

Taking Care of Your Emotional Health During Coronavirus

It's important to note that we are not helpless in light of current events. We can always choose our response to what is happening, and can change our relationship to the moment, befriending ourselves in these difficult times. Here are some things you can do to support yourself and take care of your emotional health in the face of uncertainty:

1. **Avoid excessive exposure to media coverage** of COVID-19. Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories. It can be upsetting to hear about the crisis and see images repeatedly. Limit watching or reading the news to only once per day.
2. **Seek out accurate information from reliable sources**, such as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or your local state public health agencies.
3. Make time to unwind and **remind yourself that strong feelings will fade**. Everything is changing right now, and that includes your feelings. Feelings flow through us like waves. It can help to name your feelings when you recognize them ("*oh this is fear,*" "*irritation is here*"), to feel them in the body (*there's a knot in my stomach, restlessness, jittery feelings in the limbs*), and to notice them change. It can also help to notice where you are not feeling fear (*e.g. my left big toe isn't feeling fear*) as a way of seeing that even when strong feelings are present, there are also parts of you that are feeling more neutral.
4. **Try to do activities you enjoy and maintain daily routines** – e.g. get up at the same time, take your morning walk, take your evening bath – this can help provide a sense of normalcy and stability amidst the changing circumstances.
5. **Take care of and move 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. Even if you are sheltering in place, you can still move - take a yoga or exercise class online, ride a stationary bike, do jumping jacks, toss a ball around with your dog in the backyard, or walk up and down stairs. Exercise helps both your physical and emotional health.
6. **Get outside in nature**—you can enjoy being outside at a safe distance from others. Take a walk, feel the sun shining, get fresh air. Even if you are sheltering in place, sit on your porch, walk in the backyard, or simply open the window.
7. **Challenge yourself to stay in the present**. Anxiety is often fueled by future thinking. When you find yourself worrying about something that hasn't happened, gently bring yourself back to the present moment. Notice the sights, sounds, tastes and other sensory experiences in your immediate moment and name them. You just have to live this moment right here. And often this moment is *okay*, if not better than okay, even amidst a growing crisis. Engaging in mindfulness activities is one way to help stay grounded when things feel beyond your control. Sometimes it helps to literally drop your awareness from your thoughts down into the soles of your feet. A walking meditation is often easier and more grounding than a sitting meditation in times of anxiety and stress.
8. **Maintain a sense of hope and positive thinking**. Seek out and savor moments of beauty (the first spring crocus), connection (your cat sleeping in your lap) or humor (reruns of Seinfeld or whatever makes you giggle).
9. **Separate what is in your control from what is not**. There are things you can do, and it's helpful to focus on those. Wash your hands. Remind others to wash theirs. Take your vitamins. Limit your consumption of news (Do you really need to know what is happening on a cruise ship you aren't on?).

10. **Do what helps you feel a sense of safety.** When we feel overwhelmed, we have to come back to a sense of safety before we can reach out and meet life's challenges. Connecting with a sense of safety will be different for everyone, and it's important not to compare yourself to others. Maybe for you safety is curling up with a good book and snuggling your cat or dog. Maybe safety is playing video games...or cooking a good meal...making a cup of tea...taking a nap...calling a friend...having a good cry...There is no right way. What do you need? What works for you?
11. **Maintain healthy relationships.** Social distancing can foster a sense of isolation, which can be stressful as we are wired to be social beings. Connecting with others by phone, social media, video platforms (e.g. skype, google hangouts, zoom), text or email can be helpful. Share your concerns and how you are feeling with a friend or family member. There are ways to share life even with social distancing in place to slow the spread of disease. For example, have a cup of tea with a neighbor as you each sit on your own front porch, garden in your respective yards with a neighbor across the street, play words with friends, continue your book group via a video platform, or as they did in Italy, have a balcony sing-a-long. Be creative, and **stay connected.**
12. **Take care of your loved ones and your neighbors.** Offering a warm smile to a neighbor, or calling to check on an elderly family member can make someone's day and soften the sense of isolation. Those who are most vulnerable among us - the elderly, those with compromised immune systems, the poor - are feeling fear and stress just like you. Reaching out and offering kindness is good for them, and it also nourishes our own hearts, as we experience our common humanity and our innate goodness. One of my favorite stories so far is hearing about 2 kids playing a porch concert for their 78 year old neighbor sheltering in place.
13. **Reach out if you need more support.** If you are feeling particularly anxious or if you are struggling with your emotional health, it's ok to reach out to a mental health professional for support. You don't have to be alone with your worry and it can be comforting to share what you are experiencing with those trained to help. Please note that most therapists across the country are offering telehealth video sessions so you don't have to compromise your sense of physical safety while you are attending to your emotional and mental well-being.

We are in this together, and help is always available. If you're feeling alone and struggling, you can also reach out to The Crisis Text Line by texting TALK to 741741 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK. Or locally, Colorado Crisis Services at 844-493-8255.



Additional Resources to Support Coping with COVID-19:

General Health Information about COVID-19:

- [Center for Disease Control \(CDC\) Website](#)
- [Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment](#)

Mental health resources:

- CDC [Tips for Managing Anxiety and Stress](#) during the COVID-19 outbreak.
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: [Taking Care of Yourself in the Face of Uncertainty](#)
- American Psychological Association: [Five Ways to View Media Coverage of the Coronavirus](#)
- American Psychological Association: [Podcast about Coronavirus Anxiety](#)
- American Psychological Association: [Information on Navigating Social Distancing](#) - insights on how to separate yourself from others, while still getting the social support you need.
- Guided imagery for [anxiety relief](#) and [stress reduction](#). There is a whole audio library available that you to access, including a section with recordings for kids.

Talking to kids and teens:

- [Talking to Children about COVID-19: A Parent Resource](#) - from the National Association of School Psychologists
- [Talking to Tweens and Teens about Coronavirus](#): A New York Times article
- [Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) - from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)
- [Additional resources for coping with the pandemic](#) - from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)

Meditation:

- [The Mindful Living Summit](#) is a free online event, March 19-22, 2020, gathering 16+ leading neuroscience experts, mindfulness teachers, and psychologists to explore practical insights, guided mindfulness practices, and helpful tools you can start using right now to cultivate inner-resilience, and strengthen our presence.
- [Creating a home retreat](#): Being at home may create the perfect opportunity for some to create a self-retreat at home. This website offers support for creating a self-retreat under the guidance of senior meditation teachers Jack Kornfield, Trudy Goodman and Tara Brach.
- **Free drop-in lunchtime virtual meditation group - with Jean Leonard, Ph.D.** As noted above, coming home to the moment, as well as maintaining a sense of community are essential supports to our well-being. Come join me for a weekly guided meditation and optional group sharing starting Wednesday 3/25, 12-1 pm, MST (*no meeting 4/8/2020*). Details about joining can be found [here](#).
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Good News/Humor:

- Good News Network - [10 Positive Updates on the COVID-19 Outbreaks From Around the World](#)
- [Things that Bring a Smile in These Hellish Times](#) - the Guardian

Jean Leonard, Ph.D., LLC | for additional resources or an updated version of this handout please see http://www.jeanleonardphd.com/covid-19_care/



Pandemic

by Lynn Ungar, 3/11/20

What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—
the most sacred of times?
Cease from travel.
Cease from buying and selling.
Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world
different than it is.
Sing. Pray. Touch only those
to whom you commit your life.
Center down.

And when your body has become still,
reach out with your heart.
Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.
(You could hardly deny it now.)
Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.
(Surely, that has come clear.)
Do not reach out your hands.
Reach out your heart.
Reach out your words.
Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love--
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.