

Looking After Your Mental Health During the Coronavirus Outbreak

Infectious disease outbreaks, like the current Coronavirus (Covid-19), can be scary and can affect our mental health. While it is important to stay informed, there are also many things you can do to support and manage your well-being during such times. Here are some tips we hope will help you, your friends and your family to look after your mental health at a time when there is much discussion of potential threats to our physical health.

Try to Avoid Speculation and Look Up Reputable Sources on the Outbreak

Rumor and speculation can fuel anxiety. Having access to good quality information about the virus can help you feel more in control. Here are some valuable resources currently available on the Center for Disease Control (CDC) website regarding COVID-19:

- The Florida Department of Health has a dedicated COVID-19 webpage: www.FloridaHealth.gov/COVID-19
- The Center for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/index.html>
- The CDC Site for Communities, schools, individuals information: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/preparing-individuals-communities.html>

Try to Stay Connected and Be Aware of Your Community Resources

At times of stress, we work better in company and with support. Try and keep in touch with your friends and family. Remember if you need to talk, Peace River Center's Mobile Crisis Response Team is free and available 24-hours a day, 365 days a year by calling (863) 519-3744. As your community behavioral health organization, Peace River Center has a variety of mental health programs including crisis stabilization, inpatient and outpatient services, group homes, substance use disorder services, mental illness recovery programs, and more. To learn more visit www.peacrivercenter.org/services or call Access to Care at (863) 248-3311.

It is a good idea to stick to your daily routine. You may also like to focus on the things you can do if you feel able to:

- stress management and relaxation techniques
- keep active
- eat a balanced diet

Stay in touch with friends on social media but try not to sensationalize things. If you are sharing content, use this from trusted sources, and remember that your friends might be worried too.

Talk to Your Children

Involving our family and children in your plans for good health is essential. We need to ask children what they have heard about the outbreak and support them, without causing them alarm. We need to minimize the negative impact it has on our children and explain the facts to them. Discuss the news with them but try and avoid over-exposure to coverage of the virus. Be as truthful as possible. Let's not avoid the 'scary topic' but engage in a way that is appropriate for them.

Try to Anticipate Distress

It is normal to feel vulnerable and overwhelmed as we read news about the outbreak, especially if you have experienced trauma or a mental health problem in the past, or if you have a long-term physical health condition that makes you more vulnerable to the effects of the coronavirus. It's important to acknowledge these feelings and remind each other to look after our physical and mental health. Be aware of and avoid increasing habits that may not be helpful in the long term, like smoking and drinking. Try and reassure people you know who may be worried and check in with people who you know are living alone.

Do Not Make Assumptions

Don't judge people and avoid jumping to conclusions about who is responsible for the spread of the disease. The Coronavirus can affect anyone, regardless of gender, ethnicity or sex.

Try to Manage How You Follow the Outbreak in the Media

There is extensive news coverage about the outbreak. If you find the news is causing you huge stress, it's important to find a balance. It's best that you don't avoid all news and that you keep informing and educating yourself, but limit your news intake if it is bothering you.

Dealing with Being in Self-isolation or Quarantine

If there's a chance you could have coronavirus, you may be asked to stay away from other people (self-isolate). For people who are in self-isolation or are in quarantine, this may seem like a daunting prospect. It will help to try and see it as a different period of time in your life, and not necessarily a bad one, even if you didn't choose it. It will mean a different rhythm of life, a chance to be in touch with others in different ways than usual. Stay in touch with others regularly on social media, e-mail or on the phone, as they are still good ways of being close to the people who matter to you.

Create a daily routine that prioritizes your well-being. You could try reading more or watching movies, having an exercise routine, trying new relaxation techniques, or finding new knowledge on the internet. Try and rest and view this as a new if unusual experience, that might have its benefits. Make sure your wider health needs are being looked after such as having enough prescription medicines available.

Follow Hygiene Advice

Wash your hands more often than usual, for 20 seconds with soap and hot water (sing 'happy birthday' to yourself twice to make sure you do this for 20 seconds). You should do this whenever you get home or into work, after going to the bathroom or blowing your nose, sneezing or coughing, as well as before you eat or handle food. You should also wash your hands whenever you return from ANY activity that involves locations where other people have been. If you can't wash your hands straight away, use hand sanitizer with 60%+ alcohol and then wash them at the next opportunity.

Practical Steps to Take – Don't Consider Preparation as Panic!

We have had to deal with similar issues starting back in 2002 with the SARS virus; 2009 with the H1N1 (swine flu); and, 2015 with the MERs virus. The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. The CDC, recommends these simple strategies:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
 - Stay home when you are sick.
 - Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces with household cleaning spray or wipes.

Some added simple advice:

- Avoid handshaking. Use a fist bump, slight bow, elbow bump, etc.
- Use only your knuckle to touch light switches, elevator buttons, etc. Lift the gasoline dispenser with a paper towel or use a disposable glove.
- Open doors with your closed fist or hip - do not grasp the handle with your hand, unless there is no other way to open the door. Especially important on bathroom and post office/commercial doors.
- Use disinfectant wipes at stores when they are available, including wiping the handle and child seat in grocery carts.

The CDC does not recommend that asymptomatic healthy people, wear a face mask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19. Face masks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others.

Remember if COVID-19 is making you more anxious than normal or causing your mental health condition or illness to escalate, please call our Mobile Crisis Response Team. This free service is available 24-hours a day, 365 days a year by calling (863) 519-3744.