



This information brief is intended to assist employees, managers and organizations as they encounter stress and anxiety during the unprecedented challenges presented by the Coronavirus pandemic.

### **Stress and Coping with COVID-19 (CDC)**

- Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. People who may respond more strongly to the stress of a crisis include:
  - Older people and people with chronic diseases who are at higher risk for COVID-19
  - Children and teens
  - People who are helping with the response to COVID-19, like doctors and other health care providers, or first responders
  - People who have mental health conditions including problems with substance abuse
- Stress during an infectious disease outbreak can include:
  - Fear and worry about one's own health and the health of their loved ones
  - Changes in sleep or eating patterns
  - Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
  - Worsening of chronic health problems
  - Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs
- **Things you can do to support yourself**
  - Take breaks from watching, reading, and listening to news stories, including on social media
  - Take care of your body. Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate. Try to eat healthy, balanced meals, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, and avoid alcohol and drugs
  - Make time to unwind and do other activities you enjoy.
  - Connect with others. Talk to people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.
  - Call your healthcare provider if stress gets in the way of your daily activities for multiple days in a row.
- **Things you can do to support your child**
  - Take time to talk with your child or teen about COVID-19. Answer questions and share facts in a way they can understand.
  - Reassure your child that they are okay, and let them know it's okay to feel upset. Share with them how you deal with your own stress so they can learn how to cope as well.

- Limit your family's exposure to news coverage of the event, including social media.
- Try to keep up with regular routines. If schools are closed, create a schedule for learning activities and fun activities.
- Be a role model. Take breaks, get plenty of sleep, exercise, and eat well. Connect with friends and family members.

### **[National Alliance on Mental Health COVID-19 Resource and Information Guide](#)**

- This guide provides information and resources on topics related to COVID-19, such as coping with mental health, financial trouble, loss of a loved one, feeling unsafe at home, and accessing health care..
- **Tips for coping with stress and anxiety during COVID-19**
  - Manage how you consume information. Get information from reputable sources such as the CDC and the WHO, and place some limits on your news consumption.
  - Follow healthy daily routines as much as possible to help you feel more in control of your well-being.
  - Take care of yourself through exercise and movement, even if it's just stretching or taking breaks to stand up during the day. Other kinds of at-home exercise can include yoga, dance, and free Youtube workout videos.
  - Practice relaxing in the present moment. Mindfulness and meditation can help practice awareness and reduce stress. Apps like Headspace and Calm are free and can be used from home.
  - Do meaningful things with your time that you enjoy and that help you relax. This could include reading, creating art, journaling, playing games, etc.
  - While physical distancing, stay connected with others and maintain your social networks over text, phone, video calls, and social media.
  - Find a mental health community (see below).
  - Connect to a spiritual or religious community.
- **Tips for creating a routine while working from home:**
  - Create structure around working from home. Find a space with few distractions, schedule breaks and self-care activities, and create a boundary between work time and after-work time.
  - While nothing replaces in-person interaction, consider talking with colleagues over video call rather than just audio and emails.
  - Talk with co-workers about things other than work. Take virtual coffee breaks or walks together.
- There are a number of online support communities that can provide connection and support while at home:
  - NAMI hosts [online discussion groups](#) for people to share support and encouragement
  - [7Cups](#) is a free online chat forum for emotional support and counseling. They also offer fee-for-service online therapy with a licensed mental health professional.
  - [Emotions Anonymous](#) focuses on emotional well-being through online and weekly meetings.

