

Notice. Talk. Act.™

at Home

**Resource to Help Parents and
Caregivers Stay Mentally Healthy
through the Public Health Emergency**

AMERICAN
PSYCHIATRIC
ASSOCIATION
FOUNDATION



NOTICE the signs of the stress you are experiencing



During this coronavirus pandemic, many parents and caregivers are stressed as a result of aspects of their lives being put on hold. As a parent or caregiver, navigating new public rules and precautionary measures to keep you and your family healthy is already challenging. These are in addition to the existing stress of paying bills, caring for children who are at home and learning remotely, and more. These stressors can become overwhelming and trigger strong emotions.

Some common signs of prolonged stress in parents & caregivers include:

- ▶ Feeling more anxious, uncertain, or fearful
- ▶ Feeling overwhelmed, numb, or in disbelief
- ▶ Feeling tired, lacking usual level of energy or motivation
- ▶ Excessive feelings of sadness, despair, or sensitivity
- ▶ Difficulty concentrating
- ▶ Increased irritability or angry outbursts
- ▶ Headaches, dizziness, or stomachaches
- ▶ Extreme changes in eating habits (not eating enough or eating too much)
- ▶ Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs and substances
- ▶ Difficulty sleeping, including unpleasant or intense dreams
- ▶ Increased desire to be alone or away from children

The signs of stress during the pandemic are typically above and beyond what a person normally experiences.



The list below shows some examples of extreme changes in behavior that might indicate increased stress for parents or caregivers.

Before the Pandemic	During/After the Pandemic
Sleeping for 6-8 hours	Waking up every 1-2 hours or sleeping 10+ hours
Having 1-2 drinks every week	Having 1-2 drinks every day
Spending free time with others	Spending free time alone or away from others
Exercising regularly	Having no desire to exercise or not exercising at all

It is important to recognize these stressors and understand that it is natural to feel this way in a pandemic. Recognition is the first step to coping with the unusual or intensified feelings that many parents and caregivers encounter. Starting with self-care allows you to be ready and able to look after your children and loved ones.

Anxious about coronavirus? Reach out to a Crisis Counselor. Text **HOME** to **741741** or message Crisis Text Line on **Facebook Messenger**.

Learn ways to manage the stress you are experiencing

During these difficult times, some parents and caregivers, while focusing on the needs of their children, may overlook their own needs. If you find yourself in this situation, giving children structure, such as helping them set a schedule for their days, can free up extra energy for you and help your children feel more secure. Children and teens are at their best if they plan for each day. Make sure that there is a balance between learning, leisure time, and social contact. It is also crucial to help your children manage stress by providing accurate information from reliable sources, including the **CDC website**.

Understanding the facts about COVID-19 from trusted public health sources and being prepared can make the public health emergency less stressful. In addition to maintaining healthy routines, eating well, getting enough sleep, and exercising, it is crucial to support and refuel yourself emotionally. It is just as important to take care of your mental health: take time to relax by engaging in calming activities or practicing mindfulness.

Though everyone in your family reacts differently, especially to unexpected stress, it is helpful to learn the following **coping strategies** that can be adjusted to your routine, priorities, lifestyle, and your family's needs.



Take a break

Whether taking a deep breath for 30 seconds several times a day or getting up and moving around a couple of times during the day, taking breaks can lead to a significant release of stress. Check out a wellness application, watch a video on breathing exercise, or listen to music for relaxation.

More frequent, shorter breaks are found to be more effective than longer, less frequent breaks.¹ In addition, if you are active during your breaks, for example taking a walk or even cleaning, it will give you time to unwind and recover from your work. The ability to deactivate and then reactivate helps you stay focused.



Seize the moment

When things around you seem to be out of control, it is helpful to take a pause and recognize your thoughts, feelings, or senses in the moment. After a pause, you can recognize how to be active, make choices, or take positive action in helping yourself, your family, and your communities. After taking positive action, you will feel more calm.

One way of being present is to write down your thoughts and write what you are grateful for. This can help sort your thoughts, as well as infuse them with positivity. Yoga, meditation, or mindfulness activities can help you create a calm reality and restore your sense of control as you focus.

Let out your emotion

Give yourself an opportunity to embrace what you are feeling. If you are feeling anxious, stressed, or sad, remind yourself that these emotions are momentary and normal, rather than getting upset with yourself or anyone else in your family.

Ask yourself questions like:

- What do I need right now?
- How can I let go?
- When was the last time I felt this way?
- What did I do that worked for me last time?

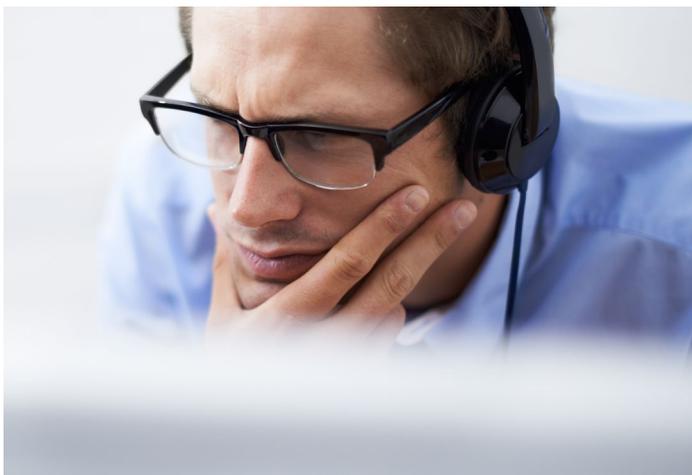
Match your actions to your feelings, whether it is sadness, happiness, silliness, seriousness, etc. This will help you maintain balance through the waves of emotions. More importantly, don't get discouraged if you feel you aren't doing enough during this crisis; keep following scientific recommendations from the CDC.



