

# What to Do When You're Stressed, Too

## A Guide for Parents and Caregivers

In the midst of all the news about the global pandemic, anxiety is inevitable. Being able to recognize and manage your stress will not only help you, but will also have a calming effect on those you care for. Here are some tips for regulating your very natural responses to these challenging times:

### Limit News Intake

Even though staying up-to-date is important, overconsuming news can be harmful—especially with children nearby. Try setting the timer on your phone for 30 minutes or so, and watch early in the morning or after children have gone to bed. For your own peace of mind, try not to consume news right before you go to bed. Read, stretch, or meditate before going to bed to help calm your mind and body. This same strategy applies to social media as well.

### Let Go of Perfection

Realize that the situation all of us are going through is unprecedented, and that things won't go exactly as planned. Whether you are working from home while trying to homeschool your children or temporarily out of work and wanting to use time more productively, be gentle on yourself. This may not be the time to learn a new skill or reorganize every closet and drawer. Stick to a simple schedule and be flexible, knowing that "good enough" is enough!

### Boost Your Immune System

Getting enough exercise and sleep helps immensely when managing stress levels. If possible, get outside for a walk every day and do some simple stretching exercises with your kids. Try your best to get to bed and wake up at the same time every day. In addition, eating your last meal of the day at least two to three hours before bedtime will help with sleep and digestion.

### Use Techniques to Calm Racing Thoughts

Those nonstop racing thoughts we have can be overwhelming and distressing while hindering our ability to concentrate and accomplish daily tasks. You can try using breath work: Take a deep breath in to the count of four, hold for a count of four, then release for a count of four. Repeat several times. Another method is to focus on your five senses: Stop to think of things you can see, hear, touch, taste, and smell.

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## Take Time Just for You

While it is not always easy, finding just 30 to 60 minutes a day to concentrate on your own well-being every day is important. Reading a magazine or book, writing in a journal, or listening to music are wonderful ways to relax. If you have never tried listening to podcasts, now might be a great time, and there are many that are specifically for relaxation and positive news (try *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, *Oprah's SuperSoul Conversations*, or *Ten Percent Happier*).

## Connect With Others

In this time of social distancing, it is so important not to practice emotional distancing. Video and phone chats are no substitute for in-person visits, but they do help your family to stay connected. Just as your children need virtual playdates with friends, you should connect with friends as well. Even if you have never played an online game before, you and a friend or family member can engage in a two-player game like Scrabble or another app-based game you have on your phones. You may find that you feel even more connected than ever by scheduling brief remote social hours to build and maintain your social network. You might also schedule a walk-and-talk call with a close friend. That will get you away from your screen and moving at the same time.

## When to Talk to a Professional

Feeling additional stress and anxiety while going through any crisis is normal, but if you begin to exhibit any of these signs, you should reach out to your doctor or one of the resources listed here.

- Sleeping or crying for long periods of time
- Extreme anger or frequent loss of temper
- The need to use drugs or alcohol daily to cope

Yale School of Medicine has a COVID-19 call center with health professionals available **Monday–Friday, 7 am to 7 pm at 1-203-688-1700.**

New York State has a free, confidential emotional support helpline staffed by volunteers and mental health professionals. **Helpline #: 1-844-863-9314.**

The CDC has a toll-free disaster distress helpline. **Call 1-800-985-5990.**

## Additional Resources

Tips for managing anxiety in an anxiety-provoking situation from the New York State Office of Mental Health

<https://omh.ny.gov/omhweb/guidance/covid-19-managing-stress-anxiety.pdf>

Yale Child Study Center/Scholastic Collaborative Solidarity Column (Articles on dealing with COVID-19)

<https://medicine.yale.edu/childstudy/scholasticcollab/news/solidarity>

Yale Stress Center Free Meditation and Mindfulness Zoom Sessions

<https://medicine.yale.edu/stresscenter/mindfulness/coping-covid-19>