

Managing Your and Your Child's Anxiety During the Coronavirus Pandemic



Overview:

In the case of a pandemic, the best thing to do is keep calm and stay informed.

Whirling and swirling news and an onslaught of changing recommendations during the coronavirus pandemic leave the majority of us wondering how to best keep our families safe. Such worry, confusion and shifting ground are contributing to the anxiety and fear felt by so many of us across the United States and around the globe. While the fight or flight response may give you an edge if you're being chased by a lion, it doesn't help much in our current situation. Better to let common sense and calm prevail! You can start to do this by attending to the practical aspects of caring for your kids and family, your aging or ill loved ones, and your work, as well as figuring out what you need to do to manage your own anxiety and stress.

This guide provides tips, tools, and suggestions for managing anxiety during the coronavirus pandemic.

💡 Know what NOT to do.

First, we'll look at which behaviors and activities may be contributing to any mounting anxiety, and see how to reduce them as much as possible. This approach of "addition through subtraction" can yield great results. For instance:

- **Take a news break.** Listening to the news or reading coronavirus stories on the internet all day is generally not helpful. Consider checking the news just once or twice a day, and only consult reputable sources, for example, the CDC, the World Health Organization, or your state or local government websites [here](#) or [here](#). Verifying that your sources are reputable is especially important when relying on social media posts, which are more likely to include alarmist stories or misinformation.
- **Be aware of and avoid scams.** Unfortunately, scammers take every opportunity to get you to click or respond and reveal personal information, especially during times of crisis. Don't fall prey to scare tactics or to-good-to-true offers on the internet or on the phone. Be discriminating about who you talk to or respond to online.
- **Don't deny your anxiety.** Experts say that the more you try to push down or ignore anxiety, the stronger it may become. Instead try to accept what you are feeling, notice where it "lives" in your body, and acknowledge it. Uncertainty is uncomfortable, and the coronavirus pandemic is unfamiliar territory.

💡 Take positive steps to manage your stress.

Now that you've turned off the radio or television, and stepped away from social media for the moment, what positive steps can you take to relieve your anxiety?

Here are 12 practices and activities you may find helpful. Find what works for you, and make it part of your routine.

- **Go outdoors.** Being outside (especially in the sunshine) improves mood. If you can get to a park or the local woods, you'll get some exercise and a dose of nature. Going outdoors is safe and acceptable if you keep your distance from others; a minimum of six feet is the current recommendation. Chatting with other dog walkers at a distance is an example of pulling together while staying apart. But no petting other people's dogs! If there are no parks nearby, or you are uncomfortable with the idea of running into other people, that's ok. Get out on your balcony or deck, or walk around your backyard instead.
- **Accept what you can control and let go of what you cannot control.** Think about it and make a list. It can be helpful to identify in writing:



– Things you have control over:

For example, you can wash your hands; you can call your sister; you can call elderly neighbors to check how they're doing; you can model social distancing (aka physical distancing); you can take a half hour to play a board game with your child.

– Things you have no control

over: For example, you cannot change the length of a school closure; you cannot control how other people behave; you cannot change the way the stock market fluctuates.

- **Listen to music.** Music is important in every culture to reaffirm identity, values, and community. Some research shows that listening to music can aid in concentration and even boost the immune system. Whatever genre of music works for you — helps

you feel calm or lifts your mood — listen more.

- **Move more.** Going to the gym or attending Zumba class may not be possible for a while. YouTube is replete with all sorts of exercise programming — from five-minute workouts to extensive training regimens, dance routines, yoga, and tai chi.

Not into YouTube? Clean the house, climb stairs, balance on one foot while brushing your teeth, sit on the floor and stretch. And, if you've followed our recommendation above to listen to more music, it just might lead to a dance party with you and your kids while schools are closed and you're working remotely!

- **Stay in touch with your people.** Phone calls, Facetime, WhatsApp, and a host of other ways to connect are available to check in with friends and family. Stay



! Quick Tips

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- Move more.
- Make time to laugh.
- Stay in touch with your friends and family.

apart to prevent the spread of the virus, but stay in touch to keep each other's spirits up.

- **Watch a movie; read or listen to a book.** These activities are great distractions on their own. Make it a virtual group activity by planning to watch a movie with friends each at your own homes and then have a Google Hangouts or Zoom discussion afterward. Set up an online book club to get through the next few weeks of social distancing.
- **Do a project or learn something new.** Occupying yourself and your hands can help settle your mind. Now is the time to clean out drawers, start a jigsaw puzzle, finish that knitting or woodworking project you once started. Online classes, online museum exhibits, and other online "field trips" are a great way to expand your mind, access your creativity, and

connect to the larger world.

- **Download a meditation app** such as **Headspace**, **Insight Timer**, or **Calm**. YouTube also has guided meditations available and options for practicing focused, calm breathing. Or, forget the apps and just breathe, in through your nose, out through your mouth. Ten times. Repeat as necessary.
- **Create a routine around your self-care practices.** Routines are comforting and can "bracket" the more chaotic spaces in between. For example, take a break every day at the same time for a walk. Whether you're now working at home or not, end your workday at the same time each day if possible, and detach/disconnect as much as you can. Try ending each day with a hot bath, shower, or other relaxing ritual.
- **Reduce your caffeine intake.** Coffee, tea, chocolate, and "energy drinks" all contain

caffeine. If you tend to get jittery or anxious when you have too much caffeine under normal circumstances, you may be even more sensitive under stress. Keep a close eye on how much caffeine you are ingesting and consider decreasing your caffeine consumption slightly to see if that helps calm you. Don't cut out caffeine completely all at once, however. Doing so may give you a headache!

