



# Coping with COVID-19

## Keep up a daily routine:

- Go to sleep and wake up at the same time every day
- Get up and get dressed just like a normal day
- Eat regular meals at regular times
- Try to limit your time spent absorbing the news and social media.
- Spend at least 30 minutes outside your home being active and *moving*. If you can't get outside, then move in front of an open window. If you can't do that, then move in front of the TV watching Planet Earth...the point is to get exercise and try to experience as much nature as you can.
- Use phone calls or video conferencing to connect all members of your household with other friends or family for at least 30 minutes a day, especially children with their friends.
- Enjoy music, games, puzzles, art with each other, whether you are a child or an adult. You'll feel lighter letting your seriousness go for a few minutes.
- Play with kids. It's how they learn, and it helps them communicate. If you don't have your own children facetime or skype with nieces or nephews or your friends' kids. You will help them, and you'll feel better too.

## Adapt your thinking to our new reality.

- There is no guidebook. We are all doing the best we can with the information we have.
- While you should try and keep a daily routine, be prepared to break it. Know you will have to deviate from normal schedules and recalibrate expectations again and again. Be kind to yourself. No one, anywhere, has done this before.
- Approach time in manageable chunks. Don't focus on months from now. Take time in whatever amounts you can handle: a day, a week, an hour. We don't have a timetable for managing COVID, and we don't know what the next months will bring.
- Know that it is normal to feel a lot of different emotions-or, even, more than one at the same time. Everyone reacts differently under stress. The COVID-19 pandemic is very stressful and is compounded by social distancing and isolation on the one hand and a lot of togetherness on the other. Some people have:
  - Anxiety, worry, and fear
  - Frustration and anger
  - Loneliness
  - Ambivalence and loss of interest
  - Depression and hopelessness
  - Harmful behaviors from drug-use to binge eating to self-harm
  - Relapse of previous problems or behaviors
- Try to give everyone a safe space to retreat to. It can be in the same room, a comfy chair, a group of pillows, headphones, etc. It is a place to process feelings and personal issues alone when needed
- Practice gratitude while recognizing how difficult things are. Take 7 minutes and write a letter to anyone in your life, present or past, and thank them for what they did or have done to help you. Be grateful to people who are working essential jobs and thankful to those who are sacrificing by staying home and preventing the spread of the virus.
- Cut each other some slack. One day you may be handling the stress well while someone else in your family is having a tough time. The next day it might reverse. Try not to hold grudges and acknowledge that we are all doing the best we can.

## Understand how children react to stress and have strategies to help them

- Children have difficulty verbalizing and expressing emotions, especially negative ones. Behaviors can mask fear, anxiety, and depression.
  - Sleep problems
  - Anger, tantrums, moodiness, aggression
  - Fussiness, clinginess, whining
  - Complaints of belly pain or headache
- Limit the constant drumbeat of COVID-19 news and social media they see
- Help with the homeschooling but not too much
  - Understand that they miss friends, teachers and going to school
  - They need to complete their work but let them choose topics, locations, and schedules where possible giving them some control of their day
- Focus on making connections with children using conversation, playtime, working together, or relaxing together. Try to carve out time along with each child every day even if only for a few minutes
- Be prepared to discuss the Coronavirus
  - Ask what they know and listen to the answer
  - Project strength and optimism let them know that you will be there for them
  - “We love you and will protect you no matter what.”
  - “The world has been through this before with other diseases, and we were able to solve those problems. We will solve this one too.”
- Help them express and cope with their feelings
  - Listen to them and validate their emotions
  - Explain that their emotions are normal
  - Help them use the tools below to cope with stress and big emotions
- Give them concrete things they can do to help. It will give them a little control.
  - Teach them to wash their hands correctly
  - Teach them to cough and sneeze into their elbows
- Teens and young adults may worry about falling behind as college visits and exams are postponed. Help them understand that this is temporary, everyone is in the same situation, and learning to handle stress is a critical lesson they are learning right now. Work to keep your teen engaged with family and friends. Have them participate in school to whatever degree they can.

## Develop some new tools for yourself and your children

- Practice mindfulness: Consider apps like “Calm” or “Headspace,” yoga or meditation
- Ask for help from family and friends or a professional if you are overwhelmed
- Use positive self-talk or journaling. At the end of every day, write down three good things that happened that day and your role in bringing them about.
- Take a break from stress from constant news coverage if only a few minutes every day.
- Reframing. What opportunities are presented during this time of isolation? Reframing is sometimes thought of as “turning problems into challenges.”
- Understand what is and what is not in your control. Focus on impacting what you can control and accepting/letting go of those things we cannot change. Practice finishing discussions of the current crisis with “Just for now.” “My high schooler can’t visit her friends just for now.”
- Build a self-care toolkit for yourself and your children. Have a place where you store things that help you relax or calm down. Something like a soft blanket, a heating pad, ice pack, chocolate, photos of friends and family or vacations, music or candles. Activities can be helpful as well, coloring, journaling, playing an instrument.
- Utilize professional help if your coping strategies are not working. Call your physician who can perform an evaluation at the office or via telehealth and consider referral for therapy or treatment with medications