

# Helpful Ideas for Coping with the Pandemic

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There is no one thing we can do to make this all better. We have to take it one day at a time.

In the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic, there are going to be many things that we face and we may not know what to do with it. Our first responder community takes the brunt of this as we try and deal with the new order of working stressful jobs, navigating home responsibilities, and dealing with the overall anxiety a time like this can create.

In this time, it is important to be compassionate towards yourself and others and to take care of yourself as best as you can, there is no right or wrong when it comes to emotional responses. You feel what you feel. Those feelings are guides to let you know what you need to do support yourself, your family, and your particular situation. Feeling like the world is upside down, is okay, because for almost all of us, that's exactly what is happening.

As we take care of ourselves and those we care about, good gestures and taking care of our emotional needs goes a long way in helping us get through this. Below are some tips for each of us:

## **Take care of Your Physical Body – Exercise, Sleep, and Eat Well**

This means taking care of the basics (as you can control it). Try to exercise each day to reduce stress and get some alone time, it doesn't have to be a lot, it could be 15 minutes of a brisk walk, the rule is "anything is better than nothing." Get yourself in a healthy sleep routine (again, as best as you can). Sleep is most restorative when we have a set time to go to sleep and wake up each day (yes, all seven days). Your body may require more sleep when you are very stressed, but as a rule look at 8 hours of sleep and try and have that regular routine, your body will like that. Don't drink alcohol or use drugs, this negatively impacts your immune system and causes stress on the body. Look to eat during the day and be as healthy as you can. This not only helps your waistline, but it also helps your bodies to get the nutrients it needs when you are out of sorts. A variety of proteins, vegetables, fruits and lots of water are really good. If you have not started, take a multi-vitamin (if you have no health reasons this would be counter indicated). There is no vitamin or supplement that will prevent Covid-19 but having your body at its best means your immune system is at its best.

## **Take care of your Emotional Health – Don't Forget About You**

This can be tough. Remember little things make a difference. You cannot burn the candle at both ends and avoid getting burned. This is not easy, but it makes a difference. Try the following:

- Take a break after work before staring on your home responsibilities. Can be a few minutes to deep breathe, walk around, sit in your car and cry, its ok to feel scared and down. Give yourself a few minutes at least to close one part of your day and start another.
- Don't keep it inside – talk to someone. A few minutes with a confidant, co-worker, friend, or therapist can make a world of difference. While we may be physically distancing, we need to be engaged with social supports more than ever. Make a point to reach out to someone and talk, we are all going through this, and getting through it together is better than going it alone.
- Connect with your spiritual side, nature, or good practices. If you love Yoga, do it; if you find quiet meditation helpful, practice it; if you need to pray or talk to a spiritual contact, reach out. Whatever builds you up, make time for it. A few minutes a day, or when you can sneak it in, will help you. There is no way to make this all better or make it make sense, but if something helps you when you have been in tough spots before, give it some time now.

## ***Helpful Ideas for Coping with the Pandemic (continued)***

### **Be Compassionate with Others**

Kids, spouses, co-workers, family, whoever it is, be compassionate and slow to react or get angry. We are all struggling. Don't make a bad situation worse. If you need to, walk away for a minute, do it. Do not react and get angry, it is not good for you and it rarely solves anything. Getting angry is negative for your relationships, your physical health, and your self-care. Let go of it as much as you can. If you are scared, talk about it; if you are overwhelmed, ask for help or at least take a break for minute; if you are able to help another, do it. You can ask for help, you can talk about dealing with it, you can do what you can, and then it keeps going. Little kindnesses make a huge difference. Helping others helps ourselves. As you can, use your words, energy, and minutes, to help the situation for yourself and others. It may not be easy, you may be stretched to more than you think you can handle, but this will pass, and you will get through it. It's not easy, but it is possible. How you get through it is your call, doing it may be tough, but it is worth everything you can give it.

### **What to make of Being a "Hero" or not, in the midst of all this**

People may like us one minute and maybe not the next. Keep it simple. Appreciate yourself no matter what, even when you might have to do the right thing and it is not popular. How you feel about yourself is the most important thing. Don't be too hard on yourself, don't focus on what you cannot control, if people say "thank you" then accept it and the spirit it was given, if they say "screw you" then do the same, accept it (you don't have to agree with them) because in the overall picture of your life, who really cares about someone else not liking us for some reason? If we know what have done the right thing, or even the best we could, that's it, and we have to move on. Be considerate to yourself, just like if a friend brought this to you, what would be your best advice be to them?

### **Take care of your spiritual being – what disturbs the body and emotions impacts our spirituality**

While body and brain are obviously disrupted during a pandemic so is our soul or spiritual self. As we are impacted spiritually so are those we care for and love. Our first responder community is particularly challenged spiritually due to their continual exposure to life and death situations and the threat of contaminating their loved ones at home and others on the job. As we interact with them, often via technological methods, let us be particularly sensitive to the pastoral care needs they have. Provide an open, confidential, and safe environment to share their feelings, thoughts and life challenges.

During these conversations we may identify physical or behavioral health issues that may require referral to physicians, psychologists or other professional mental health professionals. We are blessed to have extensive professional resources in the tri-county area for us to consult with and refer to. Remember that they are there for us and our needs as well.

### **Physical vs. Social Distancing – A safety mechanism to decrease the exposure risks to COVID-19**

Given the ease of contamination of uninfected people with this virus, it is critical that we maintain at least six feet of separation between people, wear facemasks when outside our homes, and wash our hands thoroughly and frequently. These practices are "physical distancing" and should not be termed "social" distancing. In times of major crisis, we need more social support rather than distancing and withdrawal. We need to reach out to our loved ones, friends, fellow workers and neighbors. People actually have a greater need for human interaction and support as we fight the current pandemic as a community of caring humans. While practicing physical distancing let us increase contact with others via the marvels of technology. Use our phones, texting, email, Zoom, FaceTime and other techniques to show others we care for them and are here to support and help them.