

# Emotionally Surviving COVID-19:

## An informational and self help guide provided by your Lighthouse Telehealth EAP team.

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ISSUE 1

There is no doubt these are unprecedented times leading to a level of stress, worry, and uncertainty that many have never experienced before. We are all in this together, collectively fighting a battle that has never been fought. If there is some growth and enlightenment that can come of this, one positive is that we deepen our understanding that we need each other for physical and emotional survival. We are better together than separate and this epidemic magnifies that. This is a time for us to come together and appreciate the differences in one another and truly see how those differences are essential in creating a sophisticated, meaningful, compassionate nation. I want to thank each and every one of you for doing your part every day, but especially today, when you continue to gear up and press on even on the days you feel defeated. We are stronger than we think and we will overcome this together.

### Helping Children/Teens Cope with Stress and Anxiety Caused by COVID-19



While everyone is likely experiencing increased stress as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, children and teens are especially likely to struggle with handling the increased stress, anxiety, and feelings of isolation. Adapting to drastic changes can be difficult. Children/teens are dealing with many new stressors in their lives including: managing school from home; canceled sports and activities; not being able to connect with their friends in person; and possibly missing out on significant life events

such as prom or graduation. It is important to look out for changes in behavior that may indicate that your child is struggling as well as to help them learn ways to cope with difficult emotions and build resiliency.

#### Common behavioral/physical/emotional changes caused by stress/anxiety may include:

- Changes in sleeping and/or eating patterns
- Nightmares
- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating/focusing
- Expressing excessive worry/anxiety
- Excessive crying
- Expressing feelings of hopelessness
- Increased irritability or anger
- Stress related physical ailments such as stomach aches, headaches/migraines, and muscle tension.
- Use of alcohol, tobacco, vaping, or other drugs

## WAYS TO ASSIST YOUR CHILD/TEEN THROUGH THIS TOUGH TIME:

### Be understanding of their emotions & encourage them to feel their feelings.

Let them know it's okay to be anxious due to all the changes and unknowns and that they are allowed to feel disappointed because an event they were looking forward to has been canceled. Provide empathy and understanding about how they are feeling. Try not to minimize their problem by saying things such as "it could be worse" or "you need to get over it". If children aren't allowed to express their feelings in healthy ways, they will learn to minimize their feelings, numb their feelings, or change their feeling into another emotion they feel is more acceptable, i.e. a child who is not allowed to express sadness might act out with anger. Suggest activities to assist your child/teen to release their emotions such as painting, drawing, or journaling.

### Provide structure and routine.

Providing your child/teen with a sense of normality can assist in reducing anxiety/stress. Ways to



provide structure include: completing school work during otherwise normal school hours; going to bed and waking up at otherwise normal school day times; choosing to

eat at least one meal together as a family; and/or limiting screen time by choosing a time of day that your child(ren) can watch his/her favorite television show or play a game.

### Limit access to online & TV news media.

It is easy to get overwhelmed with the amount of information related to COVID-19. It is especially difficult for children to distinguish between what is factual news versus what is opinion. Make sure to monitor and limit the amount of news that is being consumed or discussed in your household to reduce overall stress and anxiety. However encourage your children/teens to ask questions and discuss their fears with you so that you can help them process and make sense of the information they are hearing.

### Provide relevant and factual information on COVID-19.

By providing factual and age appropriate information to your child/teen you can help dispel rumors and provide the reassurance that they need. If your child/teen feels that you are avoiding talking

to them about this topic they may assume the worst causing even more anxiety.

### Encourage healthy distractions.

Instead of dwelling on things that we cannot control it can be helpful to engage in healthy distractions such as reading a book, playing a board game, engaging in crafts, going for a walk, or watching a movie.

There are many on-line tutorials that offer step by step instructions on learning a new skill. Challenge your child/teen to learn something they would have never done had they not experienced this down time. Suggestions include: a learn to draw or paint tutorial; learn to speak 5 sentences in a foreign language; or, what I worked on with my child this week, learning to play simple songs on the keyboard/piano. The possibilities are endless and learning a new skill can literally strengthen the brain! Remember play time is essential for all ages!



### Find creative ways for your child/teen to connect with friends online.

Children/teens are feeling isolated from their friends. In order to reduce feelings of isolation set up video play dates, utilize social media, and allow healthy game play on-line. Make socializing on-line with friends part of their daily routine however remember it is important to monitor and talk to your children/teens about positive vs negative on-line connection. Unfortunately, stressors that children/teens often face, such as bullying, can be magnified on-line. Consider setting limits on social media and offering a choice of healthy on-line activities.

### Be aware of how you are handling your stress and anxiety.

Your children/teens will take cues from you on how to handle their emotions. If you are not handling your emotions in healthy ways it is likely they will follow suit. It is okay to tell them that you are worried and that you don't have all the answers but work together to find solutions and come up with positive coping skills. Make a plan with them on how you will get through this together as a family.

## Inspirational Quotes

“  
Challenges are gifts  
that force us to search  
for a new center of  
gravity. Just find a  
new way to stand.

