



Strategies to Help Manage Stress, Improve Self-Care, and Reduce Isolation

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood.

Many factors contribute to mental health, including:

- Biological factors, such as genes or brain chemistry
- Life experiences, such as trauma or abuse
- Family history of mental health disorders
- Environmental factors, such as national threats

Current Environmental Factors. Covid-19 has disrupted our daily activities, while introducing uncertainty and fear. Additionally, civil unrest following the death of George Floyd has had a profound impact on individuals and society at-large. This moment has introduced unknowns while also eliminating comforting and supportive social activities. The confusion, heightened stress, and uncertainty many of us are experiencing are normal human response to these events, and people react differently depending on their circumstances.

Common Signs of Stress. This list is not exhaustive but includes some of the most common signs of stress. Identifying stress is an important step to stress management.

- An increase or decrease in energy levels
- An increase in alcohol, tobacco or drug use
- An increase in irritability or anger
- Having trouble relaxing or sleeping
- Crying frequently
- Worrying excessively
- Wanting to be alone most of the time
- Having difficulty communicating or listening
- Having difficulty giving or accepting help
- Inability to feel pleasure or have fun

Strategies of Stress Management

- **Understand that stress and anxiety are natural human responses.** Humans use stress to meet deadlines, study for tests, or clean their homes. Stress can lead to healthy, positive outcomes. However, constant stress can lead to anxiety which can lead to more challenges.
- **Recognize signs to help identify stress.** When you are experiencing stress, identify the way it impacts your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Use the list of common signs of stress above. Recognizing the stress is key to addressing the condition.
- **Share your feelings with someone you trust.** Talk to someone you love and trust about the way you are feeling. It can be a simple statement like, "I am really stressed out." Vocalizing

your feelings is healthy and will increase your ability to manage your feelings in a positive way.

- **Release your thoughts.** You can release your thoughts vocally or in other ways. The most common is to write your feelings on a piece of paper. Try this if you're feeling overwhelmed and the process of writing can prove very calming.
- **Know when to ask for help.** We are all strong and proud to some degree, but if you are having a tough time managing your stress and the feelings it causes, ask for help. ***Asking for help is a sign of strength. See the list of resources below to find help right at your fingertips.***

Things to Do to Manage Stress. There are many ways to reduce stress on a daily basis. Below are some simple suggestions but look on the internet or ask your friends for suggestions that might be more personalized to your life.

- Keep things in perspective.
- Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media.
- Consume and share validated, accurate information, not rumors.
- Connect with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.
- Practice compassion and empathy.

Strategies for Self-Care. The brain is part of the body. Taking care of your brain is as essential as taking care of your body. Find what self-care looks like to you and take steps to make healthy choices. Below are simple suggestions to help you get started:

- Take care of your body. Regularly engage in a physical activity like deep breathing, stretching, meditation, and exercise. Focus on eating healthy and get plenty of sleep. Avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Make time to unwind. Do activities you enjoy.
- Go outside! (while practicing social distance)
- Create & stick to a normal routine.

Reduce Isolation. There are distinct, clinical differences between loneliness, chronic loneliness, and social isolation. The below information provides a few strategies to reduce isolation during this uncertain time:

- Social Distancing does not equal Emotional Distancing – connect with loved ones!
- Convene regular opportunities to socialize with co-workers – a virtual “coffee break” – via Skype, Zoom, Google chat, or another online platform.
- Utilize personalized communication platforms, such as telephone and FaceTime as much as possible instead of relying on social media to stay connected.

Resources

- National Suicide Prevention Line: 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)
- Call4Calm (Illinois): text TALK to 552020; for Spanish text HABLAR to 552020
- Crisis Text Line: text HOME to 741741 (24/7 text message support for those in crisis)
- If case of emergency, call 911 and explain it is a mental health situation.
- For more information or to find more resources, contact Program Director, James Burns: James@thekennedyforum.org