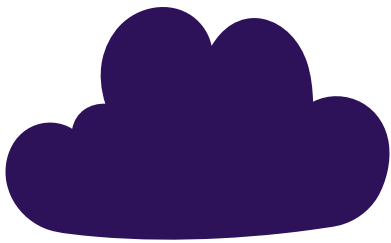


# FEELING GOOD IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC

**SAIMI PROGRAM II:  
INTEGRAL HEALTH FOR  
IMMIGRANT WOMEN**

**A TÚA VOZ PROGRAM II  
ONG MESTURA**



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# GUIDE PRESENTATION

Have you surrounded by negative thoughts since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic? Do you find it difficult to manage certain emotions? Do you find it harder to do everyday activities? Don't worry! Although all of this is uncomfortable, it is a **normal** response.

Living in a pandemic is an atypical situation that none of us have been prepared for. The pandemic has caused numerous and frequent **changes** in our routine, requiring us to **continually adapt**. These changes generate a lot of **uncertainty** and a feeling of **loss of control**. This situation, maintained over time, can be exhausting. In addition, if we are exposed to other complicated situations (such as being in a foreign country), we may face an even more intense, lasting or frequent **psychological discomfort**.

This **support guide** aims to provide tools to cope with all these changes. How? By identifying and changing unrealistic **thoughts**, managing the **emotions** that appear more frequently in the new situations, and promoting **healthy habits** and **self-care**.

If this material is not enough, we will also provide you with information on other **resources** that you can turn to in order to feel good in times of pandemic.

*The preparation of this guide is an action developed by the NGO Mestura framed in the second edition of the **SAIMI** program II: Comprehensive Health for Immigrant Women, financed from the 0.7% tax allocation of personal income tax, managed by the Xeral da Igualdade Secretariat of the Xunta de Galicia.*



*The translation of this material into English has been carried out by Alice Jaymes Vasquez, a volunteer who participates in the **A Túa Voz** program II, subsidized from the 0.7% tax allocation of the personal income tax, managed by the Department of Social Policy of the Xunta de Galicia.*





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# 1. INTRODUCTION: LIVING IN PANDEMIC

## 1.1. PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

We say that we are living in a **pandemic** because we are exposed to a disease (that of COVID-19) that has been spreading for a **long time** in many countries, attacking almost all the people who live in those regions where it has arrived. This disease is affecting the whole world, not only at the health level, but also at the economic and social level.



The COVID-19 pandemic is even harming people who have not contracted the disease, because just living with the virus and the need to protect ourselves from it has led to many **changes in our daily lives**. This has especially affected our routines and our way of relating to others. Moreover, the context is so fast-changing that our constant need to adapt to new measures makes things more difficult. Because of this, it is normal to feel uncertainty, insecurity, a feeling of loss of control... And other emotions that may affect our **psychological well-being**.

Given the consequences of a pandemic, it is not surprising to see people reacting with some alarm, since our health is threatened (even now that the medical and scientific community has made progress in terms of prevention and treatment against the disease). Moreover, if we are also exposed to other secondary stressors, our psychological well-being can be considerably compromised:



We are exposed to a new and long-lasting disease that affects globally.



We also have many changes in our routine at a social, family, work, economic level...

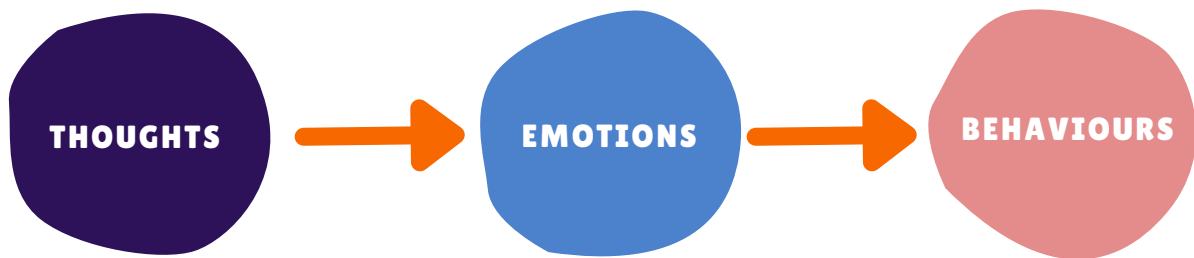


We can feel anxiety, stress, fear, anguish, helplessness, sadness, reluctance, anger, rage, irritability .