- OPRAH WINFREY ”

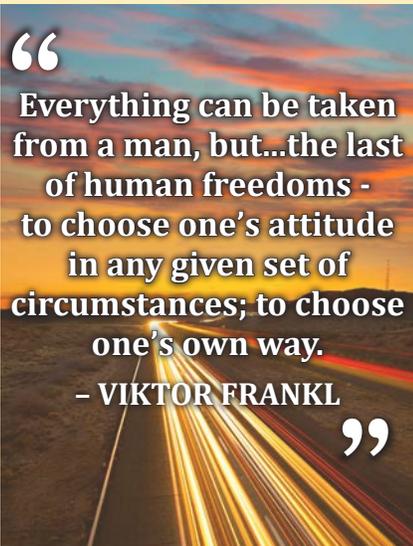


When I was a boy and I  
would see scary things  
in the news, my mother  
would say to me, “Look  
for the helpers. You will  
always find people who  
are helping.”

- MISTER ROGERS

“  
Everything can be taken  
from a man, but...the last  
of human freedoms -  
to choose one's attitude  
in any given set of  
circumstances; to choose  
one's own way.

- VIKTOR FRANKL ”



## So Much to Grieve

Amid all of the emotions and change that COVID-19 has put us through, most notably there is likely an underlying sadness that just cannot be shaken. Often I have had clients begin a sentence with something along the lines of, “this doesn't seem important but I am really upset that.....” and they go on to tell of an event being cancelled, or not being able to visit a loved one in a nursing home, or sadness because they likely won't see their Senior dressed up for prom. These clients are almost ashamed to bring up such issues while others are experiencing things like job loss, financial ruin, and having to risk their lives working on the front lines.



Each and every one of us has already experienced losses due to the virus, each loss leading to grief. Despite all of us living with some form of grief in our lives, grief is a seldom addressed topic in our culture. Grief may present as a deep sadness that you just can't shake or it may look like increased impatience or irritability. When hopes, dreams, and expectations are taken away in any circumstance it's normal to be disappointed and experience a level of grief. Allowing ourselves to feel and address the sorrow and pain is the first step to moving forward. The sooner you allow yourself to experience your true emotions the sooner you'll also be able to adjust to your new circumstances. Allowing one's self to acknowledge and accept one's emotions opens doors to problem solving, adaptation, and creativity.

There are so many things in life that we look forward to, some are held quietly in our hearts and others are shared frequently with friends/family, and when not brought to fruition these can bring us the experience of painful disappointment. Sharing those disappointments with a loved one or counselor can start the healing process. Remember in this day when plans, hopes, and dreams are in upheaval it's important to care for yourself by acknowledging painful emotions and providing yourself empathy and the space to grieve.

If you would like to read more here is an article from The Harvard Business Review that I found helpful.

***That Discomfort You're Feeling Is Grief*** by Scott Berinato  
[https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief?fbclid=IwAR1\\_6HjeJ\\_Av8UbvYBrcM85mP4290hS7E33DrX6jdXIX44YsD80C9hZ5Vs](https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief?fbclid=IwAR1_6HjeJ_Av8UbvYBrcM85mP4290hS7E33DrX6jdXIX44YsD80C9hZ5Vs)

## Self Help Section: Simple ways to build resiliency

When life becomes overwhelming we are often focused on just getting through the day. Often we feel defeated that we didn't get everything done we wanted or that things didn't go quite as we planned. During these stressful times it is easy to get down on ourselves by focusing on what we didn't do versus what we did do and by comparing ourselves to others. Sometimes we take a minor issue, like burning the garlic bread, and dangerously overgeneralize this to mean we failed as a parent, we suck at cooking, or we had a really bad day when none of these are true. It's important more than ever to keep things in perspective and practice thinking and speaking in specific truths rather than in generalizations. The more you practice this, the more you will build resiliency, which means the ability to bounce back from setbacks. So your daily homework for this week is as follows:

### Each day write down at least 3 things you did well:

Example: I stayed on task and was able to submit my report on time.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

### Next, write down at least 1 thing you judged yourself too harshly on today as well as any negative feelings that accompanied this self-identified failure:

Example: I burned the garlic bread. I was mad I wasted food and it feels like I never do anything right.

- 1.

### Now write down any unintended consequences from this line of negative thinking:

Example: I snapped at my son when he asked if this was all we were having for dinner which made him cry and leave the table.

- 1.

### Next, reframe your original failure in a more honest realistic way (if it helps pretend you are giving advice to a friend who came to you with this same issue). Then, rate your problem on a 1-100 scale (100 being the worst situation you can imagine).

Example: I burned the garlic bread. It was annoying since I tend to do that a lot but everything else I made for dinner turned out good and we didn't need the added carbs anyway. The kids actually ate more vegetables.

- 1.

### Stress rating:

### Lastly, write down as many things that come to mind that you are grateful for in spite of this mishap. I am grateful:

Examples: that I was able to provide food for my family, that the spaghetti turned out great, that we had the chance to eat together as a family, that my son made us all laugh when he told us a joke during dinner, etc.

- 1.



Your EAP team is here for you any time you need us. There is no issue too big or too small to talk to a professional about. All information is kept private and confidential including from your employer. Please contact **419-475-5338** to schedule an appointment.

**Remember to ask us about the myStrength app, which is a behavioral health app that can assist you in meeting your health and wellness goals.**