

Coping Skills and Emotional Well-Being Practices

The following resources provide information and practices to help you cope with anxiety, uncertainty, and stress.

[Self-Compassion and COVID-19](#) by Drs. Chris Germer and Kristin Neff

“Self-compassion can help if the virus is causing you unnecessary anxiety, limiting your ability to work or travel, reducing your income, or if you or someone you know has already contracted the virus... Self-compassion boosts the immune system, it reduces anxiety, and it’s the easiest way to keep our hearts open to others. Some measure of fear is a healthy response to a contagious virus, of course. We want to respond to the contagion in a wise manner – with preventive measures that benefit ourselves and others.”

For self-compassion guided activities: <https://self-compassion.org/category/exercises/>

[Care for Your Coronavirus Anxiety](#)

“Resources for anxiety and your mental health in a global climate of uncertainty.” This site has vetted and compiled a wealth of research-backed and helpful tools—articles, meditations, access to mental health experts, anxiety screenings, and more. See the “[Take a Break](#)” section for simple resources and skills to refocus and refresh.

[Headspace](#) (smartphone app for mindfulness, emotional health, physical health, and sleep exercises)

“We’re offering all US healthcare professionals, who work in public health settings, free access to Headspace Plus through 2020. What’s going on right now is a challenge for everyone. But you, our healthcare professionals, are particularly overburdened. Headspace wants to be here for you and support you as best we can. If you are a healthcare professional, you can redeem your subscription using your National Provider Identifier (NPI) and email address.”

Additional resources are available for workplaces, educators, and families. [Learn more.](#)

[Progressive Muscle Relaxation](#)

Progressive muscle relaxation is a technique that involves alternating tension and relaxation in all the body's major muscle groups. When you experience anxiety or stress, your muscles often become tense. Progressive muscle relaxation can give you a greater sense of control over your body's anxiety response and can help increase relaxation.

There are many free, online guided versions of this technique. A few options are offered below:

[Progressive Muscle Relaxation from MHealthy](#)

[Montefiore Medical Center Relaxation Audio Tracks](#) (available in English, Spanish, and Arabic)

Positive “Micro” Practices to Improve Coping

These brief activities can be incorporated into the course of your day—they don’t require going to a class, special equipment, or (in some cases) even leaving your desk or area—and can create small but meaningful positive changes.



Take a Vacation

Find 5 minutes in your day for a minimal vacation. Choose to focus, fuel/hydrate, move, or connect with others. Even a quick break can help you re-energize for the next task.

Give Thanks

Offering heartfelt words of appreciation can demonstrate that efforts are noticed and actions are valued.



Learn Their Stories

Do you really know your colleagues? Sit down with your co-workers and learn their story—ask about their hopes and goals for the future, their experiences, and what motivates them each day.



Three Good Things



Each day, list three things that went well for you. Then, write down your explanation for why those things went well. This brief reflection activity can help you recognize the sources of goodness in life.

Practice Kindness

Research shows several benefits from acts of kindness. Encourage kindness (for example, make coffee for the office, leave an appreciative note, or ask to help out a colleague on a project) to strengthen teamwork and compassion.



Celebrate Small Wins

Consider how you can celebrate the everyday successes that keep you and your team motivated, supported, and engaged.

Drop 3

In this brief relaxation exercise, practice becoming aware of tension in your jaw, shoulders, and stomach muscles. One by one and with each exhale, “drop” and let go of any tension in those areas.



Facilitate Mentoring

To increase engagement and retention, connect new employees with a mentor. Experienced employees can also benefit from mentoring to develop new skills that contribute to innovation and social connection.



Find Your Purpose

A team mission or motto can be a unifying message that provides ongoing direction and inspiration. Ask: “Why do we exist as a team?” and “What gets you out of bed each day?” Draft a brief, core purpose statement based on the responses.



A Mindful Moment

Find a quiet time and place. Focus your mind on a pleasant image, sound, or simply your own breathing. Try to simply focus on the present moment. Just a few minutes of mindfulness can help recharge our attention and energy.



Celebrate Anniversaries

Work anniversaries are important, and celebrating each person’s anniversary as a team helps to reinforce their value and commitment to the department.



Promote Self-Care

Consider how you can promote and model healthy behaviors for your team—and remember that well-being is a broad concept that encompasses many aspects of health.

