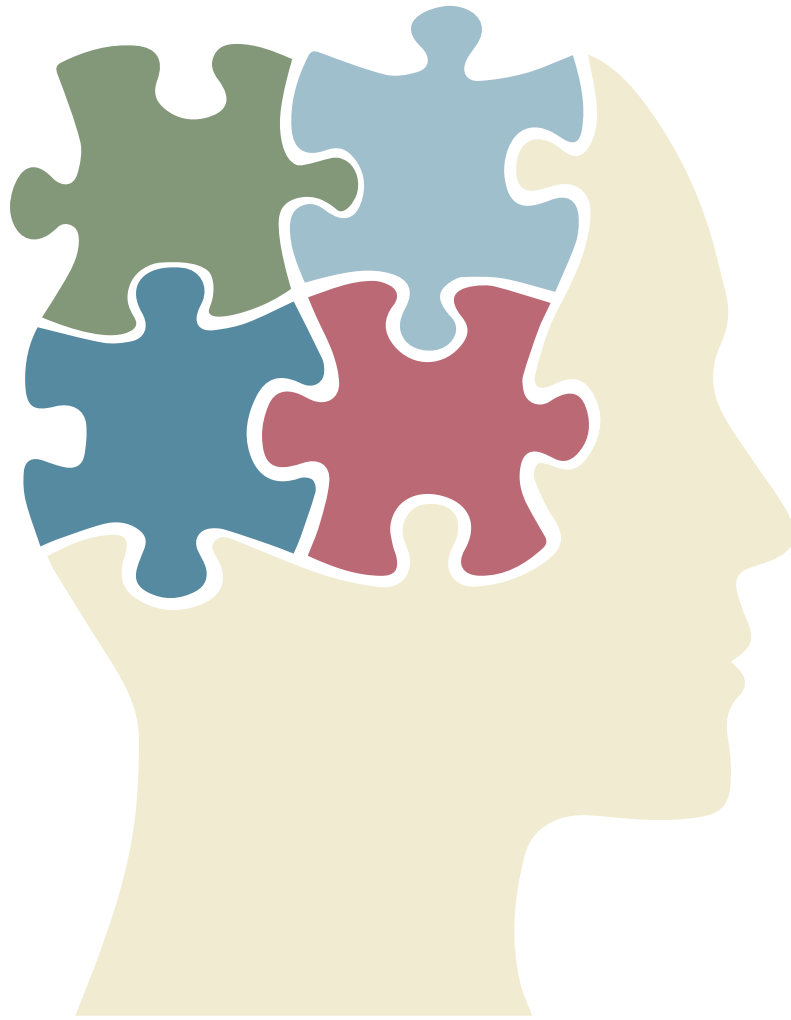




JOHNS HOPKINS  
M E D I C I N E



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Coronavirus: \_\_\_\_\_

Keeping Your Mental Health in Perspective



balance  
Your path to behavioral health

# The coronavirus pandemic is the unprecedented international crisis of our lifetime.

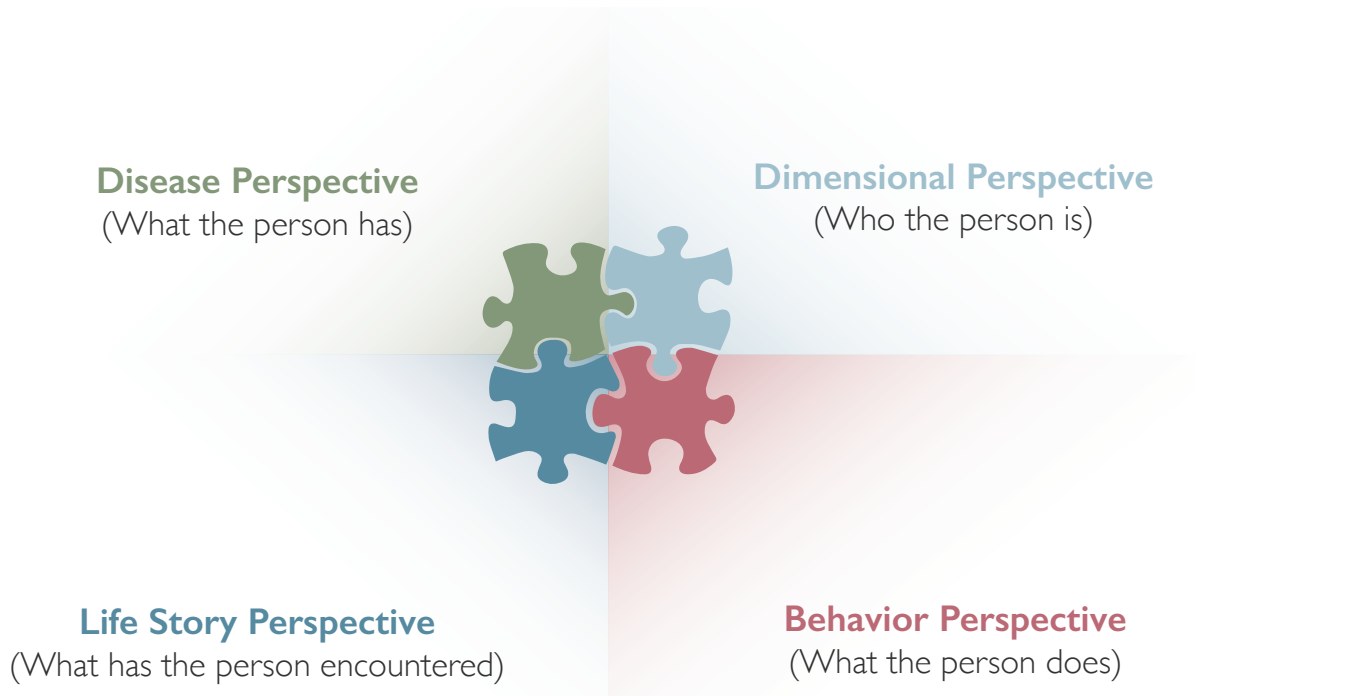
And dealing with its symptoms, coping with the loss of life and the drastic disruption to our routines is having an impact on our mental health and well-being.

Mental, emotional and behavioral issues like stress, anxiety, mild depression and alcohol and drug abuse are affecting some of us. More severe existing psychiatric conditions like bipolar disorder and severe depression are impacting others.

For people challenged by a mental or emotional health condition—and for those who are challenged with understanding them—it is important to recognize that there may be multiple, interconnected causes for these feelings and behaviors. People can use this knowledge to seek the help and support they need to achieve balance in their lives.



**Johns Hopkins Perspectives** is a clinical approach that helps people understand the complexities of their mental distress. Developed and refined over decades of research and clinical practice, Perspectives provides mental health experts a more comprehensive understanding of the nature and origin of an individual's problem, so they can develop a targeted, personalized treatment plan for the individual:



## Maintaining Perspective During a Crisis



Matthew Peters, M.D., is an assistant professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. The Perspectives approach is the foundation of his research, teaching and clinical practice. In the Q&A that follows, Dr. Peters helps us understand how the pandemic likely triggers mental health issues, and offers ways that we can manage our mental health right now to help lessen the impact of these triggers.



### What is the Disease Perspective?

It is possible that the cause of a person's condition arises from a biological or chemical disorder in the brain. These conditions are similar to other medical conditions, such as high blood pressure or high cholesterol. Here's a case to illustrate the disease perspective.



Paul is a 20-year-old IT technician who was diagnosed with a **major depressive disorder** as a teenager. Paul has been self-isolating for several weeks now, and he is aware that his depression symptoms have worsened. His moods have darkened and his motivation to do anything, including eating, has decreased.



**Q:** How can Paul, whose depression is caused by a chemical imbalance in his brain, relieve the distress caused by his self-isolation?

**A:** Treatment of conditions such as major depressive disorder often require a combination of individual therapy and management with medications. In Paul's case, an antidepressant medication should be considered. Through individual therapy he would learn about the importance of staying engaged in healthy behaviors. These two approaches together are more powerful than either one alone.



