

Self-Care During COVID-19

FOR TEENS

Since the onset of COVID-19, a lot has changed. You may find that you are struggling to cope, and that is okay. **This guide is designed to provide you with healthy ways to take care of yourself** during the pandemic and during other challenging times.

COVID-19 impacts everyone, but it impacts us all differently. Because the pandemic is evolving, and because everyone's experience is different, the examples included here may not reflect what you see in your life right now. We'll continue to update this guide as things change, but we hope that you will substitute your own examples when the ones listed here don't resonate with you.

Remember: If at any time you start to feel as though you might want or need help managing your physical or mental health, it is important to reach out to an adult you trust.

Common Reactions To COVID-19

- ☐ missing the way things used to be
- ☐ sadness about not seeing people you miss
- ☐ concern about relatives
- ☐ disappointment about events being canceled
- ☐ worry about the future
- ☐ impatience with safety precautions
- ☐ boredom and loneliness at home
- ☐ frustration, annoyance, or irritability
- ☐ grief

Resources

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-8255

National Child Abuse Hotline

1-800-422-4453

National Domestic Violence Hotline and Chat

1-800-799-7233

Focus on **FACTS**

New information can travel quickly and can come from many different sources. Try to remember that not all sources are reliable, and not all information is accurate or helpful.

Facts about **COVID-19**:

- **COVID-19 is a new sickness.** Most people who get it do not become very sick, especially children and teens. Some people will get very sick, and so it is important for everyone to take some basic steps to keep others well.
- Experts agree that **there are simple steps you can take to protect yourself.** Wear a mask, get an approved vaccine that your caregivers and doctors agree is appropriate for you, and practice physical distancing. These steps will help keep you and your community safe, and will prevent the spread of disease.
- **COVID-19 can spread easily from person to person**, so schools may close or use hybrid learning to prevent a lot of people from getting sick all at once. If fewer people get sick at once, hospitals are better able to manage and help those who are sick.
- Scientists have developed a **safe and effective vaccine.** We don't know how long it will take to get everyone vaccinated. We all need to keep using safety precautions, even if we've been vaccinated, until case numbers are low enough to reduce precautions again. This means that recommendations can change as case numbers change.

Resource

[COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions \(CDC\)](#)

Identify **Healthy** and **Unhealthy** Coping

When we are struggling with difficult emotions and challenging situations, it is normal to reach for coping strategies that provide immediate relief. But some things that make us feel better quickly are unsafe, or will make us feel worse later on. **Try to notice the ways you are coping and explore whether your strategies are truly helpful or not.**

Good questions to help **evaluate a coping skill** include:

1. Does this calm me down if I am worried, or help me feel better if I am sad?
2. Does this help me sleep better at night?
3. Are there any negative side effects – either right away or later?
4. Does this hurt anyone or put anyone in danger, including myself?
5. Does this help connect me to friends or family members I trust?
6. Who would I be willing to tell about this? Would I want to keep it a secret from adults I respect?
7. If this became a habit, would it be helpful?

If you think some of the ways you are coping are unhealthy or unhelpful, this guide will give you lots of ideas for other things to try instead.

Resource

If you are ever concerned about your safety, please reach out to a trusted adult or call a helpline.

[National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](https://www.suicideline.org/)
1-800-273-8255

Practice Gratitude and Self-Compassion

Everyone is experiencing some form of loss right now. Cancelled plans and events, lost time with loved ones, loss of support from close friends or teachers, financial loss, or even loss of friends and family due to illness. It is important to be kind and patient with yourself during this difficult time. Self-compassion and gratitude can help.

What many people are feeling is similar to the grief that comes when a loved one passes away.

How can I practice gratitude?

Gratitude means focusing on things for which you are thankful. It can be hard to focus on gratitude when so many things feel like they are going wrong. The goal of gratitude is not to discount the truly hard things about this time. Instead, expressing what you feel grateful for can help you to notice and savor the good things in your life, even if they are small, and this awareness can help you feel better. Try these tips:

Create a **gratitude jar**.

Express your appreciation to someone you care about.

Practice a **random act of kindness**.

Write down one thing for which you're grateful every day. This can be in a journal, in the notes section of your phone, or in whatever way is easiest for you. Prompts to consider for writing in a gratitude journal might include:

- Write something you can see, hear, taste, smell, and touch for which you're grateful.
- Write about a happy memory in as much detail as you can.
- Write about a time when you helped someone else and that made you feel good about yourself.

How can I practice self-compassion?

Recognize and name the emotions you are experiencing. Check in with yourself by asking: how do I feel about this? Remind yourself that all emotions are okay and normal during this difficult time.

Guilt is one normal and common emotional response in a widespread crisis, but punishing yourself is not helpful. Instead, you can respond to your guilt by practicing self-kindness.

Self-kindness means treating yourself the way you would treat a friend! It means asking yourself what you need, and how you can take care of yourself.

Kindness and compassion toward yourself is never selfish, as it helps us be more healthy and available to help others too.

Remember we are all in this together. Kids and teens around the world are having similar experiences, thoughts, and feelings.

