

# Coping with COVID-19

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Zucker Hillside Hospital  
understands the stress that  
children and families are  
experiencing right now. We want  
to provide some tips for  
managing anxiety and depression  
during this time.

# Typical Stress Reactions

It is common for people to feel worried or afraid during this time. Typical responses may include: <sup>1</sup>

- Fear of becoming ill or dying
- Feelings of helplessness, isolation, loneliness, depression, or boredom
- Fear of being separated from loved ones and caregivers
- Fear of termination from work
- Avoiding approaching medical facilities or public spaces for fear of getting infected
- Feeling powerless in protecting loved ones

# Stress Reactions in Children

Children may respond differently in a crisis depending on their age. The image below presents potential reactions according to age group, and ways caregivers can respond: <sup>2</sup>

AGE GROUP	REACTIONS	HOW TO HELP
<b>PRESCHOOL</b>	Fear of being alone, bad dreams Speech difficulties Loss of bladder/bowel control, constipation, bed-wetting Change in appetite Increased temper tantrums, whining, or clinging behaviors	Patience and tolerance Provide reassurance (verbal and physical) Encourage expression through play, reenactment, story-telling Allow short-term changes in sleep arrangements Plan calming, comforting activities before bedtime Maintain regular family routines Avoid media exposure

<p><b>SCHOOL-AGE (ages 6-12)</b></p>	<p>Irritability, whining, aggressive behavior</p> <p>Clinging, nightmares</p> <p>Sleep/appetite disturbance</p> <p>Physical symptoms (headaches, stomachaches)</p> <p>Withdrawal from peers, loss of interest</p> <p>Competition for parents' attention</p> <p>Forgetfulness about chores and new information learned at school</p>	<p>Patience, tolerance, and reassurance</p> <p>Play sessions and staying in touch with friends through telephone and Internet</p> <p>Regular exercise and stretching</p> <p>Engage in educational activities (workbooks, educational games)</p> <p>Participate in structured household chores</p> <p>Set gentle but firm limits</p> <p>Discuss the current outbreak and encourage questions. Include what is being done in the family and community</p> <p>Encourage expression through play and conversation</p> <p>Help family create ideas for enhancing health promotion behaviors and maintaining family routines</p> <p>Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school</p> <p>Address any stigma or discrimination occurring and clarify misinformation</p>
<p><b>ADOLESCENT (ages 13-18)</b></p>	<p>Physical symptoms (headaches, rashes, etc.)</p> <p>Sleep/appetite disturbance</p> <p>Agitation or decrease in energy, apathy</p> <p>Ignoring health promotion behaviors</p> <p>Isolating from peers and loved ones</p> <p>Concerns about stigma and injustices</p> <p>Avoiding/cutting school</p>	<p>Patience, tolerance, and reassurance</p> <p>Encourage continuation of routines</p> <p>Encourage discussion of outbreak experience with peers, family (but do not force)</p> <p>Stay in touch with friends through telephone, Internet, video games</p> <p>Participate in family routines, including chores, supporting younger siblings, and planning strategies to enhance health promotion behaviors</p> <p>Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school</p> <p>Discuss and address stigma, prejudice and potential injustices occurring during outbreak</p>

# Anxiety

Anxiety is our body's alarm system that alerts us when there is danger or threat.

This alarm system can become overactive in times of crisis, resulting in extended states of hypervigilance or stress.



# Depression

Depression is a common illness that negatively affects how you feel, the way you think, and how you act.

Depression causes feelings of sadness and/or loss of interest in activities that you once enjoyed.

Depression is different from sadness or grief.

Depression in children can manifest as irritability, behavioral outbursts, or physical symptoms.<sup>3</sup>



Worsening feelings of worry, sadness, hopelessness, and loneliness are **NORMAL** reactions to an extremely **ABNORMAL** situation.

Here are some tips for managing these experiences and promoting a sense of safety and calm.



## TIPP<sub>4</sub>

Temperature

Intense exercise

Paced breathing

Progressive muscle  
relaxation

When we experience anxiety or other intense emotions, our internal alarm system (i.e., the nervous system) becomes activated.

We may experience increased heart rate, rate of breathing, body temperature, muscle tension, and pupil dilation, as well as slowed digestion.

This skill **TIPPs our body chemistry** and enacts the part of our nervous system that slows down these internal processes, increasing a sense of calmness.

# Temperature



When we experience anxiety or other intense emotions, our body temperature often increases and sweat glands are activated.

This skill works by enacting the “**dive reflex**,” which triggers our bodies to slow down our heart rate and breathing when our faces come into contact with cold water.

