



COVID-19 PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLNESS GUIDE

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The COVID-19 pandemic is stressful for everyone, although each person responds differently to stress. Common reactions include feeling anxious and afraid, scared, sad, angry, and overwhelmed. These feelings are understandable. People also may have problems eating, sleeping, concentrating; may feel exhausted or foggy; and may struggle to be as productive as usual. Some people may turn to maladaptive ways to manage their stress (like substance misuse or not following the CDC recommendations for staying safe). In addition, people may experience challenges with taking care of themselves and others, communicating effectively, and managing all the competing demands in their lives. Healthy coping with stress will make you, the people you care about, and your community stronger. To help people cope optimally with their stress, support themselves, and maintain their well-being, here are some tips. Helpful resources also are included.

Stay Connected

- **Prioritize relationships**
 - Connect with trustworthy, empathic and understanding people who can support you and check in with them frequently
 - Share your fears and anxieties with them as you are able
 - Consider different people for different kinds of support, since some family and friends struggle to “get it” emotionally but might be good people to have fun with or from whom to receive practical support
- **Use technology**
 - Connect socially with others through technology - physical distance does not mean you cannot socially connect with others
 - Get support from your friends, family and co-workers via phone, Facetime, WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom, Marco Polo, or WebEx
- **Start new social traditions**
 - Have “virtual meals” or “group hangouts” via video calling
 - Start a tradition of having a “virtual happy hour” with friends or colleagues
- **Be your own best advocate!**
 - Ask for what you need from your support system, especially in terms of practical resources, social support, and your own mental health needs



Foster and Re-Invent Wellness

- Follow the best practices for keeping yourself safe
 - Wash your hands frequently and/or use hand sanitizer
 - Do not use your hands to touch surfaces when possible, use your elbow instead
 - Keep touch limited and then wash your hands after you touch things from the outside
 - Do not touch your face with your hand – remind yourself not to do so when outside by wearing a mask or bandanna
 - Do not touch others
 - Keep at least 6 feet away from others
- Take care of your body - taking care of your physical wellness is important for your mental health!
 - Be sure to rest, eat healthy foods, drink plenty of water, and, get adequate sleep at night - healthy eating and sleeping habits are important to replenish yourself and to build up your immune system
- Keep moving – *exercise is evidence-based medicine!*
 - Move your body morning, noon and night
 - Take a walk, take the stairs, dance, stretch, do yoga or tai chi, etc.
- Practice mindfulness and focus on the present, which can increase positive emotions and reduce anxiety
 - Try to pay attention to the current moment without judgement
 - Take a moment to pause and use your five senses to take in your surroundings
- Meditate
 - Check out some meditation videos online (e.g. [UC San Diego resource library](#), [UCLA library](#)) or via apps (e.g. [Calm](#), [Headspace](#), [Virgin Pulse](#), [Whil](#), [The ACT Companion](#), [UCLA Mindful App](#))
- Experience time with nature
 - Spend time outdoors and enjoy the warmer weather such as taking a walk (if safe) or listening to birds while physically distancing
 - Try to get at least 15 minutes of time in the sunshine a day
 - Listen to earth sounds, like birds and rustling trees, if you cannot get outside
- Engage in spiritual activities
 - Participate in prayer, meditation, liturgical dance, etc.
 - Consider the meaning of life for oneself and others
- Develop and maintain a routine
 - Ensure your routine includes sleep, mealtimes, exercise/activity, and balance of work/play



- Prioritize a steady rhythm, which will help your body and mind function at optimal levels
- Avoid negative outlets
 - Notice urges to engage in unhealthy behaviors to cope with COVID-19 anxiety and stress (e.g., using substances, engaging in impulsive or risky behaviors, eating unhealthy foods, sleeping too much), as these are common
 - Try to replace unhealthy behaviors with positive wellness and coping strategies
 - Participate in support groups online
 - Reach out for help if you are struggling to control your unhealthy behaviors
- Take breaks and pace yourself between stressful activities
 - Take a break when you have the opportunity
 - Remember, this is not a sprint; it is a marathon or multiple back to back marathons
- Plan time to relax
 - Engage in activities that you enjoy (jigsaw puzzles, movies, books, games), especially following a hard task
 - Relax your body often (take deep breaths, stretch, meditate or pray)
- Keep a journal - this can help you keep perspective on daily stresses and let you look back on this unique time.
 - Describe what you are experiencing through your five senses
 - Write about memories
 - Share what you have learned
 - Chronicle the day's events and associated feelings
- Try something new
 - Take an online course – many classes are being offered for free or at discounted rates
 - Start a new hobby, learn a new instrument, learn a new language, or try a new recipe
- Shift your perspective - challenging times can offer the opportunity to experience positive growth and transformation, although this takes conscious work
 - Take a moment to think about how you can grow during this time
 - Ask yourself *“Who do I want to be or become during this time?”*
- Help others
 - Keep in mind, what people share is much more powerful than what keeps people apart
 - Try to do small things for others - this can help us feel connected to a larger community while stuck inside



