

Protecting Your Mental and Emotional Health From Coronavirus

Facing any illness can stress our physical, mental and emotional health. Stress affects those who are sick but also caregivers and those indirectly exposed to the situation. Currently, we are facing the challenge of a global pandemic. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines a pandemic as the worldwide spread of a new disease facing populations with no immunity to combat the illness.

Stress and anxiety during this pandemic, which are common and normal, come from concern for yourself, your loved ones, your personal security and future during largely unknown circumstances. Markedly elevated prevalence's of reported adverse mental and behavioral health conditions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic highlight the broad impact of the pandemic and the need to prevent and treat these conditions (1). You can protect yourself and loved ones by being proactive about mental and emotional health, which are just as important as your physical health.

University of Maryland Extension research identified the following ways to be proactive:

- ▶ **Limit your exposure to media.** Staying glued to Facebook and online news feeds will only heighten your stress and anxiety.
- ▶ **Empower your knowledge.** When you do want information, use only reliable media sources since not everything on the web is factual. See suggested sites below.

- ▶ **Reduce your anxiety by reducing your risk.** Limit your exposure by avoiding large gatherings and be aware of social distancing, Wear masks when out in public, increase your exposure to fresh air, clean and disinfect your surroundings, and wash your hands frequently (2).
- ▶ **Create a plan.** Develop a plan in case you or your loved ones become sick. Keep essential medications and household necessities on hand.
- ▶ **Have a conversation.** Talking to friends and loved ones to share concerns will help you understand that you are not the only one feeling worried.
- ▶ **Practice resilience.** We will bounce back from this situation and normalcy will return. As you become more educated, you will be better prepared for the significant changes caused by the pandemic.
- ▶ **Continue to live.** Using a proactive approach will help you safely continue your daily life. Go outside and breath fresh air.
- ▶ **Stay Positive.** Focus on the wonderful things in life, big and small.
- ▶ **Avoid the bandwagon.** Do not jump into emerging trends unless recommended by professionals.
- ▶ **Seek professional help.** See a licensed mental health professional if necessary.

Everyone experiences mental and emotional distress or even breakdowns. The severity will be specific for each individual since we all react differently to difficult situations. During this pandemic, empower yourself and help remove the stigma related to mental and emotional health needs through education.

The 4-H Program fully supports efforts in improving our overall health and wellbeing, with new efforts being directed at mental and emotional health for our children and families.

Resources for Coping with Stress and Anxiety Related to the Pandemic

Coping with Stress (excellent resource from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fprepare%2Fmanaging-stress-anxiety.html)

COVID-19 Anxiety (<https://adaa.org/finding-help/coronavirus-anxiety-helpful-resources>)

Coronavirus Anxiety: How To Prepare, Not Panic (<https://www.psychom.net/coronavirus-anxiety-how-to-prepare-not-panic/>)

How to Cope with Anxiety About Coronavirus (COVID-19) (<https://www.verywellmind.com/managing-coronavirus-anxiety-4798909>)

Feeling Anxiety About Coronavirus? A Psychologist Offers Tips to Stay Clearheaded (<https://www.ucsf.edu/news/2020/03/416836/feeling-anxiety-about-coronavirus-psychologist-offers-tips-stay-clearheaded>)

References

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COVID-19: Risk Reduction Strategies. ECLKC. (2021, September 7). <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/physical-health/article/covid-19-risk-reduction-strategies>.

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