



SPINA BIFIDA
ASSOCIATION

Spina Bifida and COVID-19

*How is COVID-19 Affecting Your
Mental Health?*

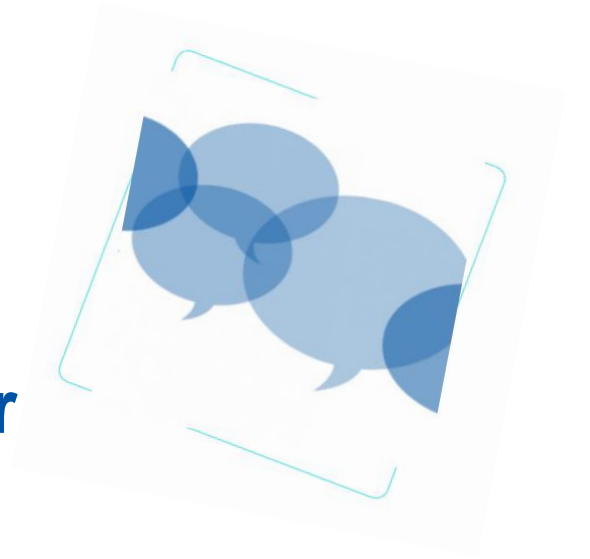
April 9, 2020

Today's session

- **Spina Bifida may already affect how we think and feel**
- **Unprecedented changes are valid reasons to feel uncertain and anxious**
- **We are still in control and able to remain positive**
- **Part of taking control involves developing a plan**
- **Questions and answers**

To Ask A Question

- **Using the Zoom platform:**
 - **Click on the Q&A button in the Zoom webinar system (*not the chat box*)**
 - **Type your question in the Q&A box**
 - **Submit your question**
- **For more information on COVID-19, visit:**
<https://www.spinabifidaassociation.org/covid19/>



Our Presenters

- **Cortney Wolfe-Christensen, PhD**
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Behavioral Health Therapist
Rochester, NY

There are reasons you feel the way you do

- **COVID-19 has dramatically changed how we live**
- **People with Spina Bifida may already be predisposed**
 - **Depression**
 - **Executive dysfunction**
 - **Isolation**

The mind and body are connected

- **The brain is like the hard drive of a computer that affects and directs the rest of the body.**
- **What you type or download into the computer is similar to what happens to your brain when it's affected by a physical interaction.**

There are reasons you feel the way you do

When we understand this about ourselves, we're better equipped to manage our thoughts and emotions

Our lives have changed dramatically

- **COVID-19 poses a real threat to our lives and the lives of our friends and families**
 - **Illness itself**
 - **Livelihood**

Our lives have changed dramatically

- **Many people with disabilities are concerned about their needs, such as:**
 - **Not being heard by their health care providers**
 - **Home health aides are not available**
 - **Accessible transit services postponed or cancelled**
 - **Availability of supplies**

We are still in control

- Keep your daily routine (that doesn't include your PJs)
 - What would you be doing if COVID-19 was not happening?

Time of day	Activity
Wake up/Morning	<input type="checkbox"/> Hygiene <input type="checkbox"/> Medication
Morning	<input type="checkbox"/> Eat breakfast <input type="checkbox"/> Meditate/Stretch/Move
Midday	<input type="checkbox"/> Eat Lunch <input type="checkbox"/> Bathroom
Midafternoon	<input type="checkbox"/> Do something relaxing/constructive <input type="checkbox"/> Reach out!
Late afternoon	<input type="checkbox"/> Eat Dinner <input type="checkbox"/> Bathroom <input type="checkbox"/> Daily news/Information time
Evening	<input type="checkbox"/> Daily reflection/prayer <input type="checkbox"/> Bedtime routine
Sleep	<input type="checkbox"/> 7-9 hours

