

Coping In These Very Stressful and Atypical Times

Some Emotions that are typical During Such Stressful Circumstances:

- Anxiety
- Stress/Tension
- Anger
- Fear
- Confusion
- Insecurity
- Isolation/Loneliness
- Sadness/Depression
- Grief (Relating to the loss of your typical life and yourself in it)

10 Tips for Coping

- Take a moment to identify what you are in fact are experiencing. Sometimes we are so overwhelmed or buffeted by our circumstances and emotions that, while we know we are suffering, we may have only a vague or general sense of what is going on and what we are truly feeling. Identifying how we are experiencing things and naming our emotions is the first step in restoring some sense of potency, normalcy, and order.
- Allow yourself to experience and express these emotions (of course to a point). You may find yourself experiencing them in thoughts, feelings, and physically. They may appear unpredictably and you may find yourself all over the place emotionally. All these emotions are understandable, typical, valid, and in a sense a necessary and healthy affective response to current circumstances.
- On the other hand, spend time away from stressful information, circumstances, thoughts, and feelings. Do this in preoccupying activities and pleasure pursuits. But also do this by employing coping approaches, exercises, and processes that emotionally and cognitively separate you as well (see Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Mindfulness, and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Resources, below).
- Choose a coping and management approach (or approaches) that work for you and the manner in which you are experiencing difficult emotions. Practice them as much as possible when you are not experiencing difficult affective episodes but instead in between them. In this way you will be proficient at using these tools when the time comes to utilize

them. Also employ them as early in episodes as possible. Approaches are much more effective when you catch difficult, strong, and runaway emotions early in the process.

- **Socially Connect.** Sounds trite but is exceedingly important. And with those outside of the home (even if you have people currently living with you), by whatever safe means available (e.g. phone calls, face-time, virtual meetings). Social connections are preoccupying, restorative, reassuring, instill a sense of normality, and are essential to mental and emotional health.
- **Find time, no matter what, for yourself.** Take a break from work, family, and commitments. When overwhelmed practically (and emotionally) this often does not feel possible. However, if you do not take a break, the break will take you (and your efficiency goes down when highly stressed, so taking a break will actually make you more productive overall).
- **Sustain routines to whatever extent possible or develop and follow new ones if you can.** Nothing like unfamiliarity, upheaval and uncertainty to produce anxiety, insecurity, tension, and a sense of instability and loss. Positive routines can facilitate a sense of predictability of expectation and comfort.
- **Do something new.** Learn a new skill, gain knowledge on a novel topic, investigate new areas. Doing something you wouldn't otherwise have done adds a little positivity to our unfortunate current situations.
- **Engage in potency promoting pursuits.** A substantial portion of the difficult emotions one feels during such times stems from a sense of loss of control. In truth there is little we can actually control, but engaging in pursuits that result in fairly immediate and concrete positive results can re-instill, even a little, our sense of potency, power, and competency.
- **Talk to someone about what you are going through.** I still really don't know why, but after years of being a clinical psychologist I have learned that talking about stuff does help. Is it catharsis, is it the power of sharing, is it feeling that someone cares, is it something else? I have no idea. But it helps and that I am sure of. And keeping things inside only adds to feelings of isolation and being alone.

Ten tips may not be nearly enough. Therapeutic services can be especially helpful, even essential during stressful and traumatic times. Mental health services are critical for clinical conditions. Not only in the present but for future mental health and well-being.

Some Relevant Research Findings:

Quarantines and Isolation can produce stress, tension, confusion, and anger (no kidding)

Getting your information from reputable news sources rather than social media tends to reduce perception of risk and promote protective behavior and too much media exposure of any kind, is not helpful (duh)

Feeling a lack of control and overexposure to risk increases stress (duh again)

Addressing anxiety and stress during the early stages of difficult times helps not only during those times, but in the long term as well

Using ameliorative approaches for dealing with tough feelings such as anxiety, panic, stress, bouts of sadness and other difficult emotions as early as possible during episodes and cycles amplifies the effectiveness of those approaches.

Resources for Coping Tools and Approaches:

General:

<https://www.apa.org>

<https://dmh.lacounty.gov/covid-19-information/>

<https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/covid-19-coronavirus>

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

https://www.allencomm.com/courses/covid19_5_tips_to_face_your_anxiety/index.html?fbclid=IwAR1yHTTDOFHppbvtHfVR6o38dEywSLa5Xvcn790QP9nCmmeSHxPwmV9BYBE#.Xn1k11d8jJo.facebook

Cognitive Behavior Therapy:

<http://www.abct.org/Home/>

<https://www.apa.org/ptsd-guideline/patients-and-families/cognitive-behavioral>

<https://www.nacbt.org/whatiscbt-htm/>

https://www.amazon.com/s?k=cognitive+behavior+therapy&i=stripbooks&crd=52LYZH6G8QP Y&srefix=cognitions%2Cstripbooks%2C227&ref=nb_sb_ss_i_1_6

<https://www.academyofct.org/page/AdditionalResources>

Mindfulness:

<https://medschool.ucsd.edu/som/fmph/research/mindfulness/mindfulness-resources/Pages/default.aspx>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/urban-mindfulness/201109/mindfulness-the-basics>

https://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletter_article/Mindfulness-resources

<https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/mindfulness>

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapy-types/acceptance-and-commitment-therapy>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/two-takes-depression/201102/introduction-acceptance-and-commitment-therapy>

<https://www.psychologytools.com/professional/therapies/acceptance-and-commitment-therapy-act/>

<https://contextualscience.org/act>

https://www.amazon.com/Acceptance-Commitment-Therapy-Second-Practice-ebook/dp/B0067L8S9Q/ref=sr_1_3?crid=3M2RQTF403267&dchild=1&keywords=acceptance+and+commitment+therapy&qid=1586476394&s=books&sprefix=acceptance%2Caps%2C216&sr=1-3

https://www.amazon.com/ACT-Made-Simple-Easy-Read-ebook/dp/B07J27TF2B/ref=sr_1_4?crid=3M2RQTF403267&dchild=1&keywords=acceptance+and+commitment+therapy&qid=1586476394&s=books&sprefix=acceptance%2Caps%2C216&sr=1-4