

# Coping with the Stress of COVID19



**Mental Health Awareness Workgroup** of the Livingston County Human Services Collaborative Body

## Managing Anxiety in Times of Crisis

Common signs to recognize that you may be experiencing stress are: an increase in irritability, outbursts of anger and frequent arguing, having trouble relaxing or sleeping, crying frequently, and worrying excessively.

You may also feel depressed, angry or more sad emotionally while your body may feel the effects in different ways such as headaches, stomachaches and loss/increase of appetite.

### Things you can do to help manage anxiety:

- ◆ Limit your access to news. We can often get overwhelmed when watching constant news sources speaking about COVID-19. It is best

to choose a reliable news source and then plan an allotted amount of time you'd like to spend exposing yourself to it—make sure to stick with that limit.

- ◆ Keep things in perspective. It's important to take time in the day thinking about other things such as things that may be going well in your life as well as things that you have control over.
- ◆ Maintain a routine. It is good to maintain a normal routine to the extent that it is possible. Keeping a regular schedule can be reassuring and promotes physical health.



- ◆ Utilize this new time to your advantage. Due to social distancing efforts we all find ourselves at home more. Try to utilize this time to your advantage and accomplish things you've been thinking about.
- ◆ Keep yourself in good physical health. Remember to prioritize sleep, exercise and healthy food and hydration.
- ◆ Take time to do things you enjoy. Focus on the

activities you enjoy most, whether it is yoga or a fun hobby you've enjoyed before. This is a great time to prioritize yourself and those things that bring you joy.<sup>1</sup>

## Family Do's and Don'ts

**Don't** watch the news for hours on end.

**Do** limit you and your kids' TV time.

**Don't** rely on social media for facts.

**Do** checkout the local health depart, CDC's or

WHO's websites for up to date info—set a time limit.

**Don't** obsess.

**Do** find ways to fill the day—exercise, new crafts/projects, make a new recipe, read a new book.

**Don't** take care of every-

one else and forget you.

**Do** practice self care—know the signs of anxiety and watch for red flags.

**Do** stay connected with loved ones and friends—maintain social connections while social distancing.<sup>2</sup>

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## Resources for Parents

COVID19 has unsettled all aspects of our lives and our kids are effected too. Here are some ways to help parents make sense of this for their children.

**R**emain calm and reassure your child. They will sense your feelings and react to them despite what you are saying. Make sure you keep calm too.

**A**nswer their questions. Make sure they feel like they can ask questions and you are telling them the age appropriate truth.

**D**o not blame others or increase stigma. Anyone can get sick from this virus.

**M**ake sure you are monitoring what they are hearing from TV, online and the radio. Too much information can cause an increase in anxiety.

**P**rovide honest and accurate information to them. They need truthful and age appropriate information.

**T**each kids how to prevent the spread of germs. There are many fun, online resources for song to use while washing your hands. Pick a family song to use together!

**K**eep a daily routine. Establishing a new routine for the whole family can help keep

everyone calm.

**F**ind new ways to fill the day. There are many resources online, make a craft, cook a meal or read a new book together.

**P**practice random acts of kindness or mail a letter. Share family gratitudes (what are you grateful for) each day at dinner. Reflecting on the positive will help keep the your mind focused toward the positive and offset the negative.

**H**ave fun and laugh. Don't forget to play together too—laughter is always the best medicine!<sup>3</sup>

## Helping Your Child Mange Anxiety

This can be a scary time for kids and their families so here are some things you can do to help manage the anxiety of children in the household.

\* Remain calm and reassuring. Children will react to and follow your verbal and nonverbal reactions. Let your children talk about their feelings and help reframe their concerns into the appropriate perspective. Remind them that you and the adults at their school are there to keep them safe and healthy.

\* Monitor television viewing and social media. Limit television viewing or access to information on the Internet and through social media. Try to avoid watching or listening to information that might be upsetting when your children are present. Speak to your child about how many stories about COVID-19 on the Internet may be based on rumors and inaccurate information.

\* Talk to your child about factual information of this disease—this

can help reduce anxiety. Be aware that developmentally inappropriate information (i.e., information designed for adults) can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children.

\* Try calming activities that your children enjoy. Some ideas are; Silly Putty, fidget toys, jumping jacks, weighted pillow/blanket, stretching, yoga, funny videos, and music.

\* Encourage healthy routines during your daily schedule. Children benefit from a healthy routine that involves Eating healthy foods, drinking water, getting proper sleep, and maintaining physical exercise.<sup>4</sup>

## Words Matter

There are many “new” words coming at us every day—COVID19, pandemic, crisis, isolation, shelter in place... I could go on and on. The news channels and social media use these words constantly.

It is important to recognize these words have an affect on us. These words have an emotional charge to them. They evoke strong feelings like anxiety and fear.

One way to balance the news and social medial messages is to balance the messages we hear.

Positive affirmations are positive statement which can be repeated to yourself of what you want to be true. Examples include: Happiness is a choice, I strive for



progress not perfection, and I do not live in fear.