- [Support Group Central](#) offers virtual support group on mental health conditions for free or low cost.
- NAMI's guide lists a number of other communities, including [The Tribe Wellness Community](#), [SupportGroups.com](#), [For Like Minds](#), [18percent](#), and [PsychCentral](#).
- Warmlines also provide confidential, non-crisis emotional support over the phone. Warmlines in your area can be found at [NAMI's Helpline Warmline Directory](#).
- A number of organizations provide support for people who feel unsafe at home or are concerned about someone else's safety:
  - [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) has 24/7 confidential support for people experiencing domestic violence or seeking resources and information, as well as online resources on [Staying Safe During COVID-19](#).
  - [RAINN](#) has a 24/7 safe and confidential sexual assault hotline that connects individuals to local service providers with free resources.
- There are resources that provide support for those who have lost a loved one:
  - Many local hospices offer free or sliding scale grief therapy and can refer people to local grief support. A list of hospices across the country can be found at [The National Hospice and Palliative Care Association](#).
  - Once current stay-at-home orders and social distancing guidelines are no longer in place, [Grief Share](#) offers free, in-person recovery support groups across the country.

### **Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak (WHO)**

- **For the general population:**
  - Do not attach COVID-19 to any particular ethnicity or nationality. Many people in many geographical locations have been and will be affected.
  - To reduce stigma around COVID-19, refer to people as "people who have/are being treated for/are recovering from COVID-19", rather than "COVID cases", "victims", or "the diseased"
  - Seek information from trusted sources at specific times of the day (once or twice), to make practical plans while reducing stress and anxiety. Get the facts, not rumors or misinformation.
  - Check in with your community (neighbors, etc.) by telephone to be supportive while still protecting yourself.
- **For healthcare workers:**
  - Managing your mental and psychosocial health is as important as managing your physical health during this time. Stress and associated feelings do not mean that you can't do your job or that you're weak.
  - Try using healthy coping strategies to take care of yourself, like ensuring you take time to rest, eat sufficient and healthy foods, engage in physical activity, and stay in contact with friends and family.
  - Know how to provide support to those with COVID-19 and how to connect them with available resources, particularly for those who require mental health and psychosocial support.
- **For team leaders or managers in health facilities:**

- Keeping staff protected from chronic stress and poor mental health will allow them to have better capacity to fulfill their roles. The current situation will not go away overnight, so it's important to focus on longer-term occupational capacity rather than just repeated short-term crisis responses.
- Ensure that good quality communication and accurate information updates are provided to all staff.
- Ensure that staff are aware of where and how they can access mental health and psychosocial support and facilitate access to such services.
- **For carers of children:**
  - Help children find positive ways to express feelings like fear and sadness, which may include creative activities like playing or drawing.
  - Maintain familiar routines in daily life as much as possible, or create new routines.
  - Discuss COVID-19 with children in an honest and age-appropriate way. If they have concerns, address them together.
- **For older adults, people with underlying health conditions, and their carers:**
  - Older adults may be more agitated, stressed, anxious, and withdrawn during the outbreak or while in quarantine. Provide practical and emotional support through informal networks and health professionals.
  - Share simple facts and clear information on how to reduce risk. Be prepared and know in advance how to get practical help if needed.
  - Keep regular routines and schedules as much as possible, or make new ones in the new environment. Keep in regular contact with loved ones.
- **For people in isolation:**
  - Stay connected and maintain your social networks via telephone, email, social media, or video conference.
  - Try to maintain personal daily routines or create new ones if circumstances change. Pay attention to your own needs and feelings, and engage in healthy activities that you enjoy and find relaxing.

### [Working Remotely During COVID-19: Your Mental Health and Well-being](#)

- **Maintaining health and wellness while working remotely**
  - Create and maintain a regular routine and schedule. Make sure to include regular breaks to recharge.
  - Stay connected with friends, family, and support systems using technology.
  - Prioritize personal hygiene and keep your immune system strong by washing your hands, getting enough sleep, eating well, and staying hydrated.
  - Stay active and get fresh air, for your physical and mental health.
  - Stay informed from reliable resources, but limit media consumption that may elevate stress and anxiety.
  - Set boundaries on work schedule. Be sure you are working reasonable hours, even though it may be tempting to work more from home.
- **Managing a mental health condition during this time**
  - Continue treatment and medication despite changes in routine. Talk to your provider about whether they offer virtual telehealth visits.