We are still in control

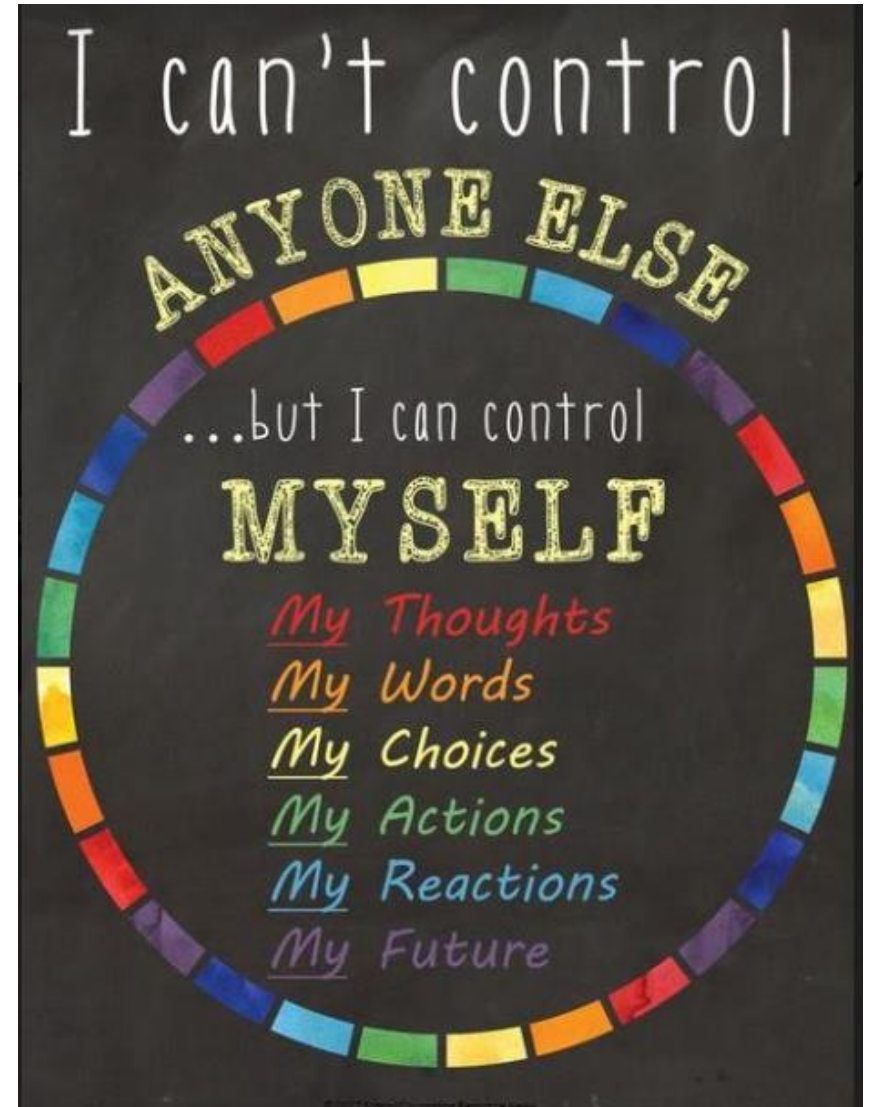
- **Do what you can to stay healthy**
 - **Control what you eat**
 - **Look for ways to stay physically active**
- **Control your intake of COVID-19 news**
 - **Seek information from CDC and WHO – not unverified sources**

We are still in control

- **Connecting with other people helps yourself and helps others**
- **Seek safe ways to connect with your friends and neighbors and maintain sense of community**

Challenge negative thoughts and think positively

- How we think affects how we feel



We are still in control

- **Advocate for yourself when you feel your needs and rights are being ignored**

Implement coping strategies

Distraction

Distraction 	Conversation, listen to talk radio, read, do puzzles, TV, computer games, jigsaws, solve a problem, make a list, learn something new, cleaning & tidying, gardening, arts & crafts.	Pros Gives your heart & mind a break. Great for short term relief. Great to get through a crisis.	Cons Can't do it for too long. Doesn't resolve any underlying issues. Meds can make it hard to concentrate.
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Grounding

Grounding 	Use body & senses: smell fragrances, slowly taste food, notice the colours around you. Walk on the grass barefoot, squeeze clay or mud, do yoga, meditate, exercise.	Pros Helps slow or stop "dissociation" (feeling numb, floaty or disconnected). Reduces physicality of anxiety.	Cons Sometimes it's better to stay a bit dissociated (that's how your mind protects you).
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Implement coping strategies

Emotional Release



Emotional Release

Yell, scream, run! Try a cold shower. Let yourself cry... and sob. Put on a funny DVD and let yourself laugh! Try boxing, popping balloons, or crank up some music & dance crazy!

Pros
Great for anger and fear.
Releases the pressure of overwhelming emotion.

Cons
Hard to do in every situation. Feels odd.
Some people might think you're acting 'crazier'
(be selective with how & where you do this)

Self Love



Self Love

Massage hands with nice cream, manicure your nails, cook a special meal, clean your house (or just make your bed), bubble bath or long shower, brush hair, buy a small treat.

Pros
Become your own best friend, your own support worker.
Great for guilt or shame.
You deserve it!

Cons
Sometimes can feel really hard to do, or feel superficial (but it's not).