## 1.2. IS MY REACTION NORMAL?

As we said, it is not surprising that we experience unpleasant emotions in this very new and unpredictable situation. However, despite the fact that all of us are living in the same pandemic, we are not experiencing it in the same way. There are as many experiences and reactions as there are people, all of them are valid and normal.

What does our reaction depend on? Mainly from our thoughts, that is, from the interpretation we make of the situation we live in. Depending on how we assess this situation, we are going to react in one way or another: we are going to feel and behave in a certain way.



**What do I think?**  
Our thoughts are our internal speech and refer to how we value the situation we live in. Our interpretation may depend on previous experience, values, personal characteristics, what we think of ourselves and of others...

**What do I feel?**  
The interpretation we make of the situation we live in will determine the emotions we feel. Some may be new to us or more intense than usual.

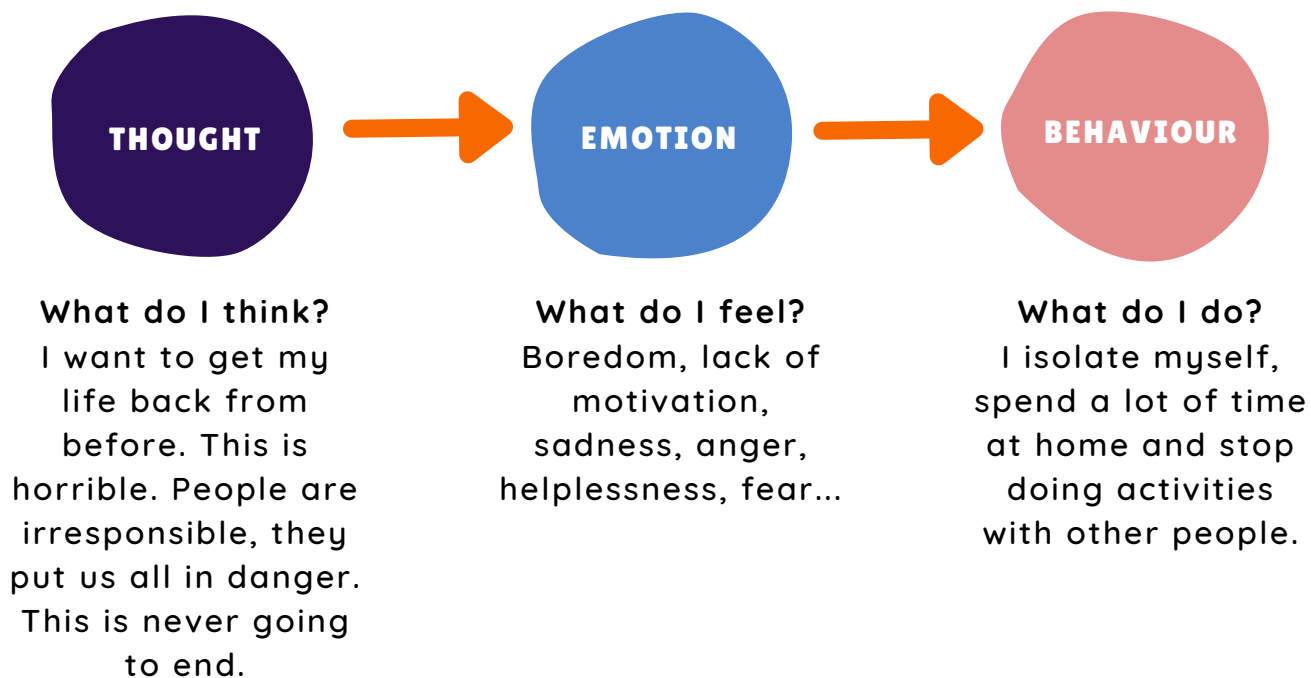
**What do I do?**  
The emotions we feel will motivate us to behave in a certain way. In the best of cases, whatever the emotion, if we interpret it correctly, it will prompt us to do something that helps us feel better.