Self-love

Be kind to yourself. Do something special for yourself even if you feel like you don't deserve it. Some examples might include taking a hot bath while listening to soothing music, curling up under a blanket with a good book, or ordering food from your favorite restaurant. Self-love boosts optimistic emotions, increases wellness, and facilitates healthier relationships in your family. Picking one way to spoil yourself will help anchor your days and provide breathing space.





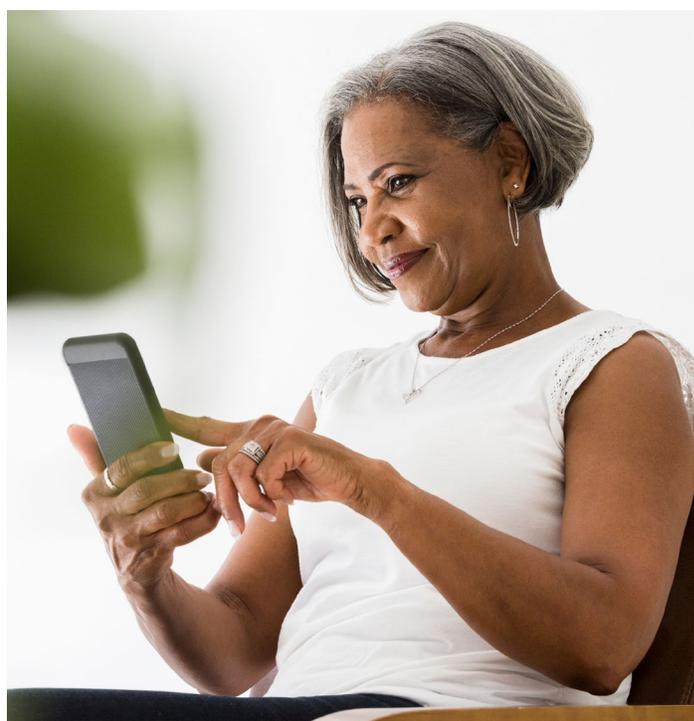
Challenge yourself

When you are feeling pessimistic, you can put strain on your mental health, relationships, and productivity. Although it can be challenging to counter negative thoughts through self-talk, the effort is worthwhile. Try to better understand what is going on and regulate emotions. It helps you think more clearly. Challenging your thinking can show how much of your thinking is incomplete, untrue, exaggerated, or biased toward the negative aspects of a situation. This allows you to feel better and react effectively to circumstances.

Connect with others

While social distancing, you can still check in with friends, family, and neighbors by phone, video chat, text, or email. You can also consider a walk outside with family members or friends while wearing a mask and staying at least 6 feet apart from others. Simply thinking about those you care about and drawing on the strength of your connections can be calming and reduce stress. Venting to others that you trust can help you and the other person. Verbal interaction allows expression and addresses what is on someone's mind.

This unprecedented time provides opportunities for all of us to recognize our value, to be grateful, to care for others, to engage with those we love, and to seek community and purpose. We are connected to one another, and we can get through this together.



Ask someone for help

If you are feeling especially stressed or overwhelmed, seek out professional help. Be sure to coordinate with your support services, including your colleagues, HR, your leadership, or the Employee Assistance Program to support yourself. Many mental health providers, including psychiatrists, have the capacity to provide services via telehealth and appropriate online resources. Click [here](#) to learn more about **telepsychiatry**.

Example of Family Calendar to Improve Mental Health

Plan out some time for stress relief activities each day and make it a family activity. Don't forget to be creative! If you have younger children, set time to play with them and engage them in these activities when possible. If you have older children, brainstorm stress relief activities with them, write ideas down onto pieces of paper, place them into a container, and take turns picking out on Sundays to plan the activities for the week.

These activities should be adapted to fit your family lifestyle. Switch around these activities to meet your coping needs. It is important to do something fun and stay flexible.

SELF-LOVE Sunday	Watch a family movie or engage in other relaxation activities.
MAKE CONNECTION Monday	Connect with someone.
TAKE A BREAK Tuesday	Limit screen time and spend more time outdoors.
WELCOMING Wednesday	Be open to new experiences. Try a new hobby or learn something new.
THANKFUL Thursday	Plan an act of gratitude for family members, friends, or local communities.
FEARLESS Friday	Challenge yourself. Write down something you need help with.
SEIZE THE MOMENT Saturday	Meditate together for 5-15 mins.

To learn more about signs and reactions to stress in your child by working with your child's school, check out our [Notice. Talk. Act.™ at School](#) resource. The Center for Workplace Mental health also offers a **Guide** for mental and well-being while working remotely during COVID-19 that parents or caregivers can use.

Reference:

- i. <https://www.hseni.gov.uk/articles/advice-employers-protecting-home-workers-advice-hse-gb>

American Psychiatric Association Foundation
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