Resources

To practice a guided loving-kindness meditation, try: [Self-Compassion Break](#)

Recordings: [Self-Compassion for Teens](#)

Videos: [25 Reasons to Be Thankful](#)

[The Science of Gratitude](#)

Practice Relaxation and Mindfulness

Chronic stress (like ongoing stress from a pandemic) can take a toll on our physical health, leaving us feeling tense and on edge. Mindfulness and relaxation are two skills you can use to soothe strong emotions and counteract the physical effects of stress.

Use **Mindfulness** to stay in the present; use **Relaxation** skills to calm your body and reduce tension.

Mindfulness

When you find yourself overwhelmed by strong emotions, try to focus your attention on what's going on in and around you in the current moment. Ground yourself in the present by noticing where you are and what you are feeling without judgement.

Notice and name your feelings, and remind yourself that feelings pass, even if the situation remains the same. Look inside yourself to find strength to tolerate and even accept your feelings as they are.

When your feelings are overwhelming, practice riding the wave. Remember that emotions always pass. Our feelings come on, peak, and roll out again – like waves. Instead of fighting, avoiding, or distracting yourself from feelings when you are upset, practice noticing them, accepting them, and watching as they eventually pass.

Our brains are problem-solving machines; this is helpful sometimes, but can get us stuck trying to “figure out” things that we have no control over. Try to resist the urge to plan for the next week or month or unknown future. While practicing mindfulness, try to stay present and focus on one moment at a time.

When all else fails, simply focus on your 5 senses to ground you in the present. Listen carefully for very subtle sounds, look for all the colors in the rainbow, notice how your feet or fingertips feel, pay attention to a subtle taste in your mouth or scent you can find.

Relaxation and Deep Breathing

We can use relaxation skills such as imagery, deep breathing, and progressive muscle relaxation to help combat the uncomfortable physical symptoms associated with anxiety. Your breath is a tool you can use to slow anxious breathing and relax tense muscles. Some activities will work better than others, so choose the ones that feel most comfortable to you.

Here are some options to try:

Breathe in and out with a visual aid:

- [Bubble](#)
- [Triangle](#)

Set a reminder on your device or alarm clock to practice 10 slow, deep, and calming breaths each afternoon.

Let [this recording](#) walk you through progressive muscle relaxation.

Cope with Worried Thoughts

When we are under stress, our brain often has more worried thoughts than usual. You may notice that your mind is racing, or that it gets stuck on little things that didn't previously bother you. Having a lot of worried thoughts can lead to feeling jittery, uneasy and on edge. One thing that can help is to identify or "call out" your specific worried thoughts, and then examine how true or helpful the worried thoughts actually are.

STEP 1:

Identify your **thoughts**

Ask yourself: **What am I worried about? How would I express it in a complete sentence?**

For example: *"I'm worried I won't be able to_____"*

"I don't think I can cope with _____"

"My friends or family will_____"

STEP 2:

Examine the **facts**

Try to determine if your thought is fully true, partially true, or not really reasonable. Also, even if your thought is true, try to evaluate how helpful or productive it is.

Ask yourself: **How do I know this is true? What is the evidence? Is there any evidence that this thought is not true? Even if this is true, is thinking about this helpful to me right now?**

STEP 3:

Try to come up with a **believable**, but **less worried thought**

Ask yourself: **What would I tell a friend who was having the same thought? If my worried thought came true, how would I cope?**

Resources

A [short video](#) about coping with worried thoughts

See [more examples](#) of common worried thoughts and more helpful thoughts [on the next page](#) ➔

Examples of Worried Thoughts

Example worried thoughts about COVID-19	More helpful coping thought
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Things will never get better.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Things are always changing. Some things have gotten better already and some things have gotten harder. I can trust that things will continue to get better over time.” • “Doctors and scientists are working hard on cures; we already have some effective vaccines. Progress is never a straight line, but I can trust that caring people are working to help make things better for me and the world.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We are going to lose our housing because we won’t have enough money to pay for it.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It is unlikely, but if we did lose our house, my family would still be with me and would help keep me safe. It would be very hard, but we would get through it together.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “What will my future look like? This isn’t what I planned.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I can’t know for sure what will happen in the future. Some of it will be hard, but some of it will be wonderful. The specifics are unknowable.” • “COVID-19 has changed the future for everyone. We’re all figuring it out together. • “I have experienced difficulty in the past. I am strong and can get through even really hard situations.”

Get Active

Increasing movement is one of the most effective ways to stay mentally healthy and to cope with worry, sadness, and isolation. During this uncertain time, physical activity is especially important for all of us, but making it possible may require some creativity. Brainstorm ways to stay active that work for you in your family setting. Some ideas might include:

Use rewards to **boost motivation!**

Every day, **identify a reward you'll only give yourself while you are doing or after you have done something active for 20-30 minutes.** Good rewards can be almost anything you enjoy, but could include:

- A favorite show or movie
- Spending time on YouTube, Instagram, or another social media platform
- A warm shower or relaxing bath
- Listening to a favorite song
- Calling a friend

- Doing a fitness challenge with a friend
- Going outside for a walk, jog, or bike ride
- Playing hopscotch, jumping rope
- Seated yoga, volleyball, basketball
- Water aerobics
- Walking up and down staircases
- Trying a free virtual dance class
- Seated arm circles
- 30 minutes of jumping jacks, push-ups or sit-ups
- Dancing to a favorite playlist
- Wheelchair basketball, tennis
- Hand-crank bicycling

Do what you can, and do what your body permits. If you're not used to being physically active, this coping skill may feel hard. It's okay to start small and take small steps. You can focus more on flexibility, strength and endurance in a way that's comfortable and accessible for you.

