

Perspectives Tip Sheet – Mental Health Concerns

Mental Health Tips for the COVID-19 Crisis

The outbreak of coronavirus disease 2020 is undoubtedly stressful for people, because it is outside the range of normal day-to-day experiences. Fear and anxiety about a virus like this can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in both adults and children.

What Are the Emotions You Might Have During Infectious Disease Outbreak?

- Fear and worry about your health and the health of their 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.

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 and people who have mental health conditions including problems with substance use.

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, these are signs of potential clinical anxiety.

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.

5 things you can do to support yourself:

- **Communicate.** Consider creating a disaster relief 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.
- **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.

Top-tier employee assistance programs (EAPs) allow for 24/7/365 access to highly-trained counselors and connections to a range of work-life resources. They also pay for counseling sessions that are free to the employees. Furthermore, some insurers will pay for mental health counseling and other services if additional support is needed beyond what is available in an employer's EAP.

The Expanded Perspectives Portal

To support customers and their employees during this difficult time, we added a section for COVID-19 to our [work-life portal](#). Visitors can learn about the virus, discover resources related to its spread and find the steps to prepare for daily living, from adjusting to remote work, to finding remote jobs and seeking medical attention. There are also resources for parents and caregivers, financial information and tailored resources for front-line workers.