

COVID-19: Managing Stress & Anxiety



As we navigate the beginning of a new school year and the evolving realities of managing classrooms during COVID-19, we may experience potential fear, stress and anxiety due to the overwhelming volume of information and the demands being put in place to combat the spread and risk of infection.

Anxiety is highly common and is often triggered by specific events, trauma or stressful scenarios creating challenges in our daily activities and interactions. Stress results from normal reactions, where adjustments or a response is required, causing our mind and bodies to react with physical, mental or emotional actions.

People who may respond more strongly to stress and/or anxiety include:¹

- Teachers, first responders, healthcare providers and front-line workers who have frequent interaction with the general public
- Children and teenagers
- Persons with mental health and addiction disorders including substance abuse
- Elderly populations and people with chronic diseases who are at higher risk of infection

Remember, we all react differently to stressful situations. Given our diverse backgrounds and the communities we live in, our beliefs and behaviours may vary.

Stressful reactions during this pandemic may include, but are not limited to:¹

- Fear and worry about your health and the health of those you care about
- Difficulty sleeping and/or concentrating
- Changes in sleeping and/or eating patterns
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs

What can you do to stay calm during this period of uncertainty?

- Be aware of your mental health. Pay more attention to your feelings and reactions rather than the event itself.
- Create a daily routine when schedules and safety protocols are defined. Establish a daily process and don't let the basics slip. Remember to practice daily and classroom hygiene including chores and cleaning.
- Reach out to your support system via text, telephone or through virtual conferencing. Maintain physical distancing. Let your family, colleagues and friends know how they can best support you during stressful periods.
- Don't judge or blame yourself. Don't criticize yourself for having these reactions. Be patient with yourself.
- Avoid saturation. Manage your media and online intake and try and focus on something else.
- Find something to help distract you. Some people find it helpful to keep busy with hobbies, routine chores or physical exercise.

- Take time to rest and relax. Maintain good sleep habits and take time for yourself and practice taking deep breaths, or meditation.

What should you do if your stress or anxiety doesn't diminish from week to week?

It's better not to keep the worrying thoughts and anxieties to yourself. People close to you don't always know how to help, despite their best intentions. If these reactions have not diminished from week to week, don't hesitate to contact your assistance program for coaching or counselling support. If you take good care of yourself, ensuring that you obtain the support you need, you will gradually regain your normal sense of self, given the new realities of COVID-19 requirements and practices in the classroom.

Remember that taking care of yourself is integral to being able to help others. Helping your family, friends, co-workers and others cope with stress can aide in making your community and workforce stronger.

Please be mindful of your community. There are vulnerable populations who are more susceptible to COVID-19 than others. We are all in this together.

References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Manage Anxiety & Stress (2020) Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>