Setting and achieving even small goals for physical activity can be empowering.

Try to notice if your feelings of worry, hopelessness, or despair feel a little bit better during or after physical activity.

Resources

[Free Accessible Yoga Class](#)

[YouTube Workouts](#)

Stay Connected

Social support is so important for getting through difficult experiences – especially for teens!

Make time to connect with classmates, friends, or relatives every day, if possible. It's very important to follow guidelines about keeping physical distance from other people, but we can still find ways to connect.

How can I stay connected to my friends when **they're not around?**

If it is safe and accessible for you to do so, go outside for a walk, jog, or bike ride, or even just sit on your front steps and greet other people you see. Seeing other people will remind you that you are not alone, even as you follow distancing recommendations.

Schedule a regular phone call or video chat with friends or family. Get creative: maybe you and your friends can have regular lunch dates, or can learn a new skill together over video! Regular connection can help you and your loved ones maintain hope. Note: it may be tempting to stick with text-based communication, and this is important too, but there are so many benefits to hearing and seeing loved ones, so get out of your comfort zone and stay connected.

Write old-fashioned letters. Receiving a letter can bring so much joy. If you're feeling like much of your day is spent in front of a screen, unplug for a few minutes and write someone a postcard or letter instead.

Use social media wisely. Social media can help us feel connected, but it can also be a source of upsetting news and misleading information. Use social media to build connections with people who help you feel good, while limiting time spent scrolling through content that makes you feel excluded, anxious, or excessively upset. Tip: set a timer for 1 hour when you begin browsing on social media. When the timer goes off, step away from your device and take a walk around. Check in with yourself about your feelings and mood to determine whether it's a good idea to keep browsing or not.

Think about the global sense of community that can be felt during this time. Everyone around the world is facing the same public health problems, and everyone is getting through it to the best of their ability. You are not alone.

Resources

[6 Ways to Safely Socialize amid COVID](#)

[5 Tips for Staying Connected while Social Distancing](#)

Cope with **Uncertainty**

One of the most challenging aspects of COVID-19 is the uncertainty it presents. It can feel like everything is changing all the time, and this can make it very hard to feel secure. Here are some tips for how to cope when we are surrounded by uncertainty:

Practice the **3-step method** and identify the following:

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
What is in my control?	I will accept my feelings about anything beyond my control.	I will problem-solve anything within my control.

Spend some time each day doing a small activity that feels **predictable, meaningful, and within your control**.

It could be painting/making art, writing, taking a walk, growing a garden/plants, having a cup of tea, listening to music, or meditating. Try doing this activity at the same time each day as a way to achieve structure and regularity.

Come up with an **uncertainty coping statement, helpful thought, or mantra**—a reminder to give yourself when you feel unsettled.

Here are some examples:

- *"Even though it's hard, I can handle change."*
- *"I can roll with it!"*
- *"If the plans change, I will make a plan B."*

Remind yourself of things that you **can be certain about**.

Even though many things right now are uncertain or can change quickly, there are some fundamental truths that will not change. For example:

- I am a member of my community (school/religious organization/city).
- I am strong and courageous; I am living through a pandemic!
- I am an(athlete/musician/artist/friend) even if I can't do those things every day right now.
- I am loved.

Maintain Structure

We all do best when our days are structured and consistent. So much of that structure is lost without a normal school schedule and extracurricular activities. Creating a daily schedule can help maintain consistency. It can also help you incorporate some of the coping strategies recommended in this guide.

We recommend that you try making a schedule for each day. Experiment with what having a schedule feels like for you. On the first day that you try a schedule, check in with your mood at the end of the day and reflect on how the schedule made you feel.

When creating your schedule, try to **include something from each of these categories:**

Social connection
(phone, texting, Zoom,
connection with others)

Chores / schoolwork

Health
(showering, eating,
physical movement)

Fun!
(hobbies, crafts, cooking,
playing with siblings, trying
something new, etc)

Resources

If you prefer to work online, you may enjoy schedulebuilder.org. You do need an email address to register, but the service is free.

For more tips on scheduling and some sample schedules, check out the TRAILS resource [Sticking to a Schedule](#).

Tips for scheduling

Try to **find a balance** of things you need to do, things you want to do, and things that may be hard to do but will make you feel good later.

Be realistic and patient with yourself. Even if you really want to stick to a routine, it can take time to change habits.

Work with an adult who can help you decide what to focus on. They might also be able to help keep you on track and help with a reward.

Remember: **if something isn't working, you can change it** or wait until next week and create a whole new schedule.