Furthermore, our behavior often reinforces our initial interpretation.



Let's go with an example of a common reaction that can occur in the situation of living in a pandemic:



The most common thing in a pandemic situation is that they appear:

- **Repetitive and intrusive thoughts** of the type: "this will never happen", "I want my life from before", "I am not going to get out of this", "I am ruining myself", "I will not get a job soon"...
- **Unpleasant emotions: sadness, stress, apathy, irritability, anger, emotional exhaustion...**
- **Unhealthy habits:** isolation, low activity, neglect of hygiene or physical appearance, higher intake...
- **Physical sensations:** changes in sleep or appetite, fatigue, agitation, palpitations, muscle tension, shortness of breath...

Experiencing any of these reactions is normal and in general, we should not worry, as they are the typical consequences of experiencing such a novel and abnormal situation. Some reactions are more common than others. Most of them will pass over time without the need to intervene, or with specific help (like the one we provide in this guide). However, if any of these reactions become **frequent, long-lasting** and/or **intense**, or are interfering a lot in your day-to-day life, consider the possibility of receiving **professional psychological help**.

### **1.3. DO I HAVE A HIGHER RISK OF FEELING BAD?**

Psychological discomfort can become more frequent, long-lasting or intense if you are in any of these situations:

**YOU ARE IN A SITUATION OF BEING UPROOTED**

**YOU ARE IN THE PROCESS OF ADAPTATION TO A HOST COUNTRY**

**YOU ARE FACING THE MIGRATORY GRIEF**

**YOU FEEL UNINFORMED OR ISOLATED  
(DUE TO A LANGUAGE BARRIER OR THE DIGITAL DIVIDE ...)**

**YOU HAVE LOST SOMEONE TO ILLNESS**

**YOU OR A LOVED ONE HAVE THE DISEASE**

**YOU CANNOT HELP THE FAMILY THAT IS IN YOUR COUNTRY OF ORIGIN**

**YOU DO NOT HAVE ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE**

**YOU STILL HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO GET VACCINATED**

**YOU ARE IN THE PROCESS OF NORMALIZING YOUR LEGAL SITUATION**

**YOU HAVE LOST YOUR JOB OR HAVE BEEN IN AN ERTE**

**YOU HAVE FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES**

**YOU LIVE IN A DIFFICULT SITUATION AT HOME**

**YOU HAVE DIFFICULTY RECONCILING THE CARE OF YOUR CHILDREN**

**YOU ALREADY HAD A PREVIOUS PHYSICAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH PROBLEM**

Any of these situations can increase the risk of suffering emotional distress, but not necessarily. If you are experiencing any of these situations, we invite you to pay more attention to the appearance of the signs of psychological discomfort that are exposed in this guide.

## 2. FEELING GOOD IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC

This section presents some guidelines to control negative thoughts, manage unpleasant emotions and have healthy habits and thus reduce the psychological discomfort derived from the pandemic situation.

### 2.1. CONTROLLING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

As we explained previously, thoughts are the internal speech that we have with ourselves and that reveal how we interpret the situation we live in. They determine what we feel and what we do.

Normally our thoughts help us to be **aware** of what we are living, to **face** the situation and **respond** in a useful way to it. However, sometimes we are inundated with some **automatic, intrusive and unrealistic thoughts** that, instead of helping us to resolve the situation, interfere and cause us discomfort.

These types of negative thoughts usually appear if we are going through an emotionally intense or stressful situation and they are difficult to control. If you are experiencing thoughts of this type, we invite you to put these three steps into practice:

#### 1 Identify the thought.

Tómate unos minutos para preguntarte:

- Is there something that worries me?
- What do I think of the situation that worries me?
- How does this situation affect me?
- Are these thoughts helping me to resolve the situation or are they blocking me and causing discomfort?

