

Monitoring Emotions and Coping Skills During the COVID-19 Pandemic

During the last few weeks, the COVID-19 pandemic has upended many of our lives and required us to distance ourselves from family and friends and created a sea of uncertainty about jobs, businesses and more. These changes may significantly stress our emotional coping mechanisms. For some of us this means, at times, feeling a wave of anxiety. You may feel a sudden increase in worry that makes you feel unsettled and uncomfortable. Try the following to cope with that anxiety:

- **Do not try to avoid or judge this anxious feeling.**
The more we avoid anxiety, the scarier it becomes. Instead, take a **PAUSE** and reflect about what just happened that led to this anxious feeling.
- **Now that you've taken a pause, IDENTIFY what you are feeling.**
Ask yourself, "What made me nervous?" Be curious about what made you uncomfortable. Think of this wave of anxiety as an opportunity to learn more about yourself and whether there was another feeling behind that anxiety.

Some common emotions that can make us anxious are:

>Disappointment.

These last few weeks have been filled with many, many disappointments. We have experienced business disruptions and cancelled vacations, family events and special occasions. When dealing with disappointments, it is common to personalize the loss. For example, we may automatically think, "Why is this happening to me?" Try not to personalize this loss, but rather allow yourself to feel the sadness that comes with this loss. Reach out to a friend who will empathize and not judge your sadness.

>Anticipation Anxiety.

Anticipation anxiety is the anxiety that we feel prior to whatever it is that we fear. For example, someone who is afraid of flying may feel more anxiety leading up to the flight, only to be surprised while on the flight that it's not as bad as they anticipated. Anxiety is often experienced when we are anticipating what will happen in the future. However, once it happens, you may experience that the anxiety is less because you can now prepare and plan accordingly.

>Change Fatigue.

Are you feeling anxious because you are experiencing so many changes at once? As humans, we thrive in our routines and even though we all enjoy change at times, when it is imposed and when it is in excess, change can make us feel uncomfortable. During this time of so much change, it is important to keep as many of your routines as possible, no matter how small the routine. For example, if you always brush your teeth before you shower, continue to do so. If you always read a bedtime story to your child before they go to sleep, continue to do so. Being able to maintain those small routines can help ground us.

- **CHECK your thinking.**
Ask yourself, "What am I worried will happen?" When we are stressed it's sometimes hard to think clearly and our brains can jump to assumptions. Check to see if you are thinking in all-or-none terms such as "everyone," "no one," "always," "never." Are you thinking of the extremes like the worst-case scenario? If so, see if you can find a more helpful and middle

ground using facts that you know. Words like “sometimes,” “possibly,” “some people” are usually more accurate at describing situations. Try and describe what you are worried about using these less-extreme words.

- **LEARN from your anxiety.**
Take note of who and/or what in your life you are worrying about. Often, we worry the most about those who are most important and meaningful to us. Notice that you have them in your life and how much you care about them.
- **CREATE a phrase or a mantra that you can repeat to yourself to provide comfort.**
This phrase should resonate with you and soothe you. Some phrases that others have used include, “I am not alone”, “This too shall pass,” “I have overcome worse” or “This will only make me stronger.” Some find it helpful to write the phrase on a piece of paper and carry it with them.
- **CONNECT with others.**
During this time, when we are being asked to practice social distancing, stay connected with others through creative ways such as Facetime, video chat, and social media. We can connect with others in our shared experiences.
- **REMIND yourself that emotions come and go.**
This wave of anxiety is like a wave in the ocean – it may be stronger than others, but like every other wave, this feeling shall also pass.

Source: Mt. Sinai Health Systems