Implement coping strategies

Thought Challenge



The graphic for 'Thought Challenge' features a green cloud icon on the left containing the text 'Thought challenge'. To its right is a light green rounded rectangle with a green border containing the instruction: 'Write down negative thoughts then list all the reasons they may not be true. Imagine someone you love had these thoughts – what advice would you give them?'. Further right are two white rounded rectangles with green borders. The first is titled 'Pros' and contains the text: 'Can help to shift long-term, negative thinking habits. Trying to be more logical can help reduce extreme emotion.' The second is titled 'Cons' and contains the text: 'The more emotional you feel, the harder this is to do. In particular, feelings of shame can make this very hard.'

Thought challenge

Write down negative thoughts then list all the reasons they may not be true. Imagine someone you love had these thoughts – what advice would you give them?

Pros

Can help to shift long-term, negative thinking habits.
Trying to be more logical can help reduce extreme emotion.

Cons

The more emotional you feel, the harder this is to do. In particular, feelings of shame can make this very hard.

Access Your Higher Self



The graphic for 'Access Your Higher Self' features a red circle icon on the left containing the text 'Access your higher self'. To its right is a light red rounded rectangle with a red border containing the instruction: 'Help someone else, smile at strangers (see how many smiles you get back), pray, volunteer, do randomly kind things for others, pat dogs at the local park, join a cause'. Further right are two white rounded rectangles with red borders. The first is titled 'Pros' and contains the text: 'Reminds us that everyone has value and that purpose can be found in small as well as large things.' The second is titled 'Cons' and contains the text: 'Don't get stuck trying to save everyone else and forget about you!'

Access your higher self

Help someone else, smile at strangers (see how many smiles you get back), pray, volunteer, do randomly kind things for others, pat dogs at the local park, join a cause

Pros

Reminds us that everyone has value and that purpose can be found in small as well as large things.

Cons

Don't get stuck trying to save everyone else and forget about you!

Develop a Plan

- If you think you are sick: who can you call on to help?
- Who can you reach out to if have a mental/emotional health crisis?

My COVID-19 Wellness Plan
Positive thought or affirmation to keep me centered: "Behind the storm, the sky is blue!"
Are my basic needs being met? (Food, shelter/safe environment, health (physical and mental), sleep and resources)
During times of crisis it is even more important to focus on what we can control and maintain our daily routines. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Follow the health guidelines to keep yourself and environment healthy• Set limits on news/media consumption• Practice self-care• Know yourself and your patterns/triggers• Allow yourself to have daily "worry time"• "Get a grip." Relax and get grounded• Move! Be physically active to get your blood flowing and increase mood.• Look to your goals and values-GROW (reach out to a loved one, do a craft, work towards a goal).• Get good sleep and eat a healthy diet
Who can I depend on to support me? <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Look inward and be your own best friend/advocate!2. Family members: _____3. Friends: _____4. Health care team: _____5. Religious community/Spina Bifida Community: _____
Important resource contact <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Mental Health Support-National Hotline and local: _____2. Doctor or health clinic: _____3. Medical equipment/supplies: _____4. Instacart or other food delivery resources: _____
What positive coping strategies can I use today to make me feel good?

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Resources

- **American Psychological Association: List of Crisis Hotlines & Resources**
 - <https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/crisis>
- **Crisis Text Line**
 - <https://www.crisistextline.org/text-us/>
 - **Text HELLO to 741741**

Resources

- **National Alliance on Mental Illness**

<https://nami.org/Find-Support/NAMI-HelpLine#crisis>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: Call 800-273-TALK (8255)

If you or someone you know is in crisis, trained crisis counselors are available 24/7—whether they are considering suicide or not.

Resources

- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration:**

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline>

Disaster Distress Helpline – 24/7, 365-day-a-year, national, multilingual, confidential crisis support hotline that provides immediate crisis counseling for people experiencing emotional distress related to any natural or human-caused disaster, including COVID-19.

Phone: 1-800-985-5990

Text: TalkWithUs to 66746

Resources

- **SBA's National Resource Center (NRC)**

High quality, confidential information and referral services to persons living with Spina Bifida, parents and loved ones, school staff, health care providers, and many more individuals who form part of our community. The NRC is the only information clearinghouse in the United States exclusively dedicated to topics related to living with Spina Bifida.

- **Phone: 202-618-4753**
- **Email: jpanlener@sbaa.org**

Closing thoughts

People with Spina Bifida have had to overcome so much uncertainty.

You have so much inner strength already.

You are a natural born warrior.

This is just one more battle.

**Recording and resources from this
session:
spinabifidaassociation.org/covid19**

Thank You!
Stay Safe and Stay Healthy

