

Coping with Stress while Sheltering at Home during the COVID-19 Crisis

Dealing with Stress during COVID-19

It is natural to feel stress, anxiety, grief, and worry during and after a disaster. Give yourself permission to feel these emotions and name them: “I am feeling grief over the fact that my child’s activities have all been cancelled.” Everyone reacts differently, and your own feelings will change over time. Taking care of your emotional and physical health during a crisis will help you think clearly so you can protect yourself and your loved ones. Self-care now will help your long-term healing. Take the following steps to help you cope:

Understand the Risk

While it is important to get the facts, avoid using untrustworthy information sources and try to limit watching the news to once per day. Children are especially affected by what they hear and see on television and it can increase adult stress and anxiety as well. Credible sources for information about COVID-19 include : [CDC](#), state and local public health departments.

Common Signs of Distress

Look out for these common signs of distress: Noticeable change in appetite, energy, and activity. Having trouble concentrating. Not sleeping well or having nightmares. Upsetting thoughts or images. Frequent physical reactions: headaches, body aches, stomach problems, changes in appetite, and skin rashes. Worsening of chronic health problems. Feeling angry and short-tempered. Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or drugs.

If you or a loved one experience these feelings or behaviors for several days in a row and are unable to carry out normal responsibilities, seek help. [SAMHSA](#) offers free, multilingual and confidential counseling services specific to people who are experiencing anxiety or stress due to a disaster. Call 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746. If you feel overwhelmed with emotions or want to harm yourself or others, call 911 or National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK.

Make a Plan

Assemble an emergency supply kit that includes at least 2 weeks’ worth of food, medications, household supplies, and pet food in case of quarantine. If you need ongoing medical care for a chronic health, mental health, or substance use condition, call your health care or treatment provider to prepare in case you cannot go to the office or clinic. Develop an emergency plan with family members that includes having each other’s contact information and ensuring all members check in with each other routinely if you are not together. Those who have preexisting mental health conditions should continue with their treatment plans during this stressful situation and contact their mental health provider if any new symptoms are noticed.

Practical Ways to Reduce Stress

Besides preparing and getting accurate information, you can do several things to respond to stress while sheltering in place. Relax your body often by doing things that work for you—take deep breaths, stretch, meditate or pray, go outdoors for a quick walk, or engage in pleasurable hobbies that can be done at home or with physical distancing from others. Take breaks between stressful activities. Reward yourself and do something fun after a difficult task. Include enjoyable activities like eating a good meal, reading for pleasure, listening to music or an audiobook, taking baths or showers, practicing yoga, watching a favorite movie, or talking with family and friends. Express your feelings to those you trust or journal. Focus on positives by writing down things you are grateful for or what is going well. Maintain positive relationships and strengthen your support system.

[Eat healthy well-balanced meals](#), be physically active daily, and get adequate sleep. Limit your use of alcohol, tobacco, vaping, and other drugs. Taking care of your physical health is an important foundation in supporting your emotional and mental health.

Learn more about COVID-19 and ways to protect yourself, loved ones, and your community: Visit [Center for Disease Control and Protection, COVID-19](#)