



## A NORMAL REACTION TO AN ABNORMAL SITUATION



## CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FOR INTEGRATED CARE

### COVID-19 RELATED STRESS & MENTAL HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS

With you all as our friends and colleagues, we at COE wanted to share a few tips and recommendations from our perspective on how to manage the stress and care for your mental health during this time.

#### EVERYONE REACTS DIFFERENTLY

A person's biology, background, and level of support largely impacts the way someone reacts to a global event such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Stress can manifest in a number of ways, some more obvious than others. Let's take a look at the emotional and physical reactions to stress:

##### *Emotional*

- Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones
- Feelings around a foreshortened future or loss of hope
- Anxiety and/or panic attacks
- Change in the way you experience emotions (numbness or an increased fragility)

##### *Physical*

- Changes in sleep or eating patterns
- Sleep disruption whether it be difficulties falling asleep or remaining asleep
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Fatigue, soreness, lethargy and/or poor concentration
- Physical pain such as joint soreness is not unusual
- Hyper-vigilance ("being on edge")
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

#### LIMIT YOUR MEDIA INTAKE

*"After 9/11, we had the first indication that even people who were not directly exposed to trauma, but spent many hours in front of the television or looking at their smart phones were at high risk for psychopathology, including PTSD, depression and anxiety"*

- Yuval Neria  
Director of Trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder at the New York State Psychiatric Institute

Ways to limit media include:

1. Social Fever is an app that tracks media usage on your phone. Utilize this to increase awareness and challenge yourself to reduce time each day.
2. Put your phone on airplane mode.
3. Give yourself a "news diet" (i.e., 30 minutes a day)

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, **it is normal**. The frequency, severity and level of impairment on your daily functioning is important to consider. Refer to our recommendations in this document.

## STAY IN YOUR TIMEZONE

With so much uncertainty around the COVID-19 pandemic and weakening economy, it is normal to worry about the future. It is normal, and healthy to an extent, to adequately prepare and plan for the future. However, going too deep can cause irrational and catastrophic feelings of anxiety and/or hopelessness. One way to ground yourself, or "stay in your timezone", is to practice mindfulness & meditation, engage in progressive muscle relaxation, or engage in cognitive restructuring. Click on the links to learn more!

Mindfulness techniques (click for links to videos and resources):

1. Deep breathing exercises: 10 minute nourishing breath meditation
2. Meditation Minis Podcast
3. Progressive Muscle Relaxation Education and Videos
4. Cognitive Restructuring

## SETTING BOUNDARIES

It's okay to say no to taking on extra things. Set a limit with yourself about looking at news and social media, a time of day or time limit.

Spend more time with things that make you feel good: TV shows, podcasts, books, and people who make you laugh. Mentally leave the at-home office outside of your work hours. This includes not responding to emails or thinking about work tasks and projects.

## EXPRESSING GRATITUDE

*"Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it."*

- William Arthur Ward

Verbal or written expressions of gratitude has been a cornerstone of positive psychology. Expressing gratitude has immense benefits on social functioning, happiness, self-worth, and even physical health! You can start practicing gratitude today by keeping a journal of people, experiences or parts of your life that you are grateful for. With the frequent washing of hands, use that as an opportunity to think of 3-5 things you are grateful for in that moment. Verbally expressing gratitude are mutually enriching!

## HELP YOUR CHILDREN COPE

Knowing what to do or say when your children ask difficult questions or begin to present with concerning behavior can be a challenge for a parent. Here are some steps toward helping your children during the COVID-19 crisis:

1. Remain calm and reassuring.
2. Validate their feelings. Talk, draw, or write about how they are feeling.
3. Maintain a sense of routine within reason.
4. Help your children stay connected via phone or online with their friends and extended family.
5. Lead and participate in stress reducing activities with your children (i.e. exercise, yoga, deep breathing, etc.)
6. Expect imperfection. Parents and children are not going to manage things perfectly. Be kind to yourself. Modeling self-compassion and flexibility to your children will go far.





## SEEK OUT HELP


*Asking a friend, family member, or member of your spiritual community for support. Simply asking them to listen can go very far.*

If symptoms are persistent, teletherapy is available. Teletherapy, especially when involving Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), has been found to be just as effective in treating depression and stress-related symptoms as face-to-face treatment.

## HOW TO FIND A PROVIDER

- Ask a friend for a referral – often times word-of-mouth from trusted friends is a great place to start.
- Have a brief introductory call or meeting with a therapist or counselor who you are interested in working with:
  - » Ask if the therapist accepts your insurance, and if you would be responsible for a co-pay, and check with your insurance provider if needed, or to verify.
  - » Ask to discuss the therapist's way of working with clients on challenges similar to what you're experiencing.
  - » Ask for the therapist's area of expertise and for the trainings, licensure, or credentials that support that expertise.
- [Psychology Today: Find a Therapist](#)
- [Better Help](#)
- [Talk Space](#)

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