
Displeasure at the consequent estrangement from his friends who think differently from himself

Comparison

Difficulties in making his point of view understood and in confronting some family members with respect to the health emergency

Loss of sense

Moments of despondency and desolation, everything seems meaningless to him

RESILIENCE RELATED SKILLS

Reprocessing

Coping with difficult periods before Covid-19 emergency (such as the death of the father, the illness of the mother, complicated family situations
Ability to rethink his own history also from a positive perspective (in particular towards his parents)

Taking care of oneself

Possibility of taking time for himself, even without doing anything in particular, obligatorily 'pausing' some issues that he was very involved and busy with

Sharing

Enjoying sharing the grief with friends
Richard participates in peer support groups

FACILITATORS' COMMENTS

Riccardo showed an amazing ability to elaborate and be aware of himself and what he experienced. He also highlighted the great power of friendship and relationship with others as a strength for overcoming difficulties.

