

Focus on Your Mental Health



1919 University Avenue West, Suite 400, St. Paul, MN 55104 | Tel. 651-645-2948 or 888-NAMIHELPS | Fax: 651-645-7379 www.namimn.org

Many people's mental health is being impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. There is a lot of anxiety, fear and grief. People don't know what the future holds, are worried about their health, feel isolated, may be facing an economic crisis and are experiencing grief over the loss of major life events such as graduations, weddings and even funerals. People are having trouble concentrating, feel more frustrated, are sad, have upset stomachs – all symptoms of anxiety. If you have children who are struggling many of these tips will help them as well.

NAMI Minnesota has put together a list of actions you can take to help your mental health during this difficult time.

- Control.** There is so much we can't control, so it helps to control what you can. That includes how you spend your time, what you eat, what you read. Take the steps needed to stay safe including staying at home, washing your hands, clean frequently used surfaces.
- News.** Limit exposure to the news. Pick one or two times a day to check in on the news. Listening, reading, watching all the time increases our anxiety. Make sure that you are going to trusted sources for the most up-to-date information.
- Move.** We know that moving increases the endorphins in the brain and improves our mood. Take a short walk or bike ride, dance to some music, watch and move to an exercise or yoga video.
- Nutrition.** In times of stress we tend to eat comfort food which isn't always good for us. Eating some is ok, but try to balance it out with veggies and fruit and lots of water. Cooking, especially with children home, can be a fun activity and lead to better eating. Be careful about alcohol use, which is a depressant, and not use it as your stress reliever.
- Connect.** As human beings we need to connect to others. Pick up the phone, use facetime or some other application to connect. Reach in to those who may be really struggling.
- Routine.** Create a routine to feel some sort of normalcy. Get up and go to bed around the same time, eat your meals around the same time, schedule talking with others, etc.
- Reflect.** Journaling during this time can be helpful. When we write down our fears and then it's easier to not ruminate on them.
- Positivity.** Focus on positive things. Watch an uplifting or funny movie, read a good book, do something that makes you smile and laugh.
- Volunteer.** We actually feel better when we help others. Make sure neighbors, family or friends have food or other necessities. Sew a mask, donate blood, help out at a food shelf. Even just sending a nice note to someone can lift your – and their – spirits.
- Sleep.** Sleep is so important to our mental health, but it can be hard to get a good night's sleep right now. Try not looking at a screen an hour before you go to bed. Keep to schedule and keep the room cool and dark.
- Today.** Focus on today and not the future. There are too many unknowns and that can be frightening. Think about in terms of there are three days—yesterday, today and tomorrow.
- Grieve.** It's ok to grieve about events that had to be cancelled. Birthday parties, weddings, graduations, recitals, championship games, funerals and more were cancelled. These were important events where we connected and celebrated. Of course you feel you sad that they didn't happen.
- Breathe.** Mindfulness, yoga, deep breathing all help us reduce stress and help us focus. There are many apps out there that can help such as Calm and Headspace.
- Compassion.** Think the best of people. This means understanding that at times we won't act our best in a crisis, that children will act out. That our routine for the day fell apart. That we weren't the best home-schooling parent in the universe. Lower your expectations, ban perfectionism. Give people - and yourself- grace and space.



NAMI Minnesota (National Alliance on Mental Illness) is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of children and adults with mental illnesses and their families. NAMI Minnesota offers education, support and advocacy.

