

Department of Family and Consumer Sciences

COPING DURING COVID-19: TIPS FOR ADULT AND CHILD MENTAL WELL-BEING

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During this time of uncertainty and change, many are experiencing greater levels of stress and anxiety. Some individuals are directed to stay isolated at home and are unable to see their loved ones. Others are managing a chaotic work-life balance by caring for children and working remotely. Many are part of the frontline, working tirelessly to care for the ill, or providing essential services to meet our basic needs. Whatever the situation may be, families are experiencing stress and hardship more than ever. Here, we provide signs and tips for managing stress and anxiety for adults and children.



Signs of Stress and Anxiety¹⁻³

Stress and anxiety look different for everyone. Many experience varied reactions when responding to stress. Some internalize stress by withdrawing into themselves, wanting to be alone and distant in processing difficult feelings. Others externalize their stress by being easily upset or moody and may find it more difficult to get along with others. Below are common signs of stress among adults and children during the COVID-19 crisis.

Adults

- Constant worry over being infected or worry over the health of loved ones.
- Disrupted sleep.
- Eating more or less than normal.
- Inability to concentrate.
- Increased desire to use alcohol, tobacco or other drugs.
- Increased moodiness, including anger and irritability.
- Tense social interactions with loved ones.
- Feelings of depression, including sadness, hopelessness or isolation.
- Worsening health symptoms of chronic physical or mental health condition.

Children

- Increased outbursts, such as crying, tantrums or other “acting out” behaviors.
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns.
- Avoidance of activities that normally bring joy.
- Sudden inability to pay attention or concentrate.
- Unexplained physical health symptoms, like stomachaches or headaches.
- Returning to behaviors they have outgrown (bedwetting, toileting accidents).
- Showing greater fear of separation from caregiver.
- Risk-taking behaviors, such as drug or alcohol use in teens.

Tips for Promoting Mental Well-Being¹⁻⁶

There are several ways to reduce stress and improve mental well-being. Adults should use these strategies for promoting their own mental well-being before attending to the needs of children.

Adults

Find information from trusted sources. There is a lot of misinformation on the topic. Use a source that cites data from reputable health organizations, such as your state’s health department, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), or the World Health Organization (WHO).

Set media boundaries. Overuse of the media news coverage during this time intensifies anxiety. Find a trusted source and set a time of day to check in to read updates.

Connect. Be socially distant, but not socially isolated. There are several ways to connect with loved ones that don’t involve being there in person. Meet over videoconferencing technology, such as Skype or Zoom. Write an email or drop a letter in the mail to your friends or neighbors.

Practice self-care. Reserve time for yourself to do whatever it is that makes you feel good. Go on a walk (but maintain social distancing), unwind with a hobby, relax by taking a bath, or use mindfulness-based exercises.

Ask for help. Use a supportive network to discuss your concerns and feelings. Reach out to loved ones or seek telehealth services that provide online or talk therapy.

Children

Once adults have tended to their own mental well-being, children will benefit from the 3Rs: *Reassurance, Routine* and *Regulation*.

Reassurance. Reassure that the extreme measures in social distancing are for everyone’s safety and that this is temporary. Be sure to openly listen to children’s questions, share developmentally appropriate information, stick to the facts and avoid sharing misinformation.

Routine. Establish a predictable routine that your family can count on day to day. Feeling out of control is common during this time, so providing routine can bring about a sense of normalcy. Offer children enriching activities to keep them occupied while also learning and having fun.

Regulation. Regulate your own emotions and help others with theirs by practicing and modeling self-care. Be especially compassionate to those who are experiencing heightened emotions during this time. Maintain optimism and strengths-based viewpoints about the situation, such as focusing on positive ways our community is coming together to support one another to enhance children's feelings of security.

References

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