

Mental Health Tips for the COVID-19 Crisis

The outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 is likely to be stressful for people, because it is outside the range of normal day-to-day experiences. Fear and anxiety about a disease like this can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in both adults and children.

What Are the Emotions People Have During Infectious Disease Outbreak?

- Fear and worry about your health and the health of your family, friends and coworkers
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- Changes in sleep and/or eating patterns
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs

For people with preexisting mental health conditions, treatment should continue and they should be aware of any symptoms that are new or worse.

If you or someone you care about is feeling overwhelmed or want to cause harm, these are the numbers to call:

- 911
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746. (TTY 1-800-846-8517)

How Much Stress Are You Experiencing?

According to the CDC, how you respond to the outbreak can depend on your background, the things that make you different from other people and your community.

People who may respond more strongly to the stress of a crisis include:

- Older people and people with chronic diseases who are at higher risk for COVID-19
- Children and teens
- People who are helping with the response to COVID-19, like doctors and other health care providers, or first responders
- People who have mental health conditions including problems with substance use

Someone might say to you, "we are all stressed" when trying to be comforting. However, that statement can also be interpreted as diminishing or dismissing what you are feeling. While it is true that we're all stressed about the coronavirus, each person's situation and stress matter.

How Much Anxiety is Too Much?

It's natural to have concerns about major events such as the coronavirus. The uncertainty about where the virus will spread and the threat it poses are understandable. But when fear and anxiety are excessive, or when they get in the way of an ability to function on an everyday basis, such as with relationships and work or school tasks, talking to a counselor can help.

How Can We Cope?

First, it is important to follow the precautions that the CDC and the WHO advise to protect ourselves and others and prevent the spread of disease. We can control this behavior. Then we must accept there are aspects of the crisis that we can't control. However, if we recognize that feelings are not always facts, it can help us to keep extreme emotions at bay.

Other things you can do to support yourself:

- **Communicate.** Consider creating a disaster plan so that you can connect with loved ones and support services during a crisis (for templates, check Ready.gov Empowerment & Self-Efficacy).
- **Act.** Do something about things over which you do have control. Develop a COVID-19 disaster kit so that you will have the supplies you need if you or a loved one gets ill. Public health emergency disaster kit guidance can be found at Ready.gov.
- **Take breaks.** Step away from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic constantly can make you feel worse.
- **Be healthy.** Take deep breaths, stretch or meditate. Try to eat a healthy diet, exercise, get enough sleep and avoid alcohol and drugs.
- **Unwind.** Make time to indulge in enjoyable activities, like reading, cooking, crafting, fishing and more.
- **Connect.** Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.

What About Therapy?

Although you might not feel the time is right for therapy (perhaps because you don't think your problems compare to what others might have on their plates), isn't now the perfect time? If you already have worry, depression, anxiety, spouse issues, parenting issues, grief, substance abuse, and other mental and emotional burdens, COVID-19 will make everything else harder.

How Can I Support Others Who are Anxious?

The same advice applies to our family and friends as to us—they should control what they can and do what experts tell us. Beyond that, we can suggest they take the steps

above to regulate negative emotions. But if it appears that a person we know is experiencing significant distress or impairment to their ability to function on a daily basis, we can let them know it's okay to get help and point them to mental health resources.

What Else Should I Know?

Here are some resources to check out:

[Alcoholics Anonymous](#). Information on finding **[virtual and telephone meetings, as well as videos and other resources](#)**.

[Crisis Text Line](#): Text NAMI to 741-741. Connect with a trained crisis counselor to receive free, 24/7 crisis support via text message.

[Marijuana Anonymous](#): **[meeting finder](#)**.

[National Domestic Violence Hotline](#): Call 800-799-SAFE (7233). Confidential support to anyone experiencing domestic violence or seeking resources and information. Spanish and other languages are available.

[National Parent Helpline: Call 1-855-427-2736. Offers a telephone helpline for parents and caregivers, offering a listening ear, problem-solving help, and other resources.](#)

[National Sexual Assault Hotline](#): Call 800-656-HOPE (4673). Crisis chat support is available at **[Online Hotline](#)**.

[National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#): Call 800-273-TALK (8255). The website also has a chat function and resources and a phone number for those who are deaf or hard of hearing.

[Psychology Today: Find a Therapist](#): Listing of therapists by state and by specialty, including special populations such LGBTQ and others, by insurance accepted, type of therapy, online/tele therapy, and more.

It is important to recognize and monitor your stress level during a COVID-19 outbreak.

Physical Reactions ▪ When you are under stress, your body reacts. You may experience low energy, exhaustion, sleep problems, headaches, muscle aches, appetite change, increased heart rate, or stomach upset. Be sure to check with your doctor about any significant changes as many stress reactions mimic major physical disorders and diseases.

Emotional Reactions ▪ You may experience anxiety, worry, fear, sadness, tearfulness, and/or loss of interest in usual enjoyable activities. You may also feel frustration, irritability, anger, or helpless. Strong feelings that won't go away, last longer than a few weeks, or are interfering with normal functioning may be a symptom of depression or anxiety and are a sign that you should seek professional mental health help.

Behavioral Reactions ▪ Some behaviors triggered by stressful events need to be stopped because they cannot only harm your physical and mental health, but they also make the situation worse for others. Harmful behaviors include, but are not limited to, increased dependence on nicotine or alcohol, substance abuse, gambling, bullying, blaming others, spreading rumors or conspiracy theories and ignoring public health and safety recommendations.

Cognitive Reactions ▪ The stress of COVID-19 may affect your ability to think clearly, make it harder to pay attention, solve problems or remember. It does not mean that you are “crazy” or “losing your mind.” These are common reactions in times of high stress. They are signals to you to take action to care for yourself.

Psychological First Aid (PFA) Strategies - While physical First Aid is used to reduce physical pain from a body injury, Psychological First Aid (PFA) is a strategy to reduce the painful range of emotions and responses experienced by people exposed to high stress situations. The PFA strategies cool your temper, do things that bring you joy and laughter, and try to get enough sleep.

Learn and practice coping techniques such as deep breathing, visualizations, and muscle relaxation. Talk to a disaster behavioral health responder, or a mental health professional if your stress level seems overwhelming.

Perspectives Counseling Centers is utilizing video conferencing and telephonic communication to keep our clients and our staff safe. To schedule a video appointment, call 866.296.5262.