- Treat yourself and others with kindness and compassion
 - Try not to judge yourself for being afraid or for having difficulty completing work or childcare tasks
 - Remember, everyone is under stress right now and are likely to be more irritable so as best as you can try not to take things personally
 - Try to treat yourself as you would treat a friend who is experiencing similar stressors, that is with gentleness and grace
 - Reach out for help when needed

Manage Stress and Anxiety

- Get educated
 - Know your level of risk and best practices to manage that risk
 - Ask questions or seek out written information
 - Stick to fact-based sites such as the CDC or your local health department.
- Limit media exposure
 - Set limits on your media exposure, especially in the evening before you sleep
 - Try to minimize listening to the news for long periods of time
 - Use your best judgement when determining how much news you need to remain informed
- Remember the value of recommended health practices
 - Remember, when you keep physical distance, you are helping everyone
 - Practice the recommendations of the CDC and other health experts as altruism in action - altruism is a known mood booster
- Engage in deep breathing
 - Make an active effort to slow your breathing when your thoughts race ahead
 - Strive for one (1) minute of relaxation breathing; this has been shown to be helpful
 - Get grounded by counting your breath, noticing your feet beneath you, the chair under you, the clothes on your back
 - Pause to regroup; this will slow the thoughts and help you think clearly.
- Name, acknowledge and accept your thoughts and feelings
 - Try to name or label the thoughts and feelings you are experiencing when you feel overwhelmed – this reduces activity in our limbic system, which reduces unpleasant emotions, helps us access more rational thinking and decision making, and allows us to gently let go of unhelpful thoughts
- Notice what you do have control over
 - Write down or make a mental note of what you have control over when you feel out of control
 - Take steps to feel in control (e.g., wash your hands, keep a safe distance,



learn to work virtually, and do things to improve your mental and physical wellness)

- Accept things you cannot control
 - Take a moment to think about what is out of your control - while this may seem scary at first, it is a very empowering practice
 - Increase acceptance by telling ourselves things like, “it is what it is” or “this is happening, so I am just going to do the best I can.”
- Allow yourself to grieve – Grief is a common response right now as people may be grieving the loss of normalcy or having anticipatory grief because the future is uncertain
 - Be aware that people experience their grief in different ways – some feel angry, some are sad, some may want to ignore their grief, and others feel all these things at different times
 - Try not to shove away these feelings
 - Try to find balance in your thinking - when you think of the worst-case scenario, also try to think of the best-case scenario
- Cultivate gratitude
 - Develop a daily ritual with your family, friends, or colleagues to each share one thing you are grateful about each day
 - Write a gratitude list – write down three things you are grateful for each day - nothing is too big or small.
- Seek psychological help
 - Remind yourself that if you find yourself struggling to cope, it is important and valuable to ask for help – emotional support and psychological or psychiatric help are available and accessible
 - Remember, you matter!

Manage Work Related Responsibilities

- Set and maintain a flexible schedule
 - Set time limits as appropriate
 - Communicate your work schedule to your supervisor or colleagues so that you can remain productive while not letting typical work hours overtake home time and impact your emotional health
- Maintain connections
 - Maintain virtual relationships with your mentors, supervisors and colleagues to obtain needed support
- Establish a buddy system to hold yourself accountable
 - Share your goals and challenges with your buddy
 - Check in regularly



- Reward yourself and your buddy when you achieve your goals
- Create a dedicated workspace
 - Strive to create a private work area if possible
 - Limit email and phone interaction, when/if you are able, to reduce distractions

Remember, it truly takes a village to respond to a pandemic and these are uncharted times we are living through!

Helpful Resources

General Information about COVID-19:

- CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>
- WHO: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
- Emory: <https://www.emory.edu/coronavirus/>
- Emory LGS: <https://www.gs.emory.edu/>
- SAMHSA: <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/tips-social-distancing-quarantine-isolation-031620.pdf>
- Check Your Risk for COVID-19: <https://c19check.com/start>

COVID-19 related Anxiety and Psychological Coping:

- Local COVID-19 emotional support lines
 - Georgia – 866-399-8938
- CDC Coping Resources: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>
- CDC Dealing with a Traumatic Event: <https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/index.asp>
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/covid/index.asp>
- General Recommendations: <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-to-cope-with-coronavirus-covid-19-anxiety-psychologist-2020-2>
- University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Self Help Brochures: <http://counseling-center.illinois.edu/node/376>
- SAMHSA: <https://www.samhsa.gov/coronavirus>
- Psychology Tools: <https://www.psychologytools.com/psychological-resources-for-coronavirus-covid-19/>



COVID-19 related Anxiety for Children:

- CDC:
 - <https://www.livescience.com/coronavirus-kids-guide.html>
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/helping-children-cope.html>
 - https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/readywrigley/documents/RW_Coping_After_a_Disaster_508.pdf
- NPR: <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/13/814615866/coronavirus-and-parenting-what-you-need-to-know-now>
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network: https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf