

# Coping with Stress during COVID-19 outbreak

The Dubois County Health Department, Emergency Management Agency takes mental health very seriously. Thank you to our Mental Health Professionals Heather Terwiske and Jodi Richardson from Memorial Hospital and Healthcare Center for providing these stress management tips and techniques during this time.

The outbreak of coronavirus 2019 may be distressing to some individuals and communities. Anxiety and fear may become overwhelming and cause strong emotions for children and adults. It is important to understand that everyone reacts differently in times of stress.

Some reactions individuals may experience include:

- A change in your energy level or activities (increase or decrease)
- An increase in emotions- especially irritability, anger, guilt, tearfulness
- Excessive worrying
- Having difficulty relaxing
- Changes in appetite (increase or decrease)
- Sweating or cold chills
- Headaches or stomachaches
- Feeling confused, difficulty concentrating, or having trouble remembering things
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

The most important thing you can do to decrease your stress level is to take care of yourself. Some ways to do this and to relieve your stress includes:

- Limiting your exposure to reading and watching news in relation to the outbreak. You will want to remain up to date, but try to limit your exposure to one credible source of information.
- Keep yourself healthy. Eat well balanced food and diet. Drink plenty of water. Limit your caffeine and alcohol intake. Get plenty of sleep and rest. Continue to exercise responsibly.

Some relaxation techniques you may find helpful are:

- Deep breathing- breathe in through your nose for a count of 4, hold your breath for a count of 4, exhale through your mouth for a count of 4, and hold your breath for a count of 4.
- Meditation
- Journaling
- Talk about your feelings with loved ones and friends
- Focus on positive parts of your life
- Maintain a sense of hope and positive thinking

## **Know when to get help**

If you or someone you know are showing signs of stress for several days or weeks, and it is also interfering with your daily life, reach out for help. You may contact your family physician, National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800.273.TALK, Memorial Hospital's 24-hour Help Line at 812.827.6222, and LifeSpring 24-hour crisis line at 812.482.4020.

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## For Families and Children

Children react, in part, on how they see adults responding around them. When parents and caregivers deal with stress calmly, children will be better supported and have more reassurance.

Not all children exhibit signs of stress in the same manner. Some things to look for include:

- “Acting out” and/or irritability
- Difficulty concentrating
- Unexplained headaches, body aches, or stomachaches
- Returning to behaviors they have outgrown (e.g. bedwetting, toileting accidents)
- Fear that a family member, close friend, or pet may die.

Some things you may do to support your children during these times of stress:

- Take time to talk to your child about the COVID-19 outbreak. Answer their questions in a way that they can understand. Keep it simple and age appropriate.
- Review safety plans
- Reassure your child that they are safe. Let them know that it is ok to feel scared or upset. Share with them how you handle your stress.
- Maintain structure and routines
- Be a role model-take breaks, get plenty of sleep, exercise, and eat well.

## For Responders and Caregivers

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

- Acknowledge that STS can impact anyone. Including you, families, and co-workers.
- Learn the symptoms of STS
  - Physical- illness, fatigue, forgetfulness
  - Mental- fear, guilt, withdrawal
- Get support from your team members. Avoid working alone.
- Take breaks. This is necessary and not selfish.