

## **Coping in a Crisis**

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The plans we had for the beginning of 2020 have been put on hold, graduations were cancelled, trips and vacations are being postponed, and we are all being encouraged to stay together by staying apart. But, how do we learn to cope with all the changes? How do we learn to adapt to our new normal?

The crisis that we are experiencing in 2020 has brought forth many uncertainties and many people may not understand how to adequately cope with that. To understand how to cope, we must first understand the various types of responses and reactions that accompany a crisis. According to Cabrini University, there are three main types of responses: emotional, behavioral, and cognitive. An emotional response includes shock or denial, anger, depression, fear, and various mood changes. A behavioral response includes changes in activity level, being socially withdrawn or isolating, changes in eating and sleeping habits, and increase in alcohol or drug use. A cognitive response includes forgetfulness, headaches or back pain, muscle tension, rapid heart rate, and weakness. It is safe to say that at any point you will experience one or more of these reactions in response to the ongoing crisis. Now, how do we cope with those reactions?

The COVID-19 crisis has proven to be very different in terms of how people can cope. It seems that many of the things usually associated with coping and self-care are frowned upon when it comes to this crisis. But that does not mean we should not try, instead we must adapt. Below are a few strategies to cope and practice self-care for yourself.

**Reach out to others:** Stay connected to friends, family, and others through video chats, emails, text messages, and even handwritten notes! Make it fun and exciting and make it something you look forward to every day or every couple of days.

**Accept your feelings as normal and express your feelings:** It is important to know that your feelings are valid and very real. Do not try to minimize your feelings, no matter how silly they may seem to you. Learn to express your feelings, whether that is verbally or in written; keep a journal, use sticky-notes, or write yourself a letter or an email. Understand that we all feel things and react to things differently and it is all very normal.

Various other tips for self-care and coping in a crisis have been previously discussed in other Health Hubs and include: eating balanced meals, making time to engage in physical activity, structuring your routine/maintaining your usual schedule and avoiding excessive use of alcohol or drugs. [For more information check out CDC's tips for taking care of your emotional health.](#)

Along with learning to cope for yourself, you may have to help and support others.

**Make time to talk:** Although we may not be out doing our usual daily life activities, we are still busy and may not always have time to talk. When it comes to supporting others, make time to listen and encourage others to share their feelings. As mentioned above this will not only help them but you as well.

**Respect others need to spend time alone:** Even though we should be reaching out to others, we must also understand and accept other's need to spend time alone. Be patient if someone is not ready to talk.

**Help with everyday tasks:** Offer to help run errands, make a meal, pick up mail, etc. The smallest gestures can make someone's day and help them know that they are not alone, and someone is always willing to help.

**Do not try to offer false cheer:** As much as you want to be able to fix everyone's problems, offering to "fix things" or saying unrealistic things can make things worse. Only offer your advice and often listening is the most powerful form of support anyone can get.

Coping in times of crisis can be very scary and often stressful. Be mindful, be patient, and understand that we are all experiencing this together and we will all come out of this together.