#### 2 Confront your thoughts.

We often regard our own thoughts as absolute truths, but sometimes our interpretations are wrong. Have you ever thought that something was going to be horrible and in the end it wasn't as bad as you imagined? Once you identify the thoughts that are causing you discomfort, question them

- What is the probability that what I think is real?
- Can there be any alternative explanation?
- If someone else experienced this, would they interpret it the same?
- If someone else told me that they are experiencing this, what would I say to them?

### ③ Create a personal phrase

What we say to ourselves has a lot of power (even more than what others can tell us). Just as we can cheer ourselves up when we have a hard day, we can create personal phrases to say to ourselves in difficult times.

- When you start to feel unpleasant emotions, tell yourself: "I am not going to let this feeling get the better of me", "This feeling is temporary."
- If you have been feeling like this for a while: "I feel bad because it is a difficult situation", "I am going to do something to make myself feel better, such as talking to someone who can help or support me."
- When you feel better, congratulate yourself on it: "Well, I was able to do this!"

Here is an example of how to put these three instructions into practice to modify negative thoughts.

**Situation:** You just got off the phone with your father who is in your home country and he tells you that his neighbor has tested positive for COVID-19. At the end of the call, you resume what you were doing before the call, but you are not able to concentrate. Your kids come home from school and you can't help being irritable with them. That night you are not able to fall asleep. You feel distress and anxious. You start to think about your father's neighbor: "They were together a few days ago. What if he was already infected and the virus has infected my father? I don't know what we would do ...! He is alone, he has no one who can take care of him. And over there the health care is terrible! I have no possibility of sending money or medication from here. How did we get in this situation ...?!".

You **analyze your thoughts** and realize that your concern is that you will not be able to provide your father with the care he needs if he becomes ill. It is not a thought that is helping you resolve the situation, it has not even happened yet. You begin to **confront that thought** that you are assuming to be true and you recognize that you do not even know if your father is infected or not. In fact, it does not have any symptoms and you know that he knows the most effective prevention measures. You think about what you would say to a person in the same situation: "Do worry. At the moment he is fine. Perhaps the neighbor was not infected yet when they saw each other. Also, if they had the mask on and socially distanced, the chances of contagion are greatly reduced. And if it does eventually turn out to be positive, you may not need any specific treatment. Let's wait. " You use your **personal phrase** and you tell yourself that this feeling is not going to beat you and you distract yourself with other pleasant activities.

## 2.2. HANDLING UNPLEASANT EMOTIONS

We have already seen that our state of mind is related to our thoughts. What if we identify our negative thoughts and manage to change them, but still have unpleasant feelings?

The first thing we have to understand is that all emotions have a utility. There are no "bad" or "negative" emotions, although some are unpleasant to feel. Even those that are the most uncomfortable for us are good, as they help us identify our needs and adapt to the situations we live in.

Have you ever felt stress in the face of a situation that you had to solve? For example, before a job interview, an exam, an administrative process ... This stress helps you realize that this situation is important to you, and that you must invest time and energy to obtain the best possible results. Stress also activates you physically, enabling you to actively face the situation. If in this situation you did not feel any stress, the most likely thing is that you will let it pass, you will get confused with the dates, you will not make an effort to solve it and finally the result would be bad.

We do not like to feel stress, but this emotion, in its proper measure, is very adaptive. What can we do, therefore, with the rest of the unpleasant emotions that can appear in a pandemic situation?

