

Parent and Family Coping During COVID-19

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During this stressful time, we know that many people are feeling scared, worried, sad, and even frustrated or angry. It is important to take care of yourself both physically and mentally. Below you will find helpful ways to take care of yourself and others during COVID-19. Please contact your Psychology/Social Work team for further support.

Take care of yourself

It may sound cliché, however as parents, friends, and partners, it is very easy to neglect our well-being to care for others.

- Be aware of “over-caring”: giving up parts of yourself while taking care of others
- Think about the things that are most important for you to feel well. Is it sleep, exercise, good nutrition, or connecting with family and loved ones?
- Make a list of a few top priorities and remind yourself that to take care of others, you need to be well to do that.

Set a schedule and stick to it

Schedule times for work, school, chores, exercise, and sleep. Schedules promote healthy habits.

- Get up at the same time every day.
- Get dressed—don’t stay in your pajamas all day.
- Eat at set times—don’t snack all day.
- Don’t watch news all day and don’t think about COVID-19 all day.
- Keeping up a regular schedule also gives a reassuring routine that leaves less time for worry.

In fact, if you are worried and nervous, *schedule your worry* for a specific part of the day. It sounds hard, but people who struggle with worry are often asked to *schedule* their worry so that it doesn’t take over the day.

- Give yourself a specific time each day to do all your worrying.
- When your mind wanders to worries outside the scheduled time, remind yourself that you have already scheduled time for worrying.
- Keep a small journal handy and write down the topics you want to cover during your worry time. You can control your attention by directing where you want to focus, and you cannot focus on everything at once.
- Use your ability to control your attention to focus on positive, productive activities, and pack your worry time into an hour or less each day.

Social Media and News Outlets

What information are you taking in? Do you have limits to the types of notifications (examples: emails, texts) you get on your devices? Do you purposefully turn off the news and alerts to give yourself a break from the large amount of information coming at you? What is your line for getting “what you need to know” but not getting overwhelmed with information? Think about where you get your news and limit how it comes your way.

Take part in Stress Management/Positive Activities

Learn stress management. There are many ways to help you manage stress, some examples are:

- progressive muscle relaxation
- guided imagery



- mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR)

You can find examples online and there are many smartphone apps for meditation and other forms of stress management. Choose an approach that works for you.

5-4-3-2-1 Coping Technique

This is a helpful tool that fully engages your five senses so you can focus your attention to the present moment, away from stressful thoughts.

Take a deep, slow breath.

5: What are five things you can *see*? You see the computer screen. You see the clock. You see a window, and a bird outside. Direct your *vision* to five things in your surroundings.

4: What are four things you can *touch*? The chair you're sitting on. The keyboard in front of you. Your shoelaces. Feel the hand sanitizer cooling your skin. Acknowledge any four things engages your sense of touch.

3: What are three things you can *hear*? Listen carefully. Can you hear the clock ticking? Birds singing? The soft whirring of your computer fan? Take a moment to hear all the noises that you typically filter out.

2: What are two things you can *smell*? Bacon cooking? Perhaps you can go smell the fancy soaps or hair products you have in the bathroom. Smell is a powerful sense for commanding your full attention.

1: What is one thing you can *taste*? Does the inside of your mouth still taste like toothpaste? Coffee? Tea? If you have some coffee or tea handy, take a sip. Try to notice the subtle flavor notes.

Practice Mindfulness

There is a good amount of science behind the benefit of mindfulness for improving well-being. *Mindfulness is present moment awareness, on purpose, without judgment.* Simply notice what is happening right now.

- Do a body scan or notice your 5 senses.
- Try out an app such as **Mindshift, Headspace, or Calm** to do regular guided meditation practice or a beginning meditation course.
- Try setting aside time today to practice being mindful (maybe just 3 breaths, or maybe 10 minutes) and notice how you feel after doing so. If you like the way you feel, do it again tomorrow.

Practice Gratitude, Compassion, Kindness, and Patience.

When stress runs high, we tend to be at our worst, and that can come out in how we treat each other. Try to find extra patience, grace, gratitude, and kindness in your interactions with colleagues, loved ones, and especially strangers. Focus on helping others or saying thank you to those who are helping you. Sharing an attitude of caring and compassion can spread as easily as stress and anxiety. Have compassion for yourself.

More Resources (click to link):

1. [Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with the Coronavirus Disease 2019](#) – The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2020
2. [Mental Health and Coping During COVID-19](#) – CDC, 2020
3. [How to Talk to Your Kids About Coronavirus](#) – PBS, 2020

Information taken and adapted from the following:

- American Psychological Association (APA). (March 2020). *Keeping Your Distance to Stay Safe*.
- Han, J. (2020). *Staying Well*, Personal Communication from the University of Colorado School of Medicine.
- Hughes, J. (2020). *Anxiety Coping Plan for COVID-19 Handout*, Kent State University.