

Mental Wellness and Resiliency while Coping with the Coronavirus/COVID Pandemic



Image credit: Adobe Stock

Summary: It is extremely stressful having to cope with COVID. Most of us have never faced this type of situation. The good news, is that we are not alone. Humanity has faced epidemics and pandemics in the past, during times with far fewer resources, and has survived. We can cope, and survive this.

"I wish it need not have happened in my time," said Frodo. "So do I," said Gandalf, "and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."
-- J.R.R. Tolkien - The Fellowship of The Ring

Introduction

Dealing with COVID is stressful. For most of us, the measures being taken with COVID have been unprecedented in how disruptive they are to our lives, our families and our friends.

On the one hand, it is understandable that anyone would feel stressed out by the current situation.

On the other hand, overreacting and coping in negative ways are not helpful.

Humanity has faced other stressful times and survived. The good news is that there are many positive ways to cope and be resilient.

Do's and Don'ts

First, if you need to, accept that the whole coronavirus situation is unprecedented and stressful. Have a good cry if you need.

Now take a deep breath, and see if any of these suggestions might be helpful..

Do's

Don'ts

Do follow the advice of reputable organizations such as those at

- Health Canada
<https://www.canada.ca/en/publi...>
- Center for Disease Control (CDC)
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronaviru..>

Fact: The vast majority of those infected with coronavirus will recover completely.

Do focus on those things that you are in control of. For example:

- Getting enough sleep;
- Getting outside;
- Washing your own hands.
- Following advice on social distancing from others.
- Being helpful to others.

Do limit how much you check the news -- for most people, probably once a day is enough. If there is anything critical and urgent, you'll get it from your other family and friends.

Do remember that even with "social distancing" (i.e. keeping physical distance to avoid transmitting any viruses), you can still connect emotionally with other people through other ways.

Do cope with healthy strategies, and take advantage of the opportunity to do things you normally might not do such as:

- Getting outside with family or friends, such as for a walk;
- Touching base with people you haven't seen for awhile;
- Read an actual book, whether digital or real.
- Practise or learn how to play that instrument, or write that screenplay or book, etc.
- Volunteering to help others, e.g. doing a grocery run for a neighbour.

Consider contacting community organizations in your area to find out where you can volunteer. **Helping others (i.e. altruism) is particularly powerful as it helps you feel good about yourself, and helps others.**

Don't follow the advice of unreliable websites or social media, many of whom are intentionally trying to spread false news.

Don't focus on things that are outside your control, i.e. things which other people do that you cannot control.

Don't overdose on news, such as by:

- Leaving it on in the background;
- Reading articles that don't concern you, like that article about what is happening on a cruise ship that you aren't on, etc.

Don't simply isolate yourself from other people and hole up in your home or apartment and go on a long internet binge - that will definitely make you feeling worse!

Don't use unhealthy coping strategies such as

- Binging on screen time such as video games, social media, internet videos or surfing.
- Drinking too much alcohol or using more marijuana (than you would normally).

Do practise...

- Mindfulness. Focus on the present, and what you can do now, as opposed to dwelling on the past or worrying about the future.
- Gratitude: Be grateful for what you do have in your life. We are still far luckier living now in this time than in previous times in history. Better yet, thank the family and friends in your life for what they have done, or mean to you.
- Self-compassion and compassion: Be kind to yourself and others during these times.

Do be hopeful

- Epidemics and disease, disappointment, loss and suffering are a part of human existence, and humanity has dealt with such trying times and survived.
- Do remember that for every negative story we read in the media about people hoarding sanitizer or toilet paper, adversity also brings out the best of humanity, with good news stories such as:
- Businesses that are giving away their excess toilet paper to people in need
- Quarantined Italians singing from their balconies
- Grassroots volunteers in all communities that are offering to deliver food or groceries for those who are shut in...

This too shall pass.

"The word 'crisis' stands for danger and opportunity. In a crisis, be aware of the danger--but recognize the opportunity."

— John F. Kennedy

When to Seek Professional Help

Are you finding that despite your best efforts to cope, you are having troubles with mood or anxiety that are getting in the way of your life?

If so, then consider reaching out to:

- Crisis lines such as
 - Crisis Services Canada: 1-833-456-4566 or text 45645
<https://www.crisisservicescanada.ca/en>
 - Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868
<https://kidshelpphone.ca>
 - First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line:
1-855-242-3310
<https://www.hopeforwellness.ca/>
- Your primary care provider

For More Information

Need some good news?

The Good News Network

A news service that scans the usual news, but rather than focusing on presenting the negative news, it focuses on positive news

<https://www.goodnewsnetwork.or...>

Looking for more information to help you cope with COVID?

Health Canada

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Being prepared

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/being-prepared.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Manage Anxiety & Stress

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fabout%2F coping.html

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)

Mental Health and the COVID-19 Pandemic

<https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-health-and-covid-19#top>

Are you a parent or caregiver? You might find these helpful:

Children's Mental Health Ontario

Talking to your anxious child about COVID-19

<https://www.cmho.org/blog/blog-news/6519918-talking-to-your-anxious-child-about-COVID-19>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Talking with children about coronavirus disease 2019: Messages for parents, school staff and others working with children

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/talking-with-children.html>

Psychology Today

How to Talk to Kids and Teens about the Coronavirus

Article about how to talk to children of different ages about coronavirus

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/smart-parenting-smarter-kids/202003/how-talk-kids-and-teens-about-the-coronavirus>

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