



agpa
american
group
psychotherapy
association

gpf
group
psychotherapy
foundation

nrcgp
national registry
of certified
group
psychotherapists

25 East 21st Street, 6th Floor, New York, NY 10010

(877) 668-AGPA (2472)

www.agpa.org

Media Contact:

Diane C. Feirman, CAE

877-668-AGPA (2472)

dfeirman@agpa.org

**AMERICAN GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY ASSOCIATION (AGPA) OFFERS TIPS FOR
COMMUNITIES MANAGING ANXIETY DURING A PANDEMIC**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW YORK, May 7, 2009 – As the World Health Organization upgrades the pandemic status of the swine flu, it is important to utilize our communities as groups for support and education to alleviate stress. The Swine Flu outbreak is serious, but as President Obama stated, it is a cause for “concern not alarm.” Group consultants affiliated with the American Group Psychotherapy Association have observed social responses to past crises. From experience assisting the survivors of the 9/11 attacks, Hurricane Katrina, and the anthrax scare, among other traumatic events, AGPA group specialists know that fear can become magnified as a result of scary headlines and 24/7 reporting in all news media. Emotional contagion – anxiety spreading from one person to the next and one group to the next – can be quite debilitating. Families, colleagues at work, as well as teachers and students can take steps to prevent panic. Informal and organized discussions or briefings can allow groups to remain current on what is really happening, dispel rumors, and contain emotional contagion.

It is important to remember that in times of great tension the vast majority of our citizens do not panic and go about their business and service to others in a very organized way. While they may be tense, they are not overwhelmed with anxiety. Neighbors continue to help neighbors – and we get through these crises.

“Our existing support groups, including family, friends, spiritual centers and workplaces, are a key aspect of our communal resiliency,” said Jeffrey Kleinberg, Ph.D., CGP, FAGPA, AGPA President-Elect. “We can use these networks to obtain and communicate accurate information and provide emotional support, both of which help to manage the stress of these situations.”

In trying to stay calm, groups must know what the facts are. The Center for Disease Control web site (www.cdc.gov) is excellent for keeping up-to-date with what is happening. It also outlines what various governmental agencies are doing to control the spread of influenza virus. Knowing that we are being protected provides reassurance. Means for disseminating these factual reports need to be strengthened and existing community groups provide excellent outlets for sharing accurate information.

When an individual believes he or she has acquired the virus, stress and a tendency to panic may increase and those in their groups can help by providing advice such as not jumping to conclusions and checking with your physician to determine the facts, as many may just be suffering from another, less hazardous and more common virus.

Seeing symbols related to community health can also trigger high levels of anxiety. For example, seeing a van with a governmental agency logo does not automatically mean that your neighborhood is threatened. Or,

noticing someone wearing a mask over his or her mouth does not necessarily mean that the level of alert has risen. Again, colleagues, family members, and friends can calm each other by finding out the facts and communicating with each other.

If these methods of managing anxiety do not work and you or members of your family are having difficulty coping with anxiety over the swine flu outbreak contact a qualified mental health professional, a physician or allied health professional, or a local clinic or hospital. Individual, family or group counseling may help you feel calmer. In times of ongoing tension, the support of others can make the difference between feeling concerned and becoming overwhelmed.

For more information on group interventions as a public mental health intervention, please visit our website at www.agpa.org or contact Diane Feirman, CAE, at 877-668-AGPA (2472) or via e-mail at dfeirman@agpa.org.

About AGPA

The American Group Psychotherapy Association is the foremost professional association dedicated to the field of group psychotherapy, operating through a tri-partite structure: AGPA, a professional and educational organization; the Group Psychotherapy Foundation, its philanthropic arm; and the National Registry of Certified Group Psychotherapists, a standard setting and certifying body. This multidisciplinary association has over 3,000 members, including psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, nurses, clinical mental health counselors, marriage and family therapists, pastoral counselors and creative arts therapists, many of whom have been recognized as specialists through the Certified Group Psychotherapist credential. The association has 31 local and regional societies located across the country. Its members are experienced mental health professionals who lead psychotherapy groups and various non-clinical groups. Many are organizational specialists who work with businesses, not-for-profit organizations, communities and other "natural" groups to help them improve their functioning.

#