

*"For safety's sake—do something."*

## Safe and Healthy Coping During COVID

We have certainly been facing the most challenging of times. Most of us can handle a crisis or other unusual events when it is a short-term incident, we go through it, grieve, feel fear, deal with our emotions and then we recover. However, in the time of a long-term, continually evolving huge stressor, our normal ways of coping are not always enough. They get old, fall short or we just get worn down. We are seeing increased mental health disorders and drug and alcohol abuse.

*Here are a few tips to recovering your energy and spirit, develop resilience, and maintain healthy methods of coping:*

1. **Find ways to connect with others** in a time of physical isolation. Being isolated in our homes can lead to depression, anxiety, and loss of social connections. Use Zoom, Skype, or FaceTime calls to stay connected to friends and loved ones. Make these calls fun with themes, games, and talks about what you are grateful for with one another.
2. **Focusing on gratitude** can really help alter a state of depression or stress. During difficult times, it can often be hard to list things we are grateful for. However, feelings of gratitude have been shown to scientifically change our brain function and decrease depression. Make a list of 5-10 things every day you are grateful for.
3. **Use the mental health or drug / alcohol service benefits** your company and healthcare plan offers. This is not a time to think you are too tough or that asking for help makes you weak. This is not normal life right now! It is perfectly normal to need outside help during such trying times. We have mental health / drug and alcohol benefits for a reason, so if there ever was a time to use them, it is now! If you think you have fallen into some unhealthy coping skills that may cause even more stress for you, ask for help. Drugs and alcohol only compound stress. You are not alone and solutions are out there for you.
4. **Be of service to others** and make a difference. Seek out an organization or charity that needs help right now. If you cannot afford to donate financially, ask what other types of help they need. Many organizations are shorthanded and may have other tasks that you can help with that will cost nothing. It feels good to help others.
5. **Create a daily routine and schedule and stick to it.** As many people work remotely for the first time, this can lead to a lot of stress as well. It is easy to procrastinate, put things off thinking you have more time or unstructured days, but deadlines are still deadlines! Get up at the same time every day and create "office hours". On Sunday night, look at your schedule for the week and identify deadlines, must-do tasks, and prioritize your work.
6. **Help our partners and clients build and create safe practices and environments.** There has never been a more pressing time for people to feel safe more than now. When we do not feel safe, we go into fight or flight mode. Our mind and body get primed to protect ourselves and our loved ones. When we are in fight or flight, our thinking becomes narrow, we compartmentalize, lose sight of the bigger picture, and have trouble finding solutions. If we are not operating at our most efficient, thinking effectively and clearly, our work may suffer.

In a profession where safety and helping others is the center of your work, it may be easy to put yourself last. Take time to check-in with yourself. How are you dealing with difficult emotions and dramatic world changes? If you notice signs of emotional trouble in yourself, reach out for help and seek professional assistance if needed.

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This worldwide stressor has been evolving for many months and ongoing stress can really take a toll on our physical and mental health. Seek help when needed and don't let symptoms of depression or anxiety, drug or alcohol abuse, or other unhealthy behaviors get too far along before you reach out for assistance. As you place the safety of others at the core of your work, take time to replenish your own spirit, safety, and mental well-being.

For Safety's Sake, Do Something and protect yourself.  
Safety Always!!