**To use the “Temperature” skill, bend your head over a sink and either dunk your face in cold water or splash cold water on your face.**

Modifications of this skill can also include ice or ice packs on your face!

## Intense Exercise



When anxiety increases, our bodies may be revved up, making us feel jumpy or like we need to run.

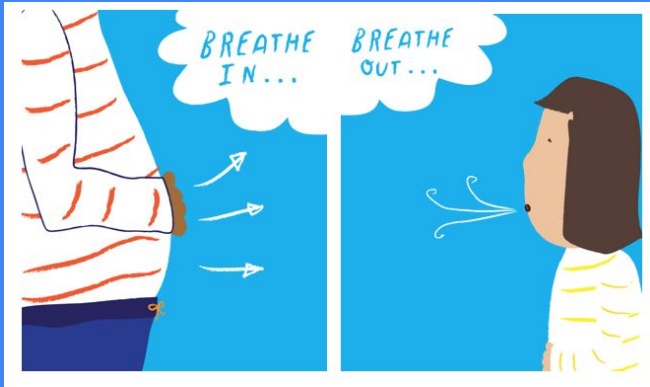
**Intense aerobic exercise allows you to use up all of your bodies stored up energy.**

This skill allows us to calm down our bodies after engaging in this physical activity.

Exercises include anything that **increases your rate rate!**

Examples: Running/jogging, fast walking, jumping rope, playing basketball.

## Paced Breathing



Anxiety often takes control of our breathing, which may become too fast or shallow.

Paced breathing, also known as **deep breathing** or **belly breathing**, teaches us to slow our breathing to calm down our bodies.

1. **Breathe in through your nose**, noticing your belly fill up with air, kind of like a balloon.
2. **Breathe out slowly through your mouth**, noticing your belly contract.

You can count while you breathe, making sure you breathe out more slowly than you breathe in!

# Progressive Muscle Relaxation



When our emotions have us revved up, our muscles often become tense and rigid.

For this skill, we **tense and relax each muscle group, one at a time**. Try to do this **twice per muscle group**. Head to toe, or toe to head.

As you practice, notice the tension, and the difference when you let go.

For example:

1. Toes
2. Legs
3. Stomach
4. Arms
5. Hands
6. Shoulders
7. Neck
8. Face

## Self-Soothe<sup>4</sup>



Use your **Five Senses** to produce a sense of calming and relaxation.

**Sight:** Watch a relaxing scene (such as the beach), go to your favorite place and notice your surroundings, look through some photos.

**Smell:** Light a scented candle, use your favorite lotion, smell your favorite flowers, bake cookies.

**Sound:** Playing relaxing music, such as soft tunes, go to the beach and listen to the waves, pay attention to the sounds outside (such as birds chirping).

**Touch:** Pet your dog or cat, rub your hands over your favorite blanket or pillow, put on your most comfortable sweatshirt or sweatpants, hug family or friends.

**Taste:** Eat your favorite snack, notice it's flavors, chew gum.



# Coping Statements

## Examples:

- “I can get through this”
- “Things will get better”
- “I’ve made it through tough times before”
- “I can handle this situation”
- “I can stay calm”
- “This will pass”
- “It won’t be like this forever”
- “I have the power to turn things around”

When we experience stress or anxiety, our minds may become plagued with **Negative Automatic Thoughts**, which are thoughts that typically occur quickly, sometimes without us even noticing.

Our minds often get stuck in THOUGHT TRAPS, or unhelpful thinking patterns, which are **unhelpful and stress enhancing!**

Examples of Negative Automatic Thoughts: “I can’t do this” or “This is too hard”.

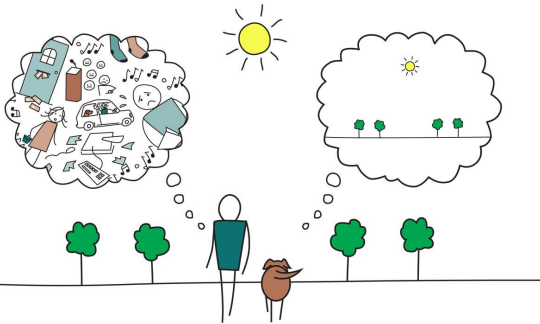
To combat this thinking style, we use the power of **positive** thinking!

**Begin when you’re in a relaxed, NON-stressed state!** Then, before and during stressful situations.

Use this skill **consistently**, like a personal mantra. Practice, practice, practice!

NEGATIVE AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS	POSITIVE SELF-TALK
“I can’t handle this”	“I can handle this”
“I don’t know what to do”	“I will figure this out”
“This is hopeless”	“I will get through this”
“I’m not going to get better at this”	“I’m going to work harder and try again”

# Mindfulness



Mind Full, or Mindful?

