

Mental Health Care in the Midst of the COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

In the midst of seeing grocery store shelves empty and hearing terms such as “stay-at-home” or even “shelter-in-place,” your sense of peace and certainty can be rattled. As human beings we 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 you don’t generally feel safe, it’s normal to feel stressed.

As you adjust to the new “norm,” such as working from home, limiting and/or eliminating social activities and practicing social distancing, your body’s stress response may become triggered. However, it’s important to note that you are not helpless in light of current events. You can choose a response. If you are struggling, here are some things you can do to take care of your mental health in the face of uncertainty:

1 - 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 you really need to know what is happening on a cruise ship you aren’t on?).

2 - 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.

3 - Get outside in nature—even if you are avoiding crowds. Get a dose of vitamin D, some fresh air and quality down-time. Exercise helps both your physical and mental health.

4 - 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.

5 - 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.

Reference:

Marshall D., Taking Care of your Mental Health in the Face of Uncertainty, <https://afsp.org/taking-care-of-your-mental-health-in-the-face-of-uncertainty/>

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