

How to cope with stress during an outbreak, according to the CDC website

The outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) may be stressful for many students. Fear and anxiety about a disease, as well as continuing your studies, can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in parents, students, siblings, and others in the home. Finding a healthy way to cope with stress will help strengthen your mental health, your community, and your bonds with those you care about.

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. How you respond to the outbreak can depend on your background, the things that make you different from other people, and the community you live in.

Reduce stress in yourself and others

Sharing the facts about COVID-19 and understanding the actual risk to yourself and people you care about can make an outbreak less stressful. When you share accurate information about COVID-19 you can help make people feel less stressed and allow you to connect with them.

For parents

Your student, though a young adult, likely still looks to you for guidance. Young adults tend to react, in part, on what they see from those they perceive to have authority around them. Therefore, if parents and caregivers deal with this outbreak with calm and confidence, their students/children feel more at ease. Younger siblings or relatives will also look to your student for reactions, so it is important for you to be reassuring for everyone in your care. The more prepared you are, the better those under your guidance will feel.

Remember that not all young adults will respond the same to stress. Some common changes to watch for include...

- Excessive crying or irritation
- Excessive worry or sadness
- Unhealthy eating or sleeping habits (Please remember, however, that your student may have had an odd sleeping schedule at school. It is not unusual for students to stay up really late at night studying and then sleep in if they don't have morning classes).

- Irritability and “acting out” behaviors
- Poor school performance or avoiding school
- Difficulty with attention and concentration
- Avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past
- Unexplained headaches or body pain
- Sudden use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

There are many things you can do to support young adults.

- Take time to talk with them about the COVID-19 outbreak. Answer questions and [share facts](#) about COVID-19.
- If your student deals with intense anxiety issues, please reassure them that they are safe.
- Remind young adults it is ok if they feel upset. Your student might have not seen the fruition of a lot of hard work, might be upset they were unable to say goodbye to their friends.
- Share with them how you deal with your own stress in a healthy way so that they might find a new and possibly healthier way to cope.
- Limit your family’s exposure to news coverage of the event, including social media.
- Your student is already aware of their own class schedule, and it is their responsibility to attend the online courses.
- Finally, be a role model. Take breaks, get plenty of sleep, exercise, and eat well. Connect with your friends and family members. Your student is encouraged to communicate with their peers digitally to help mitigate some of the uncertainty and loneliness they might feel.

For Students

Students who may respond more strongly to the stress of a crisis include...

- Students with older relatives and loved ones, or else relatives and loved ones with underlying issues who are at a higher risk for COVID-19.
- Students with relatives who are helping with the response to COVID-19, like doctors and other health care providers, or first responders, and are therefore at greater risk
- Students with mental health conditions, including those who have problems with substance use
- Students with younger siblings or relatives in the home with them

Stress during an infectious disease outbreak can include

- Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Sudden or increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

If you, or someone you care about, are feeling overwhelmed with emotions like sadness, depression, or anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or others call...

- 911
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746. (TTY 1-800-846-8517)

Students with preexisting mental health conditions should continue with their treatment and be aware of new or worsening symptoms. Additional information can be found at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration ([SAMHSA](#)) website.

Things you can do to support yourself

Taking care of yourself, your friends, and your family can help you cope with stress. Helping others cope with their stress can also make your community stronger.

- Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.
- Take care of your body. Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, and avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Make time to unwind. Try to do some other activities you enjoy.
- Connect with others digitally. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling. We know this is stressful, and communicating with your peers is good for your mental health. Please remember though that you are still expected to complete your course work, and that all communication with those outside your home should be done electronically.

- Remember that these measures are not punitive-it is to prevent the further spread of Covid-19.

Call your healthcare provider or a mental health hotline if stress gets in the way of your studies. Also, know that you can still take advantage of free mental health via telehealth appointments at the **University Counseling Center**. Schedule your appointment by calling 504-520-7315. Learn more about [taking care of your emotional health](#).