We often go about our daily lives without paying attention to how we feel or what our bodies are telling us, and that's on a typical day!

When there is so much going on in the world, it can be even harder for us to really be in the moment.

Mindfulness is all about **increasing control over our minds** by (1) **being fully aware** of what's going on and (2) **focusing on one thing** at a time.

This skill can help us to **be in the present moment**. Mindfulness is **living with our eyes wide open**.

**You can practice mindfulness by fully taking in:**

- (1) **What's going on inside for you**--your emotions, thoughts, body sensations, urges.
- (2) **What's going on around you**--using your 5 senses to observe your surroundings.



## FACE COVID<sup>5</sup>

During times of crisis, it's natural to experience fear and anxiety.

This acronym provides practical, **mindfulness-based** steps for managing anxiety as well as other intense emotions associated with COVID-19.

**F**ocus on what's in your control

**A**cknowledge your thoughts and feelings

**C**ome back into your body

**E**ngage in what you're doing

**C**ommitted action

**O**pen up

**V**alues

**I**dentify resources

**D**isinfect and distance

# FACE COVID<sub>5</sub>

## Focus on what is in your control:

It's easy to get lost in thoughts and worries about all sorts of things that are out of your control. While this is completely natural, it is not useful or helpful and often leads to feelings of hopelessness and anxiety. The most useful thing to do is focus on what **is** in your control.

## Acknowledge thoughts and feelings:

Silently acknowledge what is going on inside of you- thoughts, emotions, sensations, urges. As you do this, put words to your experience: "I am noticing sadness", "I'm worrying about my family", "I'm experiencing grief"

# FACE COVID<sub>5</sub>

While acknowledging thoughts and feelings...

Come back into your body:

Connect with your physical body by...

- Slowing your breathing
- Stretching
- Pressing your hands together

As you acknowledge and come back into your body you also want to...

Engage in what you're doing:

Refocus your attention to an activity you are doing by noticing...

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can feel
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

End by giving full attention to whatever activity you are doing.

# FACE COVID<sub>5</sub>

Once you have centered yourself by acknowledging, coming into your body, and engaging, focus on...

## Committed Action:

Engage in activities and actions that are driven by your core values. This can include effective measures to protect against COVID, as well as caring for others or engaging in projects or activities that are meaningful for you!

## Opening Up:

Make room for difficult feelings and be kind to yourself. Difficult feelings will continue to pop up as this crisis continues. We cannot stop them, but we can acknowledge that they are normal, allow them to be there, and treat ourselves kindly.

# FACE COVID<sup>5</sup>

## Values:

Committed action is guided by your core values: What kind of person do you want to be? What do you want to stand for? Look for ways to infuse your values in the things you do every day.

## Identify Resources:

Identify sources of help and support. This can include family and friends as well as medical professionals. Find reliable and trustworthy sources of information to stay informed on the crisis.

## Disinfect and Distance Physically

Disinfect your hands regularly and practice social distancing. Align this with your core values and recognize this as a caring action.

# Pleasant Activity Scheduling<sup>4</sup>

Engaging in activities that you enjoy can improve your mood in the short-term.

Scheduling ongoing pleasant activities can improve mood in the moment and give you something to look forward to!

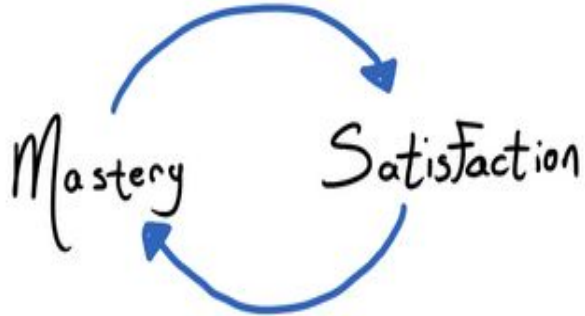
Make a schedule of fun and engaging activities, and try to do one activity a day.

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT

Download & Print Free Calendars From [www.wiki-calendar.com](http://www.wiki-calendar.com)

Keep in touch with friends and family and make socializing (at a distance) a priority!

## Build Mastery<sup>4</sup>



Do at least one thing a day to feel **competent** and **in control** of your life!

Challenge yourself, improve in an area, or cross things off your to-do list.

Plan for success! Do something difficult, but possible. Gradually increase difficulty over time.

By engaging in activities that are challenging yet do-able, you increase feelings of **accomplishment, satisfaction, and motivation.**

We hope that these strategies will be helpful for you! If you feel that you need professional help, speak with your physician or visit this [website](#) for a list of COVID-19 mental health resources.



# References

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