### 1 Identify the emotion, normalize it, and accept it.

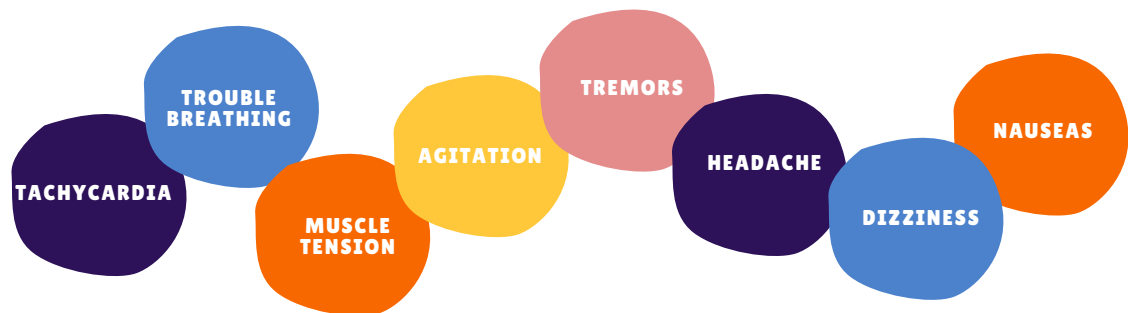
We often reject the emotions we feel when they are unpleasant by saying "I don't want to feel this." However, all we can do is pay more attention to them, making them more intense and long-lasting. What do you think of if you continually tell yourself "Don't think of a red car"? Surely of a red car. Something similar happens with our emotions.

Accept that they are already present and normalize them. Do not resist, do not be critical of yourself. Everything you are feeling is normal. Identify the emotion and ask yourself:

- Taking into account the situation in which I live, should I feel differently?
- If I told someone how I feel, would they understand my emotions?
- Would I understand that someone else was feeling the same as me?

## 2 Face and redirect the emotion of ...

- **Anxiety.** This emotion appears when we detect a threat, something that can compromise our physical and / or psychological well-being. It is no wonder we feel this emotion if we are experiencing a pandemic. Anxiety can produce these physiological responses:



All these physical sensations are unpleasant to us and, on certain occasions, they generate even more anxiety. To relax our body and feel calmer we can do **diaphragmatic breathing**, a slow and deep breath. Do we practice it?

### DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING

Go to a **quiet place** and get into a **comfortable position**, sitting or lying down.

Place one hand on your chest and the other on your abdomen, above your navel and begin to breathe slowly.

**Take air through your nose for 3 seconds.**

**Hold the air for another 3 seconds.**

**Expel all the air through your mouth for 6 seconds.**

Try not to let the air stay in your chest, but rather go down to your abdomen, **filling your belly**. In this way, the hand on your abdomen should move in time with your breathing, while the hand on your chest will barely move.

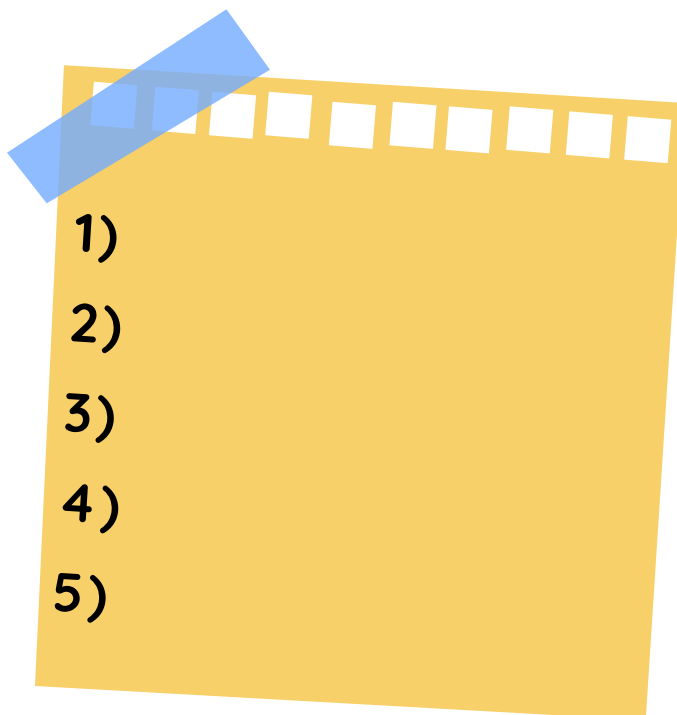
**Repeat this for several minutes.** You will notice how your body gradually relaxes.