- **Make time to laugh.** You've probably heard the adage "laughter is the best medicine." It may seem counterintuitive, but, it's especially true in times of uncertainty. Watch funny movies, television shows, or stand-up comedy. Share funny memes. Google "funniest cartoons of 2020." Be silly with your kids. Call or video chat with your funniest friend.

- **Remind yourself that most cases of COVID-19 are not severe.**

According to recent data from the World Health Organization (WHO), COVID-19 causes mild to moderate illness in the majority of cases.

💡 **See to your own needs.**

As a parent, you may be preoccupied with meeting the needs of those you love — and not paying enough attention to your own. Conserving your energy and resources is important today and will continue to be so in the coming weeks. Ask yourself, “What do I need to do to support myself while I manage the day-to-day demands of work and family?” Then, take a moment to listen, really listen, for an answer.

Try naming **three to five things** you need every day that contribute to your sense of well-being and make you feel safe and supported. Write them down using an “I” statement.

Be sure they are in the present tense, as if you are already doing them. If they are things that you can make happen, make them a priority and do them. If there are items, actions, or behaviors that others can help with, ask for the help and support you need.

Here are some examples:

- I take at least 30 minutes each day to myself, with no interruptions.
- I enjoy a hot meal for dinner.
- I make sure my car's gasoline tank is always at least half full.
- I am the last person to turn off the lights, lock up, and turn in.

- I rough-house with my dog.
- I drink my morning cup of coffee in bed.

Managing your own anxiety benefits you and all those who depend on you.

💡 **Determine how much structure your family needs.**

Remember our suggestion about making a list of “things you have control over”? Determining the extent to which you create order and structure through your family's daily routines is likely to be one of those things.

If you or your children tend to thrive on routines under more typical circumstances, writing up a schedule of your family's daily activities may be a good way to curb uncertainty and stress. Your family schedule may include specific times that are blocked out for sleep, family meals together, chores to be completed (yours





or your child's), study or work, quiet time for rest for activities like crafts or reading, and family activities. Consider creating the schedule together, posting it somewhere where it will be visible to all members of the household, and having everyone check off each item or activity block as it is completed. Reuse the schedule by slipping it into a plastic sheet protector and writing on it with a dry erase marker.

If you have a young child or a child who is non-verbal, visual schedules may be preferable to written ones. A morning checklist, evening checklist, or "if, then" board can help you build predictable routines.

Alternatively, some families may find that the best way to cope with unusual or stressful circumstances is to let go of rigid routines or expectations and think outside the box. If your family falls into this

category, trust your gut – it's okay to pioneer or experiment with new ways of being.

Have your child(ren) help around the house.

If your child's school or daycare is currently closed, it's likely your home is about to get a lot more "lived in" over the next few weeks. And general messiness can cause an extra dose of stress for parents.

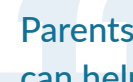
Fortunately, you don't have to be responsible for all household clean-up on your own. Unless your child is very small, it's perfectly okay to have him or her help around the house – in fact, it's encouraged!

You can also try setting a timer for, say, 20 minutes once a day during which time everyone helps put the house in order. A little bit of effort on a daily basis can go a long way!

Don't expect perfection.

These are not typical times. We can't necessarily hang on to our usual expectations without causing ourselves and our families undue stress. Now is not the time to expect perfection in all areas of life. You might just have to throw that carefully crafted schedule out the window on some days, or all days. You can try again tomorrow. Or not. And it's okay.

The house might be messier than usual. Your child might use more screen time than you'd normally allow. You might struggle to balance parenting or the care of loved ones with your work; some days you'll feel more competent in one of these areas than you will in another. And the next day, the

 Parents and caregivers can help kids remain calm and assured by remaining calm themselves. Supporting your child by modeling, sharing information, and offering opportunities to make (controlled and safe) decisions or practice self-regulation will help build your child's resilience.

balance may skew in the opposite direction. That's also okay.

Like everyone else right now, you're doing the best that you can. And the best that you can is good enough.

Help your child manage anxiety.

Anxiety can be contagious. Chances are that if you're feeling overly worried, your child might be, too!

Parents and caregivers can help kids remain calm and assured by remaining calm themselves and acknowledging an appropriate level of concern without panicking. Supporting your child by modeling, sharing information, and offering opportunities to make (controlled and safe) decisions or practice self-regulation will help build your child's resilience.

Consider the following tips on

how to address anxiety about COVID-19 with your child:

- **Reassure your child** that schools, health officials, and adults are doing all they can to prevent the spread of infection and keep people safe.
- **Provide accurate, age-appropriate information about the illness** along with instruction on how to reduce the chance of illness (such as handwashing). Many children are comforted by the idea that they have control over some things, too.
- **Let your child ask questions and discuss concerns openly.** Acknowledge your child's anxiety and use accurate, age-appropriate information to re-frame their concerns.
- **Ask "What do you think would help you right now?"** This opportunity for introspection is a great way to develop self-

awareness and agency.

- **Offer extra affection** during times of worry.
- **Breathe together.**
- **Limit television viewing, social media, or news access that may be upsetting to your child,** and explain that not everything being said about the coronavirus (online, in the media) is accurate.

Talk to your doctor.

If your anxiety becomes severe or you are experiencing increasing levels of depression, contact your doctor, therapist, or a qualified health professional to find out if there are other options that may help.

If you feel unsafe at any time, dial 911 for emergency assistance.

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Contact Torchlight at support@torchlight.care for more information.

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