These affirmations can be said to yourself, posted on a board or mirror. Families can also make one to represent them as a whole.

What you hear and say really matter—make it count!<sup>5</sup>

## How Should We Respond?

According to FEMA, there are three steps to “**psychology first aid.**” Psychology first aid means supporting one another by listening to their concerns and needs, trying to help out where you can and connecting them to resources in the community.

**Listening.** It is hard to listen when there is chaos and crisis. The current situation has changed since yesterday. First you must HEAR what is being said. This means tuning out your thoughts and focusing your attention and energy on the person. Are there things being unsaid? Are their actions matching their words? Make sure to

listen to their immediate needs.

**Helping** out. Are there basic things they need. Can you provide these? Make sure to provide sympathy and support. If you can answer their questions, do it with the correct information—check reliable sources. Share success stories and encourage healthy behaviors.

**Connect.** Connecting to others is powerful and necessary. Spend extra time with family and friends through apps or on the phone. When you share



your experience, you help other realize they are not alone.

Listening, helping and connecting with each other will help us support one another through this time. You can play a part in helping others feel connected and heard. How we respond matters!<sup>6</sup>

## Staying Connected to Each Other

During times of crisis sometimes our ability to reach out and be kind to others not only helps us to feel positive but also brings joy to ourselves and others. Some things to consider:

### Check-in with your neighbors.

While following social distancing guidelines, reach out to your neighbors who may be at higher risk. Providing communication and potential grocery essentials may be the perfect way to help others but also provide you with a sense of productivity and impact.

### Reach out to loved ones with mail.

Due to social distancing it may not be recommended to drop-in on loved ones, especially those who may be high risk so considering sending a gift or a card through the mail.

“Everything can be taken from us but one thing: the freedom to choose our attitude in any given set of circumstances.”

-Viktor Frankl

**Random acts of kindness** are a great way to not only boost your mood but others as well. Ideas include: leaving a treat or words of encouragement for those who are still working during this crisis such as sanitary workers or delivery people, posting something positive on another person's social media, or sending a cute animal video. Little things can mean a lot to a person.

**Provide conversation.** Even with current social distancing practices technology has provided us multiple ways to still speak with our friends and family. Try to reach out, conversations can provide an opportunity for you to talk about the positive things as well as a chance for them to do the same.<sup>7</sup>

## Powerless vs Empowered?

Today when we are being told things like how far apart to stand from our fellow human beings, we can feel a lack of control or a sense of powerless over our lives.

We can stay in this place of powerlessness and lack of control or we can empower ourselves in this moment. By giving ourselves the authority to make productive, helpful and kind actions/decisions—we empower our self. Here are some ways to empower you:

**Unplug.** Turn it off or tune it out.

Taking a break from everything can help disconnect and regroup.

Set goals for yourself. By setting and achieving goals, you build a sense of confidence in your abilities.

Identify what you are good at doing. What are your natural talents? Find ways to use these at work or home.

Identify what you like about yourself and show it appreciation—my legs



support me and get me where I am going.

**Exercise daily.** Find something you like to do and as you get better at it, you build you confidence.

**Practice gratitude.** At the end of the day, find 1-3 things you are grateful for and share them in a journal or with someone special.

Do something special for someone. It can be a random act or not, but the joy of giving brings deep joy.<sup>8</sup>

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9. March 2020 Life Advisor Newsletter

*Ensuring a system of support for  
members of our community.*

- ⇒ We believe that collaboration means **shared stewardship** of community resources for the common good of Livingston County.
- ⇒ We believe that collaboration requires broad **community representation**.
- ⇒ We believe the HSCB is responsible for developing continuums of services from **prevention to treatment**.
- ⇒ We believe the HSCB should ensure that community members needing services from multiple agencies receive services as efficiently and effectively as possible by **creating systems of care**.
- ⇒ We believe that the HSCB should provide a caring community for Livingston County residents by **supporting each other's work**.



### WAYS TO PRACTICE SELF CARE:<sup>9</sup>

- Make sure you are taking a break from ALL media.
- Take deep breaths.
- Smile.
- Keep moving.
- Get fresh air.
- Drink water.
- Sleep and rest.

Many people have difficulty managing emotions, especially during stressful situations. **If you notice some of these warning signs, it**

**might be time to get some professional help.**

#### **Behavior:**

Increase/Decrease in activity level  
Increase in alcohol, tobacco or drug use  
Increased irritability, or argumentative behavior  
Difficulty relaxing or sleeping  
Crying spells / Excessive Worry  
Difficulty with focus/concentration

#### **Emotions:**

Fear / Depression / Guilt / Anger  
Euphoric / Numb

### **Emergency Services**

(517) 546-4126

OR

(800) 615-1245—

TOLL FREE

#### **Thoughts:**

Difficulty with memory and focus  
Confusion  
Thoughts of dread or doom

#### **Physical/Body:**

Stomach upset  
Headaches / Sweating  
Changes in appetite  
Tremors/muscle spasms  
Easily startled  
Chest pain

**Creating pathways to wellness, recovery, resilience and self-determination**