calming anxiety

If you feel stressed about coronavirus, you're not alone. Coronavirus (COVID-19) has had ripple effects into almost every aspect of our lives. It's affected the way we live every day. So much has changed in such a short time.

It's natural to feel anxiety when we face a crisis, the unknown, or sudden change. It's a normal reaction to feel the need for safety, certainty, predictability, and control.

Anxiety is a normal emotion and serves as a signal to pay attention so we can protect ourselves. Anxiety alerts us. It prompts us to adapt. But when we're overwhelmed by anxiety, it sometimes can do more harm than good.

When anxiety becomes overwhelming, we're less able to rise to a challenge, and sometimes we get stuck.

Here are some tips that can help you cope with anxiety and give you a sense of control even during an uncertain time. Many are simple techniques with proven benefits.

- **Follow the advice of experts.** First, know what to do to avoid the spread of germs. This not only helps keep you safer, it gives you and your kids a sense of control! Follow the expert guidelines for health and safety. Wash your hands well and often. Keep surfaces clean. Stay at home when you can. If you need to go out, wear a mask and keep a safe distance from others. When you do these things, you protect yourself, your family, and your community.

- **Notice, label, and accept your emotions.** When you feel anxious, quietly say to yourself, "OK, there's my anxiety again." Just putting a label on what we feel helps reduce our concern.

- **Accept anxiety as one of your many emotions.** Don't ignore it, fight it, reject it, or be afraid of it. Don't judge yourself for feeling it. Be kind. Give yourself permission to be human.

- **Keep it in perspective and notice the good.** Don't let anxiety run the show. It's one part of your emotional life, but it's not the whole thing. Leave room to challenge yourself: Is there anything going well? What positive things have happened that make me think this anxious thought might not be accurate?

- **Direct your attention or practice mindfulness.** When you notice anxious thoughts, know that you don't have to dwell on them. Direct your attention to things that help you feel calm. You can use techniques such as guided imagery (easily found on YouTube or Google Video) or mindfulness practices that help you focus on being in the moment.

- **Practice breathing.** Just pausing to take a breath can calm you in a difficult moment. It can help you pause before you react, and choose how to react. Specifically, "belly breathing" or diaphragmatic breathing is most helpful. Practice for 5–10 minutes a day. Try an app like "Belly Bio" that is free to download.

- **Reach out to others.** Staying in touch with friends and family is good for you and for them. Feeling close to others reduces anxiety, and has been known to boost the immune system. Even though we're staying home more, we can reach out by phone, video chat, or social media. We can feel close, even while we're apart. Practice physical distancing, but social togetherness.

(continued on reverse)

- **Practice gratitude.** Noticing what we're grateful for is a powerful remedy to anxiety. Showing gratitude is another way to feel close to others. It benefits your mood and your health. Say a simple heartfelt thank-you. Make a list of what you're grateful for. Send a letter to someone who's helped you. Let loved ones know how much they mean to you.

- **Be awed by nature.** Even 5 minutes spent appreciating nature can lower anxiety and blood pressure. It raises emotional well-being. It reminds us we are part of something bigger than ourselves.

- **Be active.** Even though we are staying at home more, find ways to be active every day. There are plenty of ways to be active outdoors and still practice social distancing (also called physical distancing). Exercise relaxes you. It generates hormones that boost the body's immune system. If you can't get out, take a fitness class online.

- **Keep your balance.** Calming anxiety doesn't mean ignoring problems. It's about finding our balance so we can cope well; so we can help ourselves and each other though this situation. We can find calm and well-being even when we face great uncertainty.

- **Know when to reach out for help.** If your anxiety seems overwhelming — if you're having trouble sleeping, eating, or interacting in the ways you normally would — get help. Most behavioral health providers are offering telehealth visits during this time and can schedule with new patients. Don't be afraid to reach out for help during this stressful time!