

# Coronavirus anxiety: Identify, address and ease it

Catastrophes, including public health emergencies such as COVID-19, affect mental health, both at the individual and population levels. Indeed, people experience a wide range of mental health issues during and long after emergencies, according to the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO).

Such emergencies, by definition, are unexpected and out of an individual's control, which in the case of COVID-19 (i.e., coronavirus), can lead to stress and anxiety. While you may not be able to control the trajectory of the coronavirus, you can control how you respond to it.

## Anxiety and tips to address it

Most people experience some level of anxiety in their lives; it's a natural response to dealing with life's day-to-day pressures. However, when anxiety starts to interfere with overall health and wellbeing, it's time to address it. Symptoms of anxiety include:

- Intense worry
- Fatigue
- Panic
- Obsession
- Nightmares
- Muscle tension
- Headaches
- Sleep problems
- Rapid heart rate
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Sweating

Fortunately, you can start addressing any anxiety you may have here and now. Consider the following:

1. *Take control of the situation.* There are preventive measures you can take to limit your susceptibility to the coronavirus, such as washing your hands; not touching your eyes, nose and mouth; and disinfecting your home and work area. For more suggestions, refer to the [Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC) and [WHO](#) websites.

2. *Take care of yourself.* Eat nutritious food, exercise, limit alcohol consumption and make sleep a priority. Stay connected with family and friends so that you're not socially isolated.
3. *Stay informed by learning the facts.* The news isn't always accurate. Be sure to get your information from authoritative sources, such as the [CDC](#) and the [WHO](#).
4. *Think about the impact you have on others.* Be sure to care for yourself and take preventative measures more seriously. Communicating with family and friends about those measures is a form of positively affecting others.
5. *Limit your media exposure to coronavirus news.* Today's news cycle is 24 hours, and the exposure can be overwhelming, regardless of the topic.
6. *Let it go.* Don't dwell on what may or may not happen regarding the coronavirus. Change what you can and let the rest take its course. Refocus your mind and think only about positive things.

### What's the best way to talk to kids about this?

With their technological know-how, your children are probably better at picking up on news than you are, but as with yourself, there are steps you can take to address any stress and anxiety they may have around COVID-19. For example:

1. *Ask, listen and assure.* Ask what they've heard so you can correct any misinformation. Acknowledge their feelings and ask questions to help you identify the sources of their fears. Ask what they are afraid will happen, and then answer with details you think they can handle based on their ages, tendencies to worry, etc. Assure that COVID-19 is a situation that can be addressed. For example, you can say that experts are doing all they can to understand the virus, treat people who have it, and keep it from spreading.
2. *Limit news exposure.* In addition to social media and other news outlets, you are a source of news as well. Be careful what you and other adults say about the coronavirus when young children are nearby. An offhand remark might be taken out of context and trigger anxiety. Avoid graphic news coverage when your kids are present, too.
3. *Be a good role model.* Your children will look to you to decide if their fears are grounded. Model good hygiene, reasonable precautions, and a calm attitude. If you aren't anxious, they will likely feel better.

If you or your children's stress and anxiety persist in spite of taking these recommended steps, contact your company's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or your primary care physician who may refer you to a behavioral health specialist. Another option is to call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration's Disaster Distress Helpline at 1-800-985-5990, a 24/7, 365 day-a-year, free national hotline that provides immediate crisis counseling. It is toll-free, multilingual and confidential.