



MANAGING ANXIETY DURING THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

COVID-19 continues to spread, and efforts to contain it have led to profound disruptions in many of our lives. These circumstances easily contribute to anxiety; and for those who already struggle with anxiety the current environment can certainly make that worse. The Wayne State University School of Social Work wants to help you manage your anxiety and our expert faculty, Associate Professor Suzanne Brown and Part-time Faculty Caitlin Brown, have compiled the following list of tips for you to consider as you work, learn and live in this new environment.

Anxiety is a feeling of fear in response to a perceived threat, and usually comes along with thoughts or beliefs that this situation is beyond our resources or ability to cope.

We experience anxiety through physical symptoms such as sweating, increased heart rate, or upset stomach, and cognitive symptoms such as racing thoughts, mental confusion, avoiding things, freezing, or an inability to decide on the best course of action.



WAYS TO MANAGE YOUR ANXIETY

Observe and Accept: The current pandemic and its consequences may leave us feeling overwhelmed, frightened, more tired than usual and generally not ourselves. Observe these changes mindfully and accept that you may not be able to be as productive or focused during this time.

Simplify: Modify your expectations of yourself. Consider that you may not be able to do as much as you did before this crisis. Simplify your activities, prioritize what is most important, and break down tasks into smaller pieces.



Limit Time on Social Media: Spending too much time on social media reading and hearing about the consequences of COVID 19 may only increase our anxiety and sense of isolation. Limit your time on social media to once or twice a day to manage anxiety.

Take Action: Anxiety often makes us want to DO something. So, go ahead and DO something. No, you can't do anything about the virus. But there are many things that are under your control. Identify one task you can accomplish and do it, then do the next thing.

Help Someone: Doing something for someone else is a powerful antidote to anxiety. Get involved in a volunteer activity or do something for someone else. Research tells us that altruism helps the help giver as much as the help receiver.

Gratitude: Identify one pleasant experience (i.e. the feeling of sun on your skin, petting your dog, the experience of breath moving in and out of your lungs) and focus your attention on just that pleasant experience using all of your senses in this moment. Marvel in the delight of having this experience. Consider this an exercise. The more you practice it, the easier it becomes, and the less room there is for anxious thought processes.



STAY IN THE MOMENT

Mindfulness is another tool that can help us recognize when we are feeling anxious and respond wisely rather than react rashly to that anxiety. Mindfulness refers to the act of paying attention in the present moment with an attitude of curiosity and non-judgment. The following are some exercises for mindfulness during stressful times:

Just This Moment: When you are feeling overwhelmed by information about the virus, take a moment to pause, stop, & listen. Think about just this moment.

Mindful Walking: Take some time to go for a mindful walk in nature, whether that's in your neighborhood or in the woods.

Do just one thing: Remind yourself to just focus on one thing at a time. What can you take action on in this moment? What can you let go of until another day? What can you ask for help with?

Radical Acceptance: Recognize and accepting the truth of the situation, even if it is difficult. Let go of fighting to make things be different that are out of your control.

Breathe: Notice your natural breath. If you're able, you might try to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth with a big sigh. Do this a few times, see if you can slowly lengthen and deepen your breath.

Compassion: Meet your anxiety with compassion, knowing what you're feeling is a normal response to a stressful situation, rather than judging or fighting against your feelings. This is a time to treat ourselves and others kindly, recognizing this is a moment of suffering and we are all dealing with this together, trying the best we can. Take a moment right now to notice how you feel in your body and emotions. Remind yourself it is okay to feel however you are feeling. Perhaps talk to yourself in a gentle, soothing way, like you would soothe a small child.