



Coping through a Crisis

During a time of crisis it can be difficult to cope, as we have no idea what to expect. In an effort to survive, we begin to think of worst case scenarios and then convince ourselves that is what is going to happen. We go into an emotional reactive state of mind and seem to leave the logical/rational mind out of it. So here are suggestions to bring back on line our logical/rational mind, and help us emotionally, mentally, and physically get through the crisis.

- First acknowledge that this is a difficult time and things are changing within and around us. Things will be different and we will need to adjust.
- If there is nothing that is putting us in imminent danger, just sit still and breathe for a few moments. When we have anxiety we tend to breathe shallowly, which creates a build up of carbon dioxide. By taking a few slow (at a count of 5) deep breaths, we can bring oxygen back into the brain, and help us think more clearly. Sometimes it helps to exhale all the air out first, to make room for the inhale of oxygen.
- Keep on a daily schedule. It helps to normalize our lives and puts us back in touch with the familiar.
- Have healthy habits for eating 3 nutritious meals a day.
- Have healthy habits for exercising at least 3 times a week for 30 minutes each time. There are many free classes on You Tube, etc. out there, so take advantage of it.
- How many times have you made the statement, I wish I had more time to do ...If you are in quarantine, well now is the time. Get projects done around the house, Pick up a musical instrument and make time to practice, blog, write, read, relax, exercise, get creative and have some fun with it. Look at it from a positive perspective.
- Healthy habits for sleep are very important to our well being. See link for Suggestions for Better Sleep
- Practice Mindfulness Breathing. There are a ton of these on the internet to help you calm your body and mind.

- Drink plenty of water. Water is necessary to flush out the cortisol that builds up in the body because of stress and the fight or flight system. By flushing out the system, the body has a better chance to recover including improved sleep.*
- Find gratitude or count your blessings. What are you grateful for in your life right now?
- Relationships are incredibly important right now. When in a crisis many people have the urge to isolate themselves into a cocoon of safety. Unfortunately this leaves them feeling alone and on their own. This is the time to reach out to trusted friends or family to lean on for support or to lift your spirits. Have some family time: play board games, card games, puzzles, movie time, meals together, cook, bake, exercise...get creative.
- Use Stop Think Technique. This is a brief description of the technique: Become aware of the negative thought; tell yourself to stop, that this thought is not being helpful; consider a different perspective that is neutral or positive that you can believe; Pick the most powerful perspective to change it to. This process is most helpful to learn by writing down each step,
- Laugh. Laughter is good for the soul and makes us feel better. According to the Mayo Clinic, laughter induces physical changes in your body. It can stimulate many organs, activate and relieve your stress response, soothe tension, improve your immune system, relieve pain, increase personal satisfaction, and improve your mood...are you laughing yet?!
- Write your thoughts and feelings down. This helps us express ourselves and organize our thoughts. Rereading what we wrote can also help us get an objective view if our thoughts are really rational. It can also help us understand and feel heard.
- Physical touch or hugs. It helps us feel connected and not alone. It is also known for lowering blood pressure and heart rate, relieving pain, and increases immune function. Pets are great to help us get in hugs and physical touch. If you have a pet, you may have noticed how calming it is to cuddle or pet them. Pets also give us something else to focus on (so distraction can work temporarily too).
- Limiting time on media will be helpful. There is so much negativity and misleading information out there, so limit how much you are exposed to.
- Setting boundaries with each other to set our own space. It's okay to ask for some alone time especially if you are an introvert. It can be time or space. This is a good time to set boundaries and limits with others to find some peace.
- Think through your "What ifs". If there is a question of what if this happens or that happens, then think it all the way through. If it does happen what CAN you do. Come up with several options and think about which one will give you the desirable outcome.

- Is what you are doing working for you? If not, let's try something else. If you feel stuck, reach out to others for ideas of what else you can try.
- According to my colleague, Amy Fortney Parks it is helpful to "Look for your yellow". Look for what makes your heart sing, your mouth smile and fills you with joy. This positive lens to look through can help us emotionally, mentally, and improve our physical well being.

Remember you are not alone and there are things you can do to feel better. If you continue to struggle to cope please contact your mental health provider for further support. Be Well.



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