## What is the Dimensional Perspective?

This perspective takes into account the kind of person someone is—their personality traits, level of social engagement, intelligence and other attributes. These attributes exist along a continuum, with most people falling somewhere in the middle and a smaller number existing at the extremes. Here's a case to illustrate the dimensional perspective.



Tonya is a 43-year-old database manager for a small manufacturing plant, who has always thrived when she worked within a familiar structure. But when she was asked to work from home, spending weeks away from her structured environment, there was an increasingly noticeable **lack of consistency and thoroughness in her work.**



**Q:** How can Tonya, who needs structure to be productive, regain control of her life and work?

**A:** Conscientiousness is the personality trait related to one's desire to do well and take obligations seriously. Being high on conscientiousness, Tonya is used to working in an organized and efficient manner and she struggles when things are more relaxed and disorderly. The treatment goal would be for Tonya to develop a daily schedule for her at-home environment and a structure that can act as a surrogate for the environment she has previously thrived in. Once she understands and takes advantage of her conscientiousness, her functioning will improve, as will her mental well-being.



## What is the Behavior Perspective?

What drives a person's behavior is complicated. This perspective considers how a person's emotional distress can be explained by what they do and how their condition can be improved by changing what they do. Here's a case to illustrate the behavior perspective.



Ashraf is a 45-year-old emergency medicine physician who enjoys the occasional glass of wine with dinner. However, to relieve his almost debilitating stress caused by working double shifts for days to treat the surge of patients with COVID-19 symptoms, Ashraf started drinking two or three cocktails every day after work. **His drinking recently escalated** to the point that he missed a morning shift because of a hangover.



**Q: How can Ashraf control his drinking when the stress of his workload is bound to intensify?**

**A:** This is a great example of a socially acceptable behavior turning into a condition that may require treatment. Ashraf is transitioning from social alcohol use to alcohol abuse with consequences that are impacting his life. The driving force is the work-related stress. Ashraf will need help to replace a maladaptive behavior (increased alcohol use) with a healthy behavior (meditation, exercise) that will diminish the driving force (work-related stress). Given the chaos he is experiencing at work, he should take comfort that this behavior change is something completely within his control.



## What is the Life Story Perspective?

Each of us has a lifetime of experiences that shape our unique story, which, in turn, impacts our emotional and mental health. Like any good story, there is a setting, sequence of events and an outcome to each of our life experiences. And while we can't change those experiences, we can change how we rewrite our narrative. Here's a case to illustrate the life story perspective.



Everyone who knows Denise thinks of the 38-year-old hairdresser as a pretty chill person who thoroughly enjoys the stress-free lifestyle her work allows her. But since being laid off because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Denise has had difficulty adjusting to the reality that she will be broke in less than two months if she can't go back to work. Despite the offering of friends and family to assist her financially, **she experiences constant worry** that has led to daytime attacks of anxiety and nights of troubled or lost sleep.



**Q: What can Denise, who has enjoyed a mostly stress-free life, do to reduce her anxiety?**

**A:** Denise has experienced a change in her life story. Her anxiety is occurring in the setting of the COVID-19 pandemic and the outcome of possible financial crisis. Although she is dealing with some very real concerns, Denise can rescript this part of her life story in a more positive light. Because of who she is as a person, she has a group of individuals who want to help her. By reframing her current situation, and working on sleep hygiene and controlled breathing, Denise can lower her anxiety while still remaining true to herself.

A lot has changed in the more than 100 years since mankind has faced the kind of uncertainty caused by this global pandemic. But one thing has remained constant: during a crisis, people are more stressed, anxious, and challenged to maintain good mental, and physical, health.

And while it is more complicated to reach out for in-person mental health support during a crisis, remote help is available. The Johns Hopkins Balance program is a health care benefit that employers make available to their employees. Based on the Perspectives approach, Balance features both a confidential, online risk-assessment questionnaire and phone and video access to experts, who are specially trained to provide the guidance and support your workforce needs to get the best care, *right now*.

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To learn more about Perspectives and the Johns Hopkins Balance program, please email [balance@johnshopkinssolutions.com](mailto:balance@johnshopkinssolutions.com) or visit [healthy.works/balance](https://healthy.works/balance).