- **Sadness.** We experience this feeling when we have lost someone or something important to us. In times of pandemic, this emotion is usually related to the death of a loved one, loss of stability, breaking with our routine and our daily activities...

Sometimes this emotion is so intense or long-lasting that it drags us with it. Faced with a sad day, it is likely that what we most want to do is isolate ourselves and reduce our activity. But... does that help us feel better or feed our sadness even more?

We invite you to try to break with the inertia of not wanting to do anything caused by sadness and to **plan rewarding activities** that promote pleasant emotions such as joy, motivation, feelings of usefulness ...

Write here 5 daily activities that you usually enjoy (for example: going for a walk, reading a magazine, dancing, watering the plants, doing something handmade, painting your nails, taking a bath, talking to someone on the phone ... ) and try to include them in your day:



- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

Sadness also leads us to pay attention to those things that we do not like, preventing us from enjoying the good moments that there may be. At the end of the day, spend some time **being aware of the good things** you have experienced and do an exercise in gratitude for them. What have you been grateful for today?

- **Anger or irritation.** It is very likely that these emotions appear in a pandemic situation, as it indicates dissatisfaction with the situation we are experiencing.

It may be that the origin of our anger is external (for example, in the face of the restrictions that politicians implement) or internal (wanting to make a plan that involves social contact but discarding it for safety reasons).

When you identify this emotion ask yourself these questions: What makes me angry? What would I like to see changed? Can I do something to change what bothers me? How angry is this worth being?

## 2.3 HAVING GOOD HABITS

If you are identifying that your behaviors are not healthy or adaptive, that is, that they are affecting you emotionally and interfering in your life, you can follow these guidelines:

### 1 Establish a routine.

Get yourself an agenda or calendar and plan your activities weekly. Try to make the non-working days different. Includes daily:

- Break time.
- Moderate physical activity. We don't propose that you run a marathon, just half an hour a day of moderate physical activity will improve your mood (walking to work or shopping, taking a walk...).
- Care of personal appearance and hygiene behaviors.
- Feeding hours.

Try to introduce some new activity a couple of days a week: meet someone, treat yourself, attend an event...

### 2 Keep in touch with other people.

People are social beings, we need to establish meaningful interpersonal relationships to feel good. Contact those you love and who are supportive to you, especially if you are feeling bad. Fortunately, technology allows us to contact even people who are far away. Take advantage of it!



### 3 Take care of the things you do have control over.

Since the pandemic began, there are many things that we have no control over. Thinking about it makes us feel helpless and insecure. Make an effort to seek control within the chaos.

You can't control or change a pandemic, but you can control what you want to do.

Focus on the present, your routine and the day-to-day activities that depend on you.

### 4 Stay informed.

In this highly uncertain situation, it is normal and appropriate that we want to be informed, as it gives us a certain sense of control and security. However, we have to be careful with our sources of information. Use the official sources and periodically check the updates of the things that may interest you (vaccination plan, restrictions in your area, new security measures ...). But beware of overinformation! Avoid an excess of information on the topics that concern you the most or generate negative emotions.

## 3. WHAT IF IT IS NOT ENOUGH?

If you consider that the guidelines proposed in this guide are not enough to improve your psychological well-being; that it has become more intense, frequent or lasting and / or is affecting you considerably in your day-to-day life; If you are engaging in behaviors that are harmful to yourself or are invading thoughts related to the idea of hurting yourself, consider seeking professional help.

You can contact:

- Your doctor or medical service staff
- The community social services of your town hall.
- Some social group or activity of which you are a member.
- To the Official College of Psychologists of Galicia: 981 53 40 49.
- To the Help Line, which is available 24 hours a day to assist with critical situations: 981 51 92 00.

Any of these options will be able to advise you on the available resources that may cover your needs or they could even provide you with help directly.

## **4. SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

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