

Center For Brief Therapy @ the  
Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine  
NEWSLETTER  
March 17, 2020

# COPING WITH STRESS AND ANXIETY AS A RESULT OF COVID-19



This week's newsletter will focus on coping with stress, resiliency, and mindfulness during the pandemic of COVID-19. In addition, we will provide links and suggestions for smartphone apps that are beneficial resources to utilize during this time of uncertainty and stress.

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## **STRESS MANAGEMENT:**

### **Talk about your stressors**

- Talking about stress releases hormones in your body that reduce the negative feelings that are associated with stress. Time spent talking with friends and loved ones can be beneficial, all while practicing social distancing.

### **Self-Care**

- Focusing on self-care is important. During times of distress basic needs tend to be forgotten, which lead to more stress.
- Make it a priority to eat well, keep a healthy sleep schedule, and balance your time and energy between work, school, family, and special hobbies.

### **Keep things in perspective**

- Take a step back and analyze how important your stressors are in the broader context. Writing about your stress can help you develop a healthier perspective.

### **Mindfulness:**

- During a state of mindfulness you will notice thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations as they happen. Utilizing mindfulness helps you become aware of your thoughts and feelings, rather than getting lost in them.
- The following techniques are designed to help you practice: mindfulness meditation, mindfulness walk, body scan, utilizing five senses, and grounding techniques.

### **Resilience**

- Nobody knows how long the pandemic will last or how long it will be until we can resume our regular lives. The pervasive uncertainty of the situation makes it hard to plan a course of action and creates a high level of stress. To add insult to injury, our typical ways of de-stressing, such as working out in a gym, watching sports, meeting for happy hours with co-workers or hanging out with groups of friends, have largely come to a halt.
- How can we respond to the coronavirus situation in a way that will preserve our psychological well-being? The following science-based approaches can help.

### **Accept negative emotions**

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- It is important to acknowledge that a lot of anxious thoughts and emotions will show up during this time, and to accept them rather than trying to push them away or escape them. The same goes for sadness stemming from the loss of our regular ways of living, worry about lack of supplies or apprehension about kids getting cabin fever. That's because research has shown that avoidance of such emotions will only make them stronger and longer-lasting. Notice negative emotions, thoughts and physical sensations as they come up, look into them with curiosity, describe them without judgment and then let them go. This is an essence of mindfulness, which has been consistently linked to good psychological health.
  - Instead of fighting our emotions, we can invest our energy in creating the best possible life, given the circumstances.

### **Create new routines**

- Although many people escape from reality by Netflix-binging, cookie-indulging or marathon Fortnite-playing, be mindful of over-relying on these distraction strategies. Instead, studies have shown that planning and executing new routines that connect you to what really matters in life is the best recipe for good mental health.
- It's important to establish structure, predictability and a sense of purpose with these new routines. For example, this might be the perfect moment to learn to play that guitar that has been lying in the corner or to master French.

### **Reflect, relate and reframe**

- It might help to realize that these trying times offer several avenues for psychological growth. Even during social distancing, there is an opportunity to deepen our relationships with the people in our household and beyond.
- Finally, keep in mind that experiencing stress and negative emotions can have positive consequences. Studies show that people who go through very difficult life experiences can emerge from it with a stronger sense of psychological resilience, rekindled relationships and a renewed appreciation of life. Some describe starting to live more fully and purposefully. With care and planning, we, too, can stay psychologically strong during the pandemic and perhaps even grow from this transformative experience.

### **Resilience and Routines for Families:**

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1. Our mental health relies on our physical routines, all too easily lost during times of change.

- Exercise – Daily exercise will make your children happier, even if they complain – and probably make you happier too. Regular exercise affects mood, energy level, learning, and more. If you can't get outside, old-school calisthenics for a set time is great, or seek out online programs like the Seven Minute Workout or yoga for kids.
- Sleep – Actually, sleep may be the easiest thing to manage while school is out. But remember, a consistent routine, including a consistent bedtime, encourages better sleep.
- Nutrition – Eat healthy as you're able. Don't use food to keep kids happy. Stay with a balanced diet. Cooking is also a great activity when caught inside all day.
- Screen time – Seriously, stay on top of screen time. Kids who spend more time on screen get agitated, edgy, and wound up. Open-ended limits lead to more arguing. Set an amount, and a time, and that's all. For adults – do the same, particularly by taking breaks from the news through most of the day. It is far easier to set limits and adjust than to create new ones after a difficult situation develops. Use time on-screen wisely and concisely.
- Relationships – One of the best uses for screens is in sustaining relationships with true friends and family. Use technology well. Support your family and your children by reaching out regularly to friends and relatives during these stressful times.

2. Create structure and routine. Being outside our routine unsettles all of us. Both adults and children may be happier with a rough schedule day to day. Use a piece of paper or whiteboard and post it somewhere for everyone.

- Schedule all your healthy activities, like exercise.
- Set aside time for schoolwork if your school is assigning it or other hobbies and intellectual pursuits.
- Schedule and prioritize whatever else you'd like, like family time or outdoor time.
- Create a chore schedule to keep your physical environment together – or maybe even, use the time home to take on bigger projects (cleaning a closet, giving away toys).

**Resources:**

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Body Scan: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0nuKBVQS7M>

Guided Meditation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mlr3RsUWrdo>

Diaphragmatic Breathing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPgwQFU1Cwc>

Grounding Techniques: <https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/grounding-techniques.pdf>

APA resource page <https://www.apa.org/practice/programs/dmhi/research-information/pandemics>

Are You Worried About the Coronavirus? 7 steps to overcome your worry.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/anxiety-files/202003/are-you-worried-about-the-coronavirus>

**APPS:**

*The following APPS can be found through the APP store on a smart device:*

Mindfulness Coach

CBT-i Coach

Calm

We understand this is a difficult time for everyone. We hope that these resources can be beneficial in coping with uncertainty and managing stress during this time,

The Center for Brief Therapy

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## References

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