

## **Coping with Uncertainty in Difficult Times**

At this time of apprehension and stress, it can be useful to review what we know about normal reactions to abnormal situations, and ways to manage the stress and anxiety that comes with uncertainty. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration provides a very helpful article about coping and psychological stressors:

<https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma14-4894.pdf>

In addition to the suggestions offered, it may be useful to recall what helped us get through other times of uncertainty. One important self-care approach is to limit your exposure to news. There is an urge to seek out information in times of uncertainty, but it is important to modulate exposure, especially for children. Watching news 24/7 can be experienced as traumatic and lead to long term negative consequences. Take news in small doses from trusted sources. Avoid indulging in use of alcohol or other mood-altering substances. While they may initially provide a bit of relief, over the long term their use will further aggravate feelings of anxiety, depression, or hopelessness.

It is important that your whole world not become focused on the events. Make sure to establish and maintain daily routines such, especially sufficient sleep and healthy eating, and have regular contact with supports during which you talk about topics in addition to the anxiety you may be feeling. Try to engage in your usual activities to the extent that you can, and be sure to engage in as many activities that bring feelings of comfort and normalcy such as: going for a walk, listening to music, dancing, working on an art project, reading a novel, playing with pets, taking bubble baths or other self-care activities.

It can be useful to use distraction strategies to tune out for a time. Clean a closet or work on a home project you have been putting off. Watch movies or television that give you a sense of well-being and avoid topics that spark anxiety such as zombie movies or other dark content. Play games with the family or put together a puzzle. Taking anxiety and getting it to work for you by putting your energy into helping others can improve your mood and well-being. Consider whether you could offer to drop off groceries to someone who is ill or babysit for healthcare workers so that they can focus on their important jobs, keeping the community healthy. Or consider donating to organizations that provide food services to or other support to homebound people.

Some local resources for a place to get support if anxiety and stress are getting out of control include: Walk In Counseling Center, a free and anonymous resource, <https://walkin.org/>, or the warmline provided by Mental Health Minnesota, <https://mentalhealthmn.org/support/minnesota-warmline/>. Of course, if you have feelings of hopelessness and are considering self-harm, reach out to resources such as the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK.

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