

STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH UNCERTAINTY

During times of uncertainty and change, it may seem like you have no time to prioritize self-care. Challenging times like this are when it is especially important to focus on taking good care of yourself physically, mentally and emotionally. You can make the choice to “act” – prioritizing your well-being and choosing effective coping strategies – rather than simply “reacting” to what is happening. Below are some ideas to do that:

Physical Coping Strategies

- › **Adequate rest** is the foundation of stress management. Establish a regular bedtime routine to ensure you get enough rest. Sleep helps your body renew its resources for the next challenge.
- › **Exercise** is an effective way to reduce stress. If allowed in your area, go out for a walk or run. Find videos online that are fun and stress-relieving. Consult your physician before beginning a new exercise routine.
- › **Eat well-balanced and regular meals.** You may need to experiment with new ingredients or recipes, or may even be cooking for the first time. Get creative!
- › Choose activities that allow you to **relax** while in isolation (read, quilt, paint, do puzzles, board/video games – whatever you like to do).
- › **Avoid alcohol and drugs** as a means to cope, unless your doctor gives you a needed prescription.
- › **Write out your challenges, taking a problem-solving approach.** For example if you are having difficulty finding childcare, write out the hours you need help, people you know who might be able to assist, and other resources. Set a goal to send emails or make phone calls to those people or organizations to get started.
- › **Take time to form an emergency plan** in the event that you or a family member falls ill. Know that you may never have to activate it.
- › **Talk it out.** Brainstorm your problem-solving ideas with your loved ones to get their input and ideas. Consult social media or post to public forums to get ideas from others on how they've handled similar challenges.
- › **Shift your focus** to the here-and-now needs of your loved ones, activities you enjoy, and the things you need to get done. Give your thoughts a break from constantly thinking about the “what if” that scares you.
- › **Structure your time.** Large segments of unstructured time will tempt your thoughts to center endlessly around what troubles you most, and in doing this, your interpretation of what's happening will become more alarming and less objective.

Mental Coping Strategies

- › **Stay informed on new developments from reliable sources.** Learn about the current situation and recommendations from WHO, CDC or local public health officials, rather than relying on the rumor mill or social media. Staying informed is a good way to feel “in control,” knowing you are doing all you can to stay safe and healthy.

- › **Take note of what remains constant.** With so many changes, what remains the same? Hold on to routines, and use them to maintain some stability. Regular meal and bedtimes are just two examples of ways we can make our world feel more predictable.
- › **Remind yourself of your abilities and strengths.** Self-statements such as “I have always figured out some way to land on my feet” get you back in touch with the fact that you’re steering your own ship – you’re not a bottle tossing and turning on life’s seas.
- › **Set short-term goals.** Take it day by day. What are some things that you want to accomplish in the next hour, the next day, the next week? Start small and build from there.
- › **Plan something to look forward to.** Remember, these measures are temporary. Plan something to look forward to in the future – a trip you want to take, perhaps a concert or event in your community. Plan a neighborhood “block party” to celebrate the end of social distancing. While you may not be able to plan firm dates or times, the act of planning reminds you that there will be a time when things return to normal, when they can be a reality.
- › **Offer support/assistance to others.** Perhaps offering to pick up groceries or necessities, or calling/messaging a neighbor who lives alone. Sometimes a friendly voice of reassurance over the phone can make a world of difference in someone’s day. Reaching out and supporting others helps change your emotional focus. You can see your problems in a bigger context, and feel part of the solution rather than just a victim of circumstance.
- › **Write out your feelings.** You’re dealing with an abstract but very powerful loss – the loss of your sense of normalcy, regular social connections, perhaps even loved ones or your livelihood. There’s a grief process that comes along with loss. We form expectations for the future, and when our beliefs and expectations are challenged or removed, we can lose our balance, and our worlds may feel shaken. You know from previous crises in your life, however, that you will eventually regain your balance.
- › **Know that difficulty can sometimes bring growth and meaning to our lives.** It can be hard to imagine that anything valuable could come from this experience when you’re struggling, but at some point you may notice that this hardship brought something into your life that could be considered meaningful. It might impact your relationships for the better or help you find creative solutions to problems. You may develop a deeper spirituality. It may just be the gift of discovering that you could survive this.

Emotional Coping Strategies

- › **Reach out to people who care.** Identify and talk out your thoughts, feelings and fears with loved ones. In isolation, you may need to be creative – phone calls, video chat, and text messaging may be options. Use technology to your advantage.
- › **Recognize “we are all in this together.”** This is truly a global, shared experience. The fears, anxieties, and challenges you are experiencing are shared across the world. You can see this in news coverage of communities singing together while in isolation, the volunteer and charity work happening in local communities, and strangers sharing “what works” on social media. Recognize that you are not alone in coping with this significant challenge.



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