Coping with COVID-19 Anxiety

In these anxious times, there is so much information on how to stay calm as we figure out how to respond to COVID-19. Rather than adding to this, the below prompts are designed to help you reflect and set intentions about how you want to respond to the problem, whatever the reality of your community, your family, and your own health.

Some of the prompts may trigger strong emotions – that is okay. Take your time, or feel free to skip a prompt entirely. There is no need to go through them all. There is benefit in taking time to pause and think, even if only to recognize that you are not currently in a place to engage with the prompts. If you want to talk to someone, there is help available. See a list with links to additional resources and support services on the next page.

If you are looking for practical ways that you can keep feelings of anxiety at bay, see the next page.

Myself and what I can control

- What problems, that I have control over, do I need to solve today?
- How might I remain mindful when others are panicking?
- What are my values (and/or) principles for navigating difficult situations?
- What does it look like to look after my health during this time?
- What does it look like to think flexibly, and allow for new information to inform my decisions?
- How can I stay calm and stick with a decision I’ve made, when others may disagree or be upset with me?
- How can I share my thinking without trying to force others to follow it?
- What are my responsibilities to myself, my family, and the larger community?
- What anxious behaviours or habits might get in the way of this responsibility?

My relationships and support networks

- How might I build a support network to help me feel reassured through this time?
- How might I stay connected, if I am geographically displaced from my friends or family?
- How might I be a support to others, while still maintaining my own boundaries?
- How might any stress or anxiety I feel impact my relationships during the next month?
- What might be some early ‘warning signs’ that stress or anxiety are impacting my relationships?
- When feeling stressed or anxious, how might my ‘best self’ engage with others?
  - What might I say? What might I do? How might I feel?

News and Media

- What information do I need today to update myself?
- Where might I get this information? How reputable and trustworthy is the source?
- When is the best time of day for me to process this?
- Am I in a state of mind where I can absorb this information and understand its intent?

Further Information


Practical ways for managing COVID-19 anxiety

If you’re feeling anxious or worried during this time, you’re not alone. Anxiety is normal, and in some cases it can be helpful. For example, research during past pandemics shows that people who worry are more likely to do the things that help to keep the virus at bay, like frequent handwashing. However, sometimes anxiety can be unhelpful.

We often feel anxious when events feel out of our control, and when we think we don’t have the capacity, skills or ability to cope. Anxiety tricks us into thinking about the worst-case scenarios in vivid and frightening detail.

Instead of worrying, channel your anxious energy into action: get informed, plan, and prepare. Focus on controlling the controllable.

1. Limit or avoid unhelpful media and misinformation
   Although it might be tempting to keep informed, or difficult to escape, limiting your exposure to media, news, and social media about coronavirus will help quell the panic. See Coronavirus: 5 ways to manage your news consumption in times of crisis for tips.

2. Stay focused on the here and now, taking each day step by step
   Try to focus on the here and now—not the past and not the future. Live in the moment and take one day at a time.

3. Be aware of negative thoughts and don’t give them too much power
   Just because we’re thinking something, that doesn’t always mean it’s true. When you notice yourself worrying a lot, take a step back, and try to let worries pass by without focussing on them too much.

4. Look after your body
   Get enough sleep, exercise, eat well, avoid smoking, excessive alcohol and drugs. This will help protect your mental health and immune system. For useful tips on exercise see Health’s article ‘How Physical Activity can help during COVID-19’. For tips on sleep, see Sleep Health Foundation and for tips on eating, see 5 healthy eating tips by UNICEF.

5. Stay connected with others
   It can make a huge difference when we share our worries with others and connect with other people who are supportive. See ABC article on ways to stay connected.

6. Help other people, be kind, and compassionate
   When we help other people, it can also make us feel better. We are all in this together so let’s try our best to be kind and compassionate to each other.

7. Take a breath
   When you feel overwhelmed take a few slow, deep breaths to help you calm down. For guided meditations, including breath practices, see Mindfulness @ ANU, or download the free Smiling Mind App, a unique tool developed by psychologists and educators to help bring balance to your life.

8. If you’re feeling like you’re not coping, get professional advice
   It’s ok to ask for help. If you’re feeling overwhelmed by anxiety, seek professional support. See ‘Further Information’ on the first page to link to ANU support services.