

Taking Care of Yourself and Your Loved Ones During the COVID-19 Pandemic

By Shannon Mackey, LICSW and Mark Kline, PsyD

We are currently experiencing a profound health crisis stemming from COVID-19 that will touch the lives of every person in our community. Anxiety and stress levels may well be higher than usual as individuals and families face new challenges in domestic life, work, and relationships. While HRS has moved to a completely virtual model, we are dedicated to supporting our communities through this unprecedented time. **Our phone and email lines are open: 781-235-4950 or info@hrshelps.org**

Take care of your mental health.

Stay informed, but take breaks. COVID-19 came at us fast, and information about the virus and its impact changes by the minute. It can be hard to maintain a balance between being informed and utterly immersed. It is important to know about the virus and its impact, both for your own health and the health of people around you. It is best to rely on trusted sources, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov, and the World Health Organization, www.who.int, for information about the disease. You might also choose to follow news from reputable regional sources to track local policies and trends that will affect you and your community.

However, it is also important to take breaks from the flood of COVID-19 information. Consider limiting your news and information intake (including social media!) to some scheduled times of day. Remember that your mind and nervous system need time away from the pressure of this crisis.

Cope with normal stress during this infectious disease outbreak. Look for signs of stress in yourself and your family members. Steps to minimize stress include: keeping old routines or establishing new ones; connecting with family and friends virtually on a more regular basis; and engaging in relaxing or enjoyable activities when possible. The American Psychiatric Association suggests “focusing on positive aspects of your life and things that you can control” to help maintain some normalcy in an otherwise unusual time. Part of managing in this time may also be attending to the stress of adult family members, children, or other loved ones. Please refer to Page 2 of this document for some helpful resources for caregivers.

Seek support and connection. Now is a good time to call on whatever resources are available to support you, such as friends, family, religious leaders, and mental health professionals. Many therapists are seeing patients via TeleHealth. There are also a variety of crisis and community resources available to help. Please refer to page two of this document for a list of resources.

Take care of your physical health

The connection between good mental health and good physical health is well-documented. During times of stress, physical health can easily go by the wayside. Try to:

Eat as healthfully as possible.

Avoid alcohol and drugs.

Sleep as much as you are able.

Exercise regularly. Move your body. Stretch and/or do vigorous exercise. (As always, exercise has positive effects on mental health, too.)

Try to breathe fresh air every day and spend time outside.

Be easy with yourself.

This is a difficult time for us all, but individual circumstances will mean our experiences are somewhat different. Working, parenting, maintaining your home life, caring for loved ones and pets, and all the other responsibilities of daily life will likely present new challenges for you during this pandemic. Being easy with yourself means remembering that you are doing the best you can in challenging times. This may be more of a marathon than a sprint, so pace yourself and know you can't be operating at 100% all the time. Practicing some self-care gives you a break and allows you to take better care of those around you as well.

Savor small moments of pleasure or fun.

Strengthen connections; be easy with other people, too.

Take breaks from work or caregiving when you can.

Find time to be alone when you need it and are able – even if it's just 15 minutes to breathe!

Take or leave any advice – do what works for you!

Taking Care of Yourself and Your Loved Ones During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Crisis and Support Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746. (TTY 1-800-846-8517)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255 or chat with Lifeline, <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat/>

Crisis Textline: text TALK to 741741

Searchable database of meetings with people in addiction recovery, including online meetings: <http://intherooms.org/>

Resources for Caregivers

Patient and Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with Coronavirus Disease
https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf

Supporting Homebound Children
https://www.cstsonline.org/assets/media/documents/CSTS_FS_Helping_Homebound_Children_during_COVID19_Outbreak.pdf

Talking about COVID-19 with Young Children
https://660919d3-b85b-43c3-a3ad-3de6a9d37099.filesusr.com/ugd/64c685_319c5acf38d34604b537ac9fae37fc80.pdf

Workbook for Children and Families
<https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn%3Aaaid%3Aascds%3AUS%3A144989fd-d179-4bca-9629-bf96e3eee0c7>

Resources for Individuals

Working Remotely
<http://workplacementalhealth.org/Employer-Resources/Working-Remotely-During-COVID-19>

Coping with Loneliness During Social Distancing
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-love-and-war/202003/10-ideas-coping-loneliness-during-social-distancing>

References (This document was compiled with the help of these sources.)

<https://www.psychiatry.org/news-room/apa-blogs/apa-blog/2020/02/coronavirus-and-mental-health-taking-care-of-ourselves-during-infectious-disease-outbreaks>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>