

# Cope with Stress During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic



The outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) may be stressful for people and communities. Fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in adults and children.

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. The emotional impact of an emergency on a person can depend on the person's characteristics and experiences, the social and economic circumstances of the person and their community, and the availability of local resources. People can become more distressed if they see repeated images or hear repeated reports about the outbreak in the media.

## People who may respond more strongly to the stress of a crisis include:

- People who have preexisting mental health conditions including problems with substance use
- Children
- People who are helping with the response to COVID-19, like doctors and other health care providers, or first responders

## Reactions during an infectious disease outbreak can include:

- Fear and worry about your own health status and that of your loved ones who may have been exposed to COVID-19
- 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 plans during an emergency and monitor for any new symptoms.

Coping with these feelings and getting help when you need it will help you, your family, and your community recover from a disaster. Use telephone, e-mail, social media or other virtual options to connect with family, friends and others in your community. Take care of yourself and each other, and know when and how to seek help.

## Things you can do to support yourself:

- Avoid excessive exposure to media coverage of COVID-19.
- 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 and remind yourself that strong feelings will fade. Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories. It can be upsetting to hear about the crisis and see images repeatedly. Try to do some other activities you enjoy to return to your normal life.
- Safely Connect with others. Share your concerns and how you are feeling with a friend or family member. Maintain healthy relationships.
- Maintain a sense of hope and positive thinking.

[Share the facts](#) about COVID-19 and the actual risk to others.

## What are quarantine and social distancing?

- Quarantine separates and restricts the movement of people who were exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick.

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- Social distancing means remaining out of places where people meet or gather, avoiding local public transportation (e.g., bus, subway, taxi, rideshare), and maintaining distance (approximately 6 feet or 2 meters) from others.
- Sharing accurate information can help calm fears in others and allow you to connect with them.

## For parents:

Children react, in part, on what they see from the adults around them. When you're feeling most anxious or panicked, that isn't the time to talk to your kids about what's happening with the coronavirus. 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.

There are many things you can do to support your child:

Take time to talk with your child about the COVID-19 outbreak. Answer questions and share facts in an age appropriate way that your child can understand. Don't be afraid to discuss the coronavirus. Most children will have already heard about the virus or seen people wearing face masks, so parents shouldn't avoid talking about it. Not talking about something can actually make kids worry more.

Be reassuring. Let them know it is ok to feel upset, but assure your child that they are safe. Share with them ideas about managing stress like taking deep breaths and sharing their thoughts and concerns with you.

Engage children in creative activities to express and communicate their feelings of fear and/or sadness can be helpful.

Reassure your child that they are safe. Let them know that 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 child's exposure to media coverage of the event. Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand.

Remind kids that they are taking care of themselves by washing their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds when they come in from outside, before they eat, and after blowing their nose, coughing, sneezing or using the bathroom.

Help your child to have a sense of structure. Once it is safe to return to school or child care, help them return to their regular activity.

Be a role model; take breaks, get plenty of sleep, exercise, and eat well. Safely connect with your friends and family members and rely on your social support system.

## Stress 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 outbreak.
- 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.

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- 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.
- For people who have been released from quarantine:

Being separated from others if a health care provider thinks you may have been exposed to COVID-19 can be stressful, even if you do not get sick. Some typical reactions after being released from COVID-19 quarantine can include:

- Mixed emotions, including relief after quarantine
- Fear and worry about your own health status and that of your loved ones who may have been exposed to COVID-19
- 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.

## What are my mental health options during this time of social distancing?

Mental Health appointments for GHC-SCW Members typically seen within staff model clinics are being converted to telephone appointments. Your therapist remains available to complete your appointment over the phone. This move away from in-office visits is intended to limit both Member and staff exposure to the COVID-19 virus and to maintain social distancing.

For Members who see an in-plan, non-staff model provider for their behavioral health care, GHC-SCW is providing coverage of video visits, virtual visits, and e-visits during the COVID-19 pandemic.

GHC Care OnDemand is our new 24/7 Online Clinic. Appointments can be scheduled in advance for therapy or psychiatry services and the service is free\* for most GHC-SCW members. Visit [ghccareondemand.com](https://ghccareondemand.com) to schedule virtual mental health visit. \*Members with Badgercare, Medicare or HSA-Eligible plans have restrictions or limitations.

**If you have questions about accessing behavioral health services, you can contact GHC Mental Health Services at (608) 441-3290.**

Access to free general mediations for members can be accessed [here](#).

**Headspace for Healthcare Professionals:** The current crisis is an especially difficult time for healthcare professionals. So we're offering free access to Headspace Plus for all US healthcare professionals working in public health settings. Helping those who care for us, care for themselves.

**Headspace for Work:** We've pulled together a free collection of resources to help you guide and support your team through the stress and anxiety of the current global crisis. To help you — the managers, HR, and workplace experience — lead with kindness and understanding through the uncertainty.

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