

How to Help Your Teams Cope with Coronavirus

Even if you don't live in an area that's been directly affected by the coronavirus, the news is creating understandable stress and anxiety for many people. You can equip your teams, and support each other, with effective evidence-based strategies during this uncertain time.

5 Key Steps You Can Take

There are steps each of us can take to cope more effectively with uncomfortable emotions provoked by news about the coronavirus.

1. Take reasonable precautions and follow CDC guidelines

- Practice social distancing to reduce close contact in public places
- Stay home if you are sick
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Wash your hands frequently and avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth
- Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze
- Clean and disinfect frequently-used surfaces with regular household cleaning spray/wipe

2. Stick to the facts

- Read news sources that present facts in a straightforward manner
 - Centers for Disease Control
 - World Health Organization
 - Your county's health department
- Keep perspective - current data suggests that most people with COVID-19 have mild symptoms and recover within a couple of weeks.

3. Take a media break

- While it's important to stay informed, consider taking a break if:
 - It doesn't help you take better precautions
 - It doesn't give you a healthier perspective on the coronavirus
 - You don't typically feel better afterward

4. Check your thinking

- Two common patterns of thinking can increase stress and anxiety
 - Catastrophizing - vividly imagining worst-case scenarios
 - Probability overestimation - overestimating the likelihood that something bad will happen
- Reframe your thinking with a more useful thought

5. Prioritize self care

- Maintain a daily routine - including a regular sleep schedule, eating well, exercising, and taking breaks
- Remember that thoughts and feelings aren't facts
- Connect with your loved ones
- Be kind to yourself when you fall short

Coping with Existing Mental Health Concerns

The coronavirus news may be triggering for individuals with anxiety disorders, and social distancing can be extra challenging for individuals with depression.

Notice signs of concern

- Taking more precautions than is recommended
- Feeling compelled to monitor media without breaks
- Feelings of hopelessness or helplessness
- Impaired functioning at work, in relationships, or in self care

Take steps to protect your mental health

- Be mindful of shifts in your thoughts and behaviors
- Check in with loved ones regularly and let them know if you are struggling
- If you aren't currently in care, consider re-engaging - services are often available via video or phone

Supporting Employees Working from Home

The good news is that research suggests people can be as or even more productive when working from home.

As a manager

- Set clear performance and communication expectations
- Promote face-to-face virtual meetings
- Check in casually and regularly

Making it work from home

- Maintain the same office hours and follow daily routines, like getting dressed for work
- Work in a designated space with minimal distractions
- Take breaks and go outside when possible, just like you would at the office
- Practice flexibility and compassion

Talking to Children about Coronavirus

Children are very perceptive and pick up on your feelings, worries, and changes in routine.

- Consider what is developmentally appropriate - for children under 6 a proactive approach may be more harmful than helpful
- Assess what they know about the virus, offer facts, and encourage good hand washing
- Let them know their feelings are valid and that you want to provide comfort
- Ask them what questions they have

What to Do When the Coping Strategies Aren't Enough?

If you notice that you or someone you care about is experiencing worries or strong emotions that make it hard to function well, consider connecting with professional support, which could include - finding a therapist through your health plan, accessing counseling through your Employee Assistance Program (EAP), or taking to your HR team about wellness benefits may be available.