

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Coping with anxiety and emotions

Feelings of worry and unease can be expected following significant and stressful events, such as the current coronavirus pandemic. Although unpleasant, feeling uncertain is normal. It is important to learn strategies to manage stress and emotions.

Learn the facts

Media coverage can heighten anxiety and impact mood.

- Limit exposure to media coverage of the coronavirus
- Seek information from reliable sources, such as the Australian and NSW governments, or trusted organisations such as the World Health Organisation.

Keep things in perspective

It is a natural reaction to imagine worst-case scenarios in stressful situations – sometimes, it helps us. But other times, we see things as worse than they may be. Try asking yourself:

- Am I getting ahead of myself and assuming the worst before I know the outcome?
- Am I underestimating my ability to cope? Thinking about how you would cope, even in the worst case, can help put things in perspective.

Take reasonable precautions

Being proactive and front-footed can help manage emotions. Protect yourself from COVID-19 by:

- Washing your hands frequently
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Get tested for COVID-19 if you experience even mild symptoms, including sore throat, runny nose, cough, fever or loss of taste or smell
- Stay at home if you are sick.

Know when to seek support

- Talk to someone you know over the phone
- Watch out for warning signals if things are not going well – understand your triggers and reactions
- Recognise when things are on their way to being more than you can handle and be proactive
- If anxiety or mood begin impacting on everyday life, a psychologist may be able to help.

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Practice self-care

Looking after yourself is important at any time. Examples of self-care can include:

- Maintaining good social connections and communicating with loved ones and friends
- Making time for activities you enjoy (or develop new hobbies)
- Keeping a healthy lifestyle, eating a balanced diet, exercising, walking the dog (or cat), getting quality sleep
- Where possible, avoid excessive consumption of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs
- Practice relaxation, meditation and mindfulness to settle your body
- Focus on positives and limit negative talk.

Tips for parents

Children pick up on anxiety in others. It is important they can speak about their concerns.

Do not be afraid to talk about COVID-19 with your children. Responding in an honest and age-appropriate way may lessen anxiety. You can do this by:

- Speaking in a calm manner; asking what they may know already so you can clarify
- Letting them know it is normal to experience anxiety
- Giving them control by explaining what they can do: wash hands, stay away from people coughing/sneezing
- Limiting unnecessary information and media; reassure them coronavirus is less common and severe in children
- Allowing regular communication with people they care about by phone
- Getting them to write letters or send pictures to loved ones, especially if they are living in a residential aged care facility.

Ways to find help

- Access your local GP for a referral to a Medicare telehealth psychologist
- Beyond Blue 1300 224 636 or beyondblue.org.au
- Lifeline 131 114
- findapsychologist.com.au
- Carer Gateway 1800 422 737 or carergateway.gov.au
- Carer Line 1800 242 636.