



COVID-19: Managing Anxiety & Stress

Stress and Coping

The outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) may be stressful for people. Working in a correctional environment can be stressful. Working in any environment during a pandemic can be stressful. Working in a correctional environment during a pandemic can be, well...*stressful*. Fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in both adults and children. Coping with stress will make you, the people you care about, and your community stronger. The information below is adapted from the CDC's guidelines for managing stress during a pandemic.

Please take care of yourself, your family and your coworkers.

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

- Older people and people with chronic diseases who are at higher risk for COVID-19.
- Children and teens.
- People who are helping with the response to COVID-19, like doctors, nurses and other health care professionals, correctional and probation officers or first responders.
- People who have mental health conditions including issues related to substance use.

For nonemergent reactions to stress, State of Alaska employees have access to

- The Employee Assistance Program:
<http://doa.alaska.gov/drb/headlines/employeeAssistance.html#.XnEzI3BYaUk> which is completely confidential and free of charge.
- Behavioral health services that are covered by your insurance plan.

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)

Stress during an infectious disease outbreak may 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
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

People with preexisting mental health conditions should continue with their treatment and be aware of new or worsening symptoms.

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.

Things you can do to take care of yourself

- Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.
- When you do watch or read about the pandemic, take your information from credible sources like the CDC (Center for Disease Control) or the WHO (World Health Organization).
- 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. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.

Call your healthcare provider if stress gets in the way of your daily activities for several days in a row.

For parents

Children and teens react, in part, on what they see from the adults around them. When parents and caregivers deal with the COVID-19 calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children. Parents can be more reassuring to others around them, especially children, if they are better prepared.

Not all children and teens respond to stress in the same way. Some common changes to watch for include

- Excessive crying or irritation in younger children.
- Returning to behaviors they have outgrown (for example, toileting accidents or bedwetting).
- Excessive worry or sadness.
- Unhealthy eating or sleeping habits.
- Irritability and “acting out” behaviors in teens.
- Poor school performance or avoiding school.
- Difficulty with attention and concentration.
- Avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past.
- Unexplained headaches or body pain.
- Use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.

There are many things you can do to support your child

- Take time to talk with your child or teen about the COVID-19 outbreak. Answer questions and share facts about COVID-19 in a way that your child or teen can understand.
- Reassure your child or teen that they are safe. Let them know it is ok if they feel upset. Share with them how you deal with your own stress so that they can learn how to cope from you.
- Limit your family’s exposure to news coverage of the event, including social media. Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand.
- Try to keep up with regular routines. If schools are closed, create a schedule for learning activities and relaxing or fun activities.
- Be a role model. Take breaks, get plenty of sleep, exercise, and eat well. Connect with your friends and family members.

For responders

Responding to COVID-19 can take an emotional toll on you. There are things you can do to reduce secondary traumatic stress (STS) reactions:

- Acknowledge that STS can impact anyone helping people during and after a traumatic event.
- Learn the symptoms including physical (fatigue, illness) and mental (fear, withdrawal, guilt).
- Allow time to recover from responding to the pandemic.
- Create a menu of personal self-care activities that you enjoy, such as spending time with friends and family, exercising, or reading a book.
- Take a break from media (including social media) coverage of COVID-19.
- Ask for help if you feel overwhelmed or concerned that COVID-19 is affecting your ability to care for your family, your patients or those you are charged with overseeing.

For people who have been released from quarantine

Being separated from others if a healthcare provider thinks you may have been exposed to COVID-19 can be stressful, even if you do not get sick. Everyone feels differently after coming out of quarantine. Some feelings include:

- Mixed emotions, including relief after quarantine.
- Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones.
- Stress from the experience of monitoring yourself or being monitored by others for signs and symptoms of COVID-19.
- Sadness, anger, or frustration because friends or loved ones have unfounded fears of contracting the disease from contact with you, even though you have been determined not to be contagious.
- Guilt about not being able to perform normal work or parenting duties during quarantine.
- Other emotional or mental health changes.

For all of us, no matter where we work or where we live, these are stressful times. Please reach out if you need a hand, please lend a hand if you can; and above all, stay informed and stay safe.