Manage Anxiety & Stress: Stress and Coping

Guide for Students from the Counseling & Social Work Departments

The outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) may be stressful for people. Fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in children and their families. Coping with stress will make you, the people you care about, and your community stronger. **Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations.** How you respond to the outbreak can depend on your background, the things that make you different from other people, and the community you live in.

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 and infants
* People who are helping with the response to COVID-19, like doctors and other health care providers, or first responders
* People who have mental health conditions including problems with substance use

**If you, or someone you care about, are feeling overwhelmed with emotions like sadness, depression, or anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or others call:**

* 911
* Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA’s) Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746. (TTY 1-800-846-8517)

**Stress during an infectious disease outbreak can include:**

* Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones
* Changes in sleep or eating patterns
* Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
* Worsening of chronic health problems
* Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

**People with preexisting mental health conditions should continue with their treatment and be aware of new or worsening symptoms. Additional information can be found at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration ([SAMHSAexternal icon](https://www.samhsa.gov/disaster-preparedness)) website.**

Taking care of yourself, your friends, and your family can help you cope with stress. Helping others cope with their stress can also make your community stronger.

**Things you can do to support yourself**

* Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.
* Take care of your body. Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, and avoid alcohol and drugs.
* Make time to unwind. Try to do some other activities you enjoy.
* Connect with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.

**Call your healthcare provider if stress gets in the way of your daily activities for several days in a row.** It is important to reduce stress in yourself if at all possible. Therefore, it is strongly encouraged to take care of your emotional health and identify if you are experiencing a great amount of stress related to this outbreak so that you can seek help immediately. Children and teens react, in part, on what they see from the adults around them. When parents and caregivers deal with the COVID-19 calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children. Parents can be more reassuring to others around them, especially children, if they are better prepared.

**Not all children and teens respond to stress in the same way. Some common changes to watch for include:**

* Excessive crying or irritation in younger children
* Returning to behaviors they have outgrown (for example, toileting accidents or bedwetting)
* Excessive worry or sadness
* Unhealthy eating or sleeping habits
* Irritability and “acting out” behaviors in teens
* Poor school performance or avoiding school
* Difficulty with attention and concentration
* Avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past
* Unexplained headaches or body pain
* Use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

**There are many things you can do to support your child**

* Take time to talk with your child or teen about the COVID-19 outbreak. Answer questions and about COVID-19 in a way that your child or teen can understand.
* Reassure your child or teen that they are safe. Let them know it is ok if they feel upset. Share with them how you deal with your own stress so that they can learn how to cope from you.
* Limit your family’s exposure to news coverage of the event, including social media. Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand.
* Try to keep up with regular routines. If schools are closed, create a schedule for learning activities and relaxing or fun activities.
* Be a role model.  Take breaks, get plenty of sleep, exercise, and eat well. Connect with your friends and family members.
* Ensure you keep your child at home in the event they are sick to eliminate exposing others.

**For people who have been released from quarantine**

Being separated from others if a healthcare provider thinks you may have been exposed to COVID-19 can be stressful, even if you do not get sick. Everyone feels differently after coming out of quarantine. Some feelings include:

* Mixed emotions, including relief after quarantine
* Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones
* Stress from the experience of monitoring yourself or being monitored by others for signs and symptoms of COVID-19
* Sadness, anger, or frustration because friends or loved ones have unfounded fears of contracting the disease from contact with you, even though you have been determined not to be contagious
* Guilt about not being able to perform normal work or parenting duties during quarantine. Children may also feel upset or have other strong emotions if they, or someone they know, has been released from quarantine.

Resources For Everyone, For Communities, For Families & Children: <https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/index.asp>

<https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/readywrigley/documents/rw_coping_after_a_disaster_508.pdf> - A Ready Wrigley Activity Book for Children age 3-10

*Here is the link for review and more information:*[*https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html?CDC\_AA\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fabout%2Fcoping.html*](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fabout%2Fcoping.html)

**Local Contact Information:**

* Department of Human Resources: 251-578-3900
* Conecuh County Department of Public Health: 251-578-1952
* Conecuh County Mental Health Dept: **(Southwest Mental Health) 251-578-4545 (M-F 8am-5pm)**

**Crisis Hotline: 1/800-239-4673 (24 hrs a day)**

**ACCESS to Care: 251-575-4203 (M-F 8am-5pm)**

**National Suicide Hotline: 1-800-273-8255**

* Evergreen Medical Center: 251-578-2480
* Evergreen Police Department: 251-578-1111
* Any Emergency Dial: 911

**Coping Skills to do at home to reduce Stress or Anxiety:**

* Journaling / write down your thoughts
* Coloring
* Practice focused, deep breathing
* Count to 10 (or in increments of 10)
* Limit caffeine intake, but stay hydrated
* Maintain a positive attitude / positive self-talk
* Get enough sleep
* Talk and vent to a trusted adult/individual
* Listen to music
* Practice relaxation time / take a nap or a time out
* Replace negative thoughts with positive thoughts