

Safety Newsletter



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Mental Health Assessment – COVID-19

As the number of cases of COVID-19 increase, so does the associated anxiety. For the general public, the mental health effects of COVID-19 are as important to address as are the physical health effects. And for the one in five who already have mental health conditions – or the one in two who are at risk of developing them – we need to take personal, professional, and policy measures now to address them.



For the past several weeks, Mental Health America or MHA has been using its unique database to monitor daily this increase in anxiety. According to MHA screening data, they experienced a 19 percent increase in screening for clinical anxiety in the first weeks of February, and a 12 percent increase in the first two weeks of March. This suggests that screeners are not just “worried well.” Instead they represent thousands of people whose lives and sense of well-being are being severely impacted by concerns about the virus.

Check out the screenings and assessments at:
<https://screening.mhanational.org/screening-tools?ref=Covid>

Protecting Your Mental Health

Human beings like certainty. We are hard-wired to want to know what is happening when and to notice things that feel threatening to us. When things feel uncertain or when we don't generally feel safe, it's normal to feel stressed. This very reaction, while there to protect us, can cause all sorts of havoc when there is a sense of uncertainty and conflicting information around us.

A large part of anxiety comes from a sense of what we think we should be able to control, but can't. Right now, many of us are worried about COVID-19, known as the “Coronavirus”. We may feel helpless about what will happen or what we can do to prevent further stress. The uncertainty might also connect to our uncertainty about other aspects of our lives, or remind us of past times when we didn't feel safe and the immediate future was uncertain.

In times like these, our mental health can suffer. We don't always know it's happening. You might feel more on edge than usual, angry, helpless or sad. You might notice that you are more frustrated with others or want to completely avoid any reminders of what is happening. For those of us who

already struggle with our mental wellness, we might feel more depressed or less motivated to carry out our daily activities.

It's important to note that we are not helpless in light of current news events. We can always choose our response. If you are struggling, here are some things you can do to take care of your mental health in the face of uncertainty:

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 what helps you feel a sense of safety. This will be different for everyone, and it's important not to compare yourself to others. It's ok if you've decided what makes you feel safe is to limit attendance of large social events, but make sure you separate when you are isolating based on potential for sickness versus isolating because it's part of depression.

Get outside in nature—even if you are avoiding crowds. Take a walk. Get your dose of vitamin D, and get some fresh air and quality time with family. Exercise helps both your physical and mental health.

Challenge yourself to stay in the present. Perhaps your worry is compounding—you are not only thinking about what is currently happening, but also projecting into the future. 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. Engaging in mindfulness activities is one way to help stay grounded when things feel beyond your control.

Stay connected and reach out if you need more support. Talk to trusted friends about what you are feeling. If you are feeling particularly anxious or if you are struggling with your mental 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.

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

Taking Care of Mental Health During COVID-19

During this time of unprecedented global public health crisis, many people across all communities are feeling the stress of the health threat: concerns about becoming ill, uncertainty about the future, possible financial strain, and dramatic changes in daily routines. Individuals respond to stress in different ways and some are prone to negative impact on their mood, anxiety, sleep and overall well-being. This is a critically important time for everyone to take extra care to protect their mental health. Here are some practical tips to be as proactive as possible about our mental health.

- Mental and physical health are interrelated and we know that taking care of our physical health can also support our mental health.
- Get good sleep. This is a time to worry less about getting things done and more about making sure you are getting enough sleep and rest. Sleep is restorative and important to our physical health, and we all want to help our immune systems right now. Basic sleep hygiene rules include not using sedatives or alcohol to sleep, keeping to the same sleep hours every day, and only using the bed for sleep and sex.
- Move throughout the day. This includes stretching, finding yoga videos on YouTube, walking around the house or property, dancing, and playing active video games. If you find a good resource online that works for you, share it with those you know.
- There are many meditation and breathing apps. A simple breathing exercise encourages inhaling for four seconds, hold the breath for seven seconds, and exhaling for eight seconds (4-7-8 for short).
- Drink water regularly and limit alcohol intake. Alcohol can worsen depression over time.
- Follow doctors' orders to take prescribed medication on time.

Stay focused on what you can control

- Engage in activities you don't normally have time for: play that instrument that's been sitting in the corner gathering dust; research YouTube videos on things you've always want to know or found interesting; journal; watch nature videos; fold your laundry; meditate; or play with your pets.
- Limit news intake (including news on social media). Turn off TV news and limit your intake to two 15-minute periods a day and read news from trusted sources in addition to newsfeeds on social media.
- Stick to a daily routine. If you are working from home, don't work from bed. Get up, get dressed and shower at your usual times. Have meals when you usually do and put the kids to bed on time.



- Make your environment safe and comfortable. Pull out “creature comforts” like favorite blankets, scented candles, etc. Safely secure anything that you might be concerned if kids got into if they are home with you (this is especially true for firearms right now).

Stay connected



- Reach out when you are feeling lonely. Use technology and find creative ways to stay connected. Start group text chats that check in with each other regularly. Talk about things other than current news. It's OK to limit talking about things that increase your stress, but it's also important to seek reassurance from others when you need it. Organize a coffee break chat via FaceTime or Zoom with your coworkers. Write that letter to your elderly relative or, better yet, call them. Invite friends to a virtual dinner party using video chat.
- Check if your therapist is providing telehealth services. If you are in mental health care, many therapists are able to provide online telehealth services on the phone or online. Reach out to your provider to see if yours is.
- Check in on your older neighbors: Leave a note for your older neighbor that lets them know you are available to help with a small errand (if safe).

Youth and COVID-19

This is a time of uncertainty for youth and young adults, and they don't have the life experience to know that this will pass. In addition, their schedules are disrupted: they are having fewer opportunities for socialization and events they have been looking forward to (graduation, sporting events, dances) may be canceled or already have been canceled.

- It is important for adults to listen to their kids' feelings about what is happening, reassure them and remind them that we are all in this together. It is also important not to minimize their disappointment but to hear and validate it. Also instruct them about the importance of universal precautions (washing hands) and explain that we are taking these measures so that we help others who are more vulnerable stay healthy.
- Create “virtual opportunities” for socialization for them whenever possible. Online chats or video calls with friends are great examples.
- For kids who have existing mental health issues, current uncertainty may make things worse.
- Encourage your child to continue to take care of their health (regular sleep, eating, and exercise), make sure they are taking medication if prescribed, and be in touch with your child's mental health provider if needed, especially if you think their mental health symptoms may be worsening.