



How to Manage Anxiety in the Face of COVID-19

Dr. Larry Westreich, MLB's Consultant on Behavioral Health and Addiction, has provided the following suggestions for managing that anxiety, as well as some resources for staying emotionally connected with others and getting any needed mental health help for you and your family members.

Managing Your Own Anxiety

Understand that tolerating COVID-19's uncertainty, and not trying to push away or ignore the natural anxiety we all feel, is paramount. It is a truism within psychology that the more one tries to push away a feeling, the more persistent that feeling is.

A. The CDC recommends the following specific protocols to support yourself:

Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.

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 do activities you enjoy.

Connect with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.

B. Here is a link for seven science-based strategies for coping with anxiety related to COVID-19:

<http://theconversation.com/7-science-based-strategies-to-cope-with-coronavirus-anxiety-133207>

Staying Emotionally Connected to Others

Although we may need to physically distance from others, we must focus on staying emotionally connected to friends, family members, and co-workers. Although there is no need for emotional distancing, only physical distancing, it can be very difficult to maintain that closeness to others. Here are some suggestions:

A. Avoid emotionally sequestering yourself unnecessarily:

Use your phone and computer to contact others in your life, not just about work problems.

Keep up human connections if possible – go to online religious services, watch shows online with others, speak with neighbors from your front door or window!

Learn about something else, play a game with a friend online, or watch a movie or a book that you can discuss with a friend.

Also, give yourself permission to be alone and not engaged with others.

Take a walk or hike with a friend, while maintaining a safe distance from each other.

B. Here is a link for some specific ideas for maintaining emotional connections, and the thought patterns that can help you bridge the gap between you and others:

<https://www.pih.org/article/10-mental-health-tips-coronavirus-social-distancing>

Getting Mental Health Help for Yourself or Others

Immediately contact your mental health provider, or general physician, if you are feeling like harming yourself in any way. If you have less serious psychological symptoms – like irritability, insomnia, or depression – here are some suggestions for self-care and obtaining necessary mental health treatment:

A. Keep up your self-care and psychological wellness practices as best you can:

Continue psychotherapy virtually if possible, and continue medications unless you are directed to do otherwise.

You can attend online Alcoholics Anonymous and other peer-led support groups: https://www.aa.org/pages/en_US/find-aa-resources

Be open with those around you about any mental health challenges you may be experiencing – they may be able to reassure you, and/or help you get assistance from clinicians.

Your own mental health clinician is the best resource, but if you do not have one, or cannot reach him or her, here are some resources:

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 24/7 Treatment Helpline: 1-800-662-4357

National Alliance on Mental Illness Helpline (returns calls within 48 hours): 800-950-6264