

## Five tips for dealing with Coronavirus (COVID-19) ANXIETY

Learning to manage your anxiety is vital during this time of uncertainty will not only help you make better, healthier decisions but will also improve your reaction to the crisis. After all, stress and anxiety can lower your immune response and increase your vulnerability to infection.

If you're able to stay calm, make the best decisions possible for you and your community's health, you'll have a higher likelihood of weathering this novel outbreak of Coronavirus. Here are a few tips.

### 1. Assess your risk level and act accordingly

There are four risk levels to keep in mind. Acting accordingly to your risk level will help you be prepared and stay realistic. Again, if you're not at high risk of contagion, there's no sense in worrying as if you were.

- **High Risk:** Someone is considered high risk when they live in the same household, are an intimate partner of, or provide care in a non-healthcare setting with a person who is symptomatic and who has a laboratory-confirmed coronavirus infection. People are also high-risk when proper precautions for home care and home isolation are not followed.
- **Medium Risk:** Someone is considered medium risk when they interact closely with a person who is symptomatic and who has a laboratory-confirmed coronavirus infection, *without* being exposed to high-risk close contact delineated above (2 meters).
- **Low Risk:** Someone who is within the same indoor environment as a person with symptomatic, laboratory confirmed coronavirus for a prolonged period of time but in a proximity that is not considered close contact (2 meters).
- **No Identifiable Risk:** Someone who interacts with a symptomatic laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 infection that does not meet the conditions for high risk, medium risk, or low-risk. This includes walking by the person or being in the same room for a short amount of time.

### 2. Practice good hygiene and self-care

Practicing good hygiene is one of the most effective ways to prevent yourself from being exposed to or contracting the virus. Good hygiene is also the element you have the most control over. You are responsible for your health practices and they can make a tremendous difference, for you or for someone who might be immuno-compromised and at greater risk of serious repercussions from infection.

Basic hygiene tips include:

- Washing your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water
- Avoiding touching your face, nose, mouth, and eyes
- Sanitizing commonly used surfaces
- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick
- Staying home when sick
- Covering your cough or sneeze with a tissue (and throwing it in the trash!) and immediately washing your hands thereafter.

Ensure you are taking care of yourself by eating well, exercising, and practicing good sleep hygiene. Don't forget these basics! Like hygiene habits, you are in control of these habits, which can be essential in times when you feel powerlessness.

### 3. Limit social media and news

Limiting your use of media during this time is important. Rely on official sites for factual information. Utilise social media cautiously. If you are looking to better understand what the virus is, how it is transmitted, and methods for detection and prevention, check out the *World Health Organisation* website.

### 4. Remind yourself that worrying and feeling powerless is normal

It is okay to feel worried, anxious, and overwhelmed by what is happening. It's a perfectly normal response, but one that you have some control over. Accept that things will be different for a while. To avoid obsessive thoughts about the virus, focus on what is within your control, practice good hygiene and good physical and emotional self-care.

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### **5. Social Distancing does not mean social disconnection**

If you are working from home or must physically isolate yourself, it's more important than ever to maintain connections with your loved ones, friends and community. So how do you do this?

- Participate in regular phone calls or video calls with your team.
- Make regular phone calls or video calls to people you know. If you have relatives overseas, instead of worrying about them, give them a *Skype* or *What's App* video call and check up on them.
- Arrange video 'play dates' for your children or yourself.
- Set up virtual social events with friends to watch our favourite TV show or sport.
- Play virtual games, like chess or scrabble.
- Join a local community group of Facebook.
- Reach out to others you know who might be self-isolating.
- Take a course online.
- Only share information from reputable sources, like the World Health Organisation (WHO).
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### **6. Stay healthy**

- Eat healthy food.
- Exercise when you can.
- Reduce your exposure to news. Choose one source and check it twice a day. Do NOT stream news 24/7
- Have a bedtime routine and follow this.
- Do not keep your mobile phone by your bed.
- Do not keep your mobile phone at the table when you are having meals.
- Do not post/send messages to people before 9:00am or after 8:00pm.

### **7. Helping Others**

When you do something 'good' for someone else, it can have the effect of making you happy.

- Think about who in your neighbourhood, workplace or social circle may be especially vulnerable. If possible, give them a phone call or leave a note by their door.
- Slip a note under the door people in your community who may need help. Ask if they would like essentials dropped off at their door, bins taken out, garden watered or pets walked.
- Plan your shopping and buy only groceries and household items that you need.
- Take time to thank supermarket staff, doctor's receptionists, pharmacists and others at the frontline.
- Check in on friends and family who employment is likely to be affected.
- Take children's concerns seriously and limit their exposure to the news.
- Talk to children and young people calmly and honestly about COVID-19.

### **8. Talk to your counsellor about it**

If you are trying to limit exposure and avoid contact with those potentially infected with COVID-19, talking with an EAP Assist counsellor by phone or online is a safe way to work through your anxiety that presents no threat of infection. For those in Catholic Mission, ring 1800 81 87 28 from anywhere in Australia.

While the hype and hysteria may be driving press coverage, remember that worrying, or worse, panic, won't keep you safe — in fact, it could impair your health. It's okay and normal to worry, but try to focus on things that are within your power to control.