- Respond to symptoms of COVID-19. Call your primary care provider about next steps if you start experiencing any symptoms.
- Recognize warning signs and triggers. Monitor any new or worsening symptoms with your mental or overall health, and do your best to keep your stress level low.
- Engage your support network (family, friends, etc.) through regular check-ins, and let them know if you need extra support.
- **What managers and HR professionals can do to support employees**
  - Show empathy and be available. Understand that employees are likely overwhelmed and anxious, and make yourself available to answer questions and take about fears.
  - Stay connected with communication and meeting tools to check in and allow teams to connect face-to-face.
  - Recognize the impact of isolation and loneliness. Check in routinely with your team not just about work, but to see how they're doing. Be aware of changes in employees' personality or work that may indicate they're struggling.
  - Encourage online training and new learning opportunities that may allow employees to sharpen their skills and distract from other issues.
  - Check in with your EAP and health plan to confirm their availability and coordinate support for your employees. Remind staff that the EAP is there if they need support, and learn what support health plans are offering to plan members and pass that information onto employees.

### [Caring for Employee Mental Health: A Coronavirus Guide \(Raconteur\)](#)

- Ways business leaders can help employees manage mental health
  - **Communicate clearly** with everyone calmly and transparently about what's changing in the company and how it affects them. Make space for conversation about people's emotional responses to all of the changes.
  - **Shift your leadership style.** During the crisis, a participative leadership style that encourages collaboration and problem solving might be more effective than an authoritative, decisive one.
  - **Relax the rules.** Things are not business as usual right now. Workers' needs, behaviors, and attitudes towards their work will need to change, and leaders should support rather than chastise employees. Open door policies are particularly important so leaders can be accessible and responsive.
  - **Locate the resources.** Employers should become acquainted with the resources available to employees without face-to-face access to in-house support or HR professionals, and clearly communicate those resources to employees.
  - **Know when to step aside** if you might not be the best leader to tackle a particular issue or task during this time.

### [Care for Your Coronavirus Anxiety \(Shine\)](#)

- This website is a toolkit of resources for anxiety and mental health during this time of global uncertainty. It was created by Shine in partnership with Mental Health America.

- The website includes access to mental health experts, anxiety screenings, articles, meditations, and more.

### **Managing Mental Health During the Coronavirus Pandemic**

- People are experiencing hidden grief and loss, which is bringing up the emotions that we associate with the stages of grief, like anger and depression.
- **Tips for managing mental illness during the pandemic:**
  1. Take small steps to create change in small increments.
  2. Stay connected with your therapist or counselor.
  3. Manage your medication needs with health care providers.
- **General tips for maintaining mental health in isolation**
  1. Develop a routine
  2. Stay active
  3. Stay social
  4. Limit news intake
  5. Listen to public health professionals
  6. Ask for help
- This article also includes several links to helpful resources.

### **Additional Resources**

[Company Survival Guide to Care for Staff during the Coronavirus](#) (Forbes 4/1/20)

[US Chamber of Commerce Coronavirus Response Toolkit](#)

[CDC Guidance Documents - Interim Guidance for Business and Employers](#)

[CDC Communication Resources](#)

[A List of Essential Workers that We Should Thank and Support during the Coronavirus Pandemic](#)

[Keeping things in balance while under self-quarantine](#)

Interview with Roundtable Member Nancy Costikyan in Harvard Gazette

[Build Your Resilience in the Face of a Crisis](#) HBR

[Northwestern Well-Being During COVID-19](#) Newsletter (issues [2](#), [3](#), [4](#))

### **Relevant CWF Resources**

[Emergency Leave during COVID-19 \(March 2020\)](#)

[Remote Work and COVID-19 \(March 2020\)](#)

[COVID-19 Emergency Leave \(March 2020\)](#)

[Flexible/Remote Work Communications during COVID-19 \(March 2020\)](#)