Time to Move

Every hour, make a habit to move your body for approximately three minutes. Try some stretches, take the stairs instead of the elevator, walk down the hall, or try standing rather than sitting at your desk.



Eat Together

Try to plan at least a weekly lunchtime gathering (or coffee break) with one or more people. Finding a time to connect with others can help everyone feel more energized for the remainder of the day.



Positive Messaging

Use words and communication that bring about positive interactions. Practice being personal, encouraging, passionate, and empowering with your colleagues.



Three Good Things

The “Three Good Things” practice is a simple method of redirecting attention towards positive thoughts and away from negative thoughts. This exercise allows us to see good things as “gifts.” Thinking of the good things in your life as gifts can prevent you from taking them for granted, and to be more aware of the positive people and events in daily life. Try to savor the gifts you receive each day, no matter how small or large.

Allowing yourself just a few minutes a day to reflect on the sources of goodness in your life can help boost positive emotions, increase life satisfaction, and contribute to a more positive outlook on life. This exercise can also reduce stress and negative emotions.

Instructions

At the end of each day:

1. Think of three good things that happened today. These could be relatively small in importance (“My spouse made the coffee this morning”) or relatively larger in importance (“I received an award at work today”).
2. Write them down. Try to be as specific as possible—include details about the event, the person, or circumstances. Also reflect on how you felt about the situation or person—describe how you felt at the time, as well as how you feel now while reflecting on it.
3. Reflect on why they happened. What causes or explanations can you give for why each “good thing” went well for you? What role did you play in making these good things happen?



Self-Compassion Break

When you notice that you are feeling frustrated, sad, irritated, afraid, angry, anxious, or ashamed, take a moment and focus on your breath. Rest your hand lovingly over your heart, on your cheek or arm. Feel the warmth of your hands and the gentle touch of your hands.

Now, say to yourself:

1. *This is a moment of suffering.*

That’s mindfulness. Other options include: *This hurts. Ouch. This is stress.*

2. *Suffering is a part of life.*

That’s common humanity and connectedness. Other options include: *Other people feel this way. I’m not alone. We all struggle in our lives.*

3. *May I be kind to myself.*

That’s self-kindness. Other options include: *May I give myself the compassion that I need. May I learn to accept myself as I am. May I forgive myself. May I be strong. May I be patient.*

This practice can be used any time of day or night, and will help you remember to evoke the three aspects of self-compassion when you need it most.



Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Manage Anxiety & Stress

Stress and Coping

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 adults and children. 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
- 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 ([SAMHSA](#)) 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.

Reduce stress in yourself and others

[Sharing the facts](#) about COVID-19 and understanding the actual risk to yourself and people you care about can make an outbreak less stressful.

When you share accurate information about COVID-19 you can help make people feel less stressed and allow you to connect with them.

Learn more about [taking care of your emotional health](#).

For parents

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 [share facts](#) 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.

Learn more about [helping children cope](#).

For responders

Responding to COVID-19 can take an emotional toll on you. There are things you can do to reduce secondary traumatic stress (STS) reactions:

- Acknowledge that STS can impact anyone helping families after a traumatic event.
- Learn the symptoms including physical (fatigue, illness) and mental (fear, withdrawal, guilt).
- Allow time for you and your family to recover from responding to the pandemic.

- Create a menu of personal self-care activities that you enjoy, such as spending time with friends and family, exercising, or reading a book.
- Take a break from media coverage of COVID-19.
- Ask for help if you feel overwhelmed or concerned that COVID-19 is affecting your ability to care for your family and patients as you did before the outbreak.

Learn more [tips for taking care of yourself](#) during emergency response.

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
- Other emotional or mental health changes

Children may also feel upset or have other strong emotions if they, or someone they know, has been released from quarantine. [You can help your child cope.](#)

Resources

For Everyone

- [Coping with a Disaster or Traumatic Event](#)

For Communities

- [Coping with stress during an infectious disease outbreak](#)  
- [Taking Care of Your Behavioral Health during an Infectious Disease Outbreak](#) 

For Families and Children

- [Helping Children Cope with Emergencies](#)
- [Coping After a Disaster](#)  – A Ready Wrigley activity book for children age 3-10

For First Responders

- [Emergency Responders: Tips for taking care of yourself](#)
- [Disaster Technical Assistance Center](#)  (SAMHSA)

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