

# Finding your safe space: Ease anxiety and increase your coping skills

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has dramatically affected our lives in a very short amount of time. Each of us, and those around us, are experiencing unprecedented change in our work, social relationships, financial situation, spiritual engagement and family dynamics. More than ever, we may feel unsafe in our personal or work life because of events well beyond our control.

## Your concern is real

As we write this, we are experiencing a major spike in unemployment rates. You may have lost your job, had your hours cut or seen your pay or benefits reduced. If you're employed by an essential business, you may be working extra hours or learning new skills because your company has shifted to making new products that support public health needs. In the wake of the [global novel coronavirus pandemic](#), common medical supplies like ventilators, medical masks, hospital gowns and hand sanitizers were scarce with manufacturers unable to meet demand. There are also questions surrounding the potential impact COVID-19 may have on the 2020 presidential election.

Dealing with uncertainty and a seemingly ever-changing list of unknowns affects our emotional and psychological resilience, personal and financial security, physical health and mental well-being. When so many of the ground stones in our life are changing on a daily basis, you may wonder how you can find a "safe space" and cope with anxiety and stress.

## A mindful month

June is National Safety Month—a natural time to bring you some mindful ways to protect your mental and physical safety. The emotions associated with pandemic anxiety can overwhelm adults and children, causing the following signs of physical and emotional distress:

- Changes in your sleep habits
- Disrupted eating patterns, including bingeing or forgetting a meal
- Difficulty concentrating or hyper-focus on things out of your control
- Worsening of chronic health problems or mental health conditions

- Increased use of tobacco, drugs or alcohol
- Increased headaches, stomach pains or fatigue
- Feelings of confusion, hopelessness, shock or irritability

While it may seem like the world is out of your control, there are a few ways you can control your personal world, like reducing your anxiety and using mindful techniques to stay calm. Here are some ideas to support yourself, your family and others during this unsettling time.

- **Check the facts.** Ensure you are reading accurate facts and information from sites like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or the World Health Organization (WHO). It's easy to get caught up in false information on social media, which can upset you even more.
- **Do a digital detox.** Take a meditation break to clear your mind. The MyLife (formerly known as Stop, Breathe & Think) app is available through your Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and can give you quick and easy meditation methods to use during the day. Set aside time daily to read or watch accurate news reports and take frequent breaks. Hearing, listening, watching and searching for news about the pandemic can be upsetting. It's good to give your mind a break!
- **Connect with others.** You're not alone in how you are feeling. Humans want to feel connected, and there are ways to do that while practicing social distancing. Call, text or set up a video meeting with family, friends or coworkers. Social interaction while social distancing is important for your well-being and can help you feel less isolated. Plus, EAP professionals are available to you 24/7/365 for even more support, at no extra cost to you.
- **Get up and get moving!** While rest is important during stressful times, it can be tempting to lie on the couch all day watching your favorite TV series. Take time daily to stretch, exercise, meditate and go outside for fresh air. There are at-home workouts available online, and you can find meditation and stretching techniques on your EAP app.
- **Practice self-care.** Taking care of yourself is important, especially when you are coping with anxiety. Eat healthy meals and snacks, exercise daily, get a good night's rest and identify your daily thoughts and feelings to keep your mind, body and spirit in-tune. Give yourself an at-home spa treatment one day or watch your favorite movie on the weekend. You'll be taking care of yourself and distracting yourself with positive activities!
- **Reflect with daily gratitude.** While you may have more feelings of anxiousness and sadness, it is important to remember the good in your life. By taking a few minutes each day to reflect on the things you are thankful for, you can sprinkle some positivity into your routine. Remember, you have access to Five Minute Journal through your EAP, where you can take a few minutes to log your gracious thoughts and feelings.
- **Be compassionate towards yourself and others.** It is okay to not feel okay. During unsettling times, it is important to remember that you, your friends, family and coworkers may not feel like themselves. It is important to remember everyone copes differently. Some people may need more than others. Ask others what may help them feel better and speak up if there is something you need help with too. You have strengths that others may not have and vice versa, so recognize and harness those strengths to help each other. EAP professionals are a phone call away if you need extra support.
- **Gain perspective.** In a time when there is so much unknown, gaining perspective can help combat persistent negative feelings like sadness, hopelessness and uneasiness. Think of gaining perspective this way: You are looking at your own life from the 10,000 foot level, instead of the 10 foot level. Or, some people feel calmer when they see real facts and

numbers about the situation. Check out sites from credible sources like the CDC or WHO, or visit these up-to-date sites with statistics: <https://covid19.healthdata.org/projections>, <https://txdshs.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opdashboard/index.html#/ed483ecd702b4298ab01e8b9cafc8b83>

- **Be prepared.** Make sure you have the proper amount of food, hygiene products, cleaning supplies and entertainment while at home. Prepare yourself with knowledge from trusted sources to stay up-to-date on what's going on in the world. Being prepared both mentally and physically with adequate supplies will ease your anxiety.

## Lean on your Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Your EAP program is a great resource for tools, articles and guidance to help you better manage anxiety and improve your coping skills:

- Navigate ever-changing family and work relationships
- Manage stress at your workplace or working from home
- Deal with depression
- Balance your finances
- Find child or adult care

If you haven't already synced up with mindfulness apps, now is good time to get started with MyLife (formerly known as Stop, Breathe and Think) to relax your mind and Five Minute Journal to help you cope with your thoughts.

You also have confidential access to EAP professionals who can talk you through difficult situations, assess what you need and connect you with trained specialists and community resources. The number is at the top of your EAP home page—call 24/7/365.

National call and chat lines are also available:

- 911 in emergency situations
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Disaster and Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746 (TTY 1-800-846-8517)
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741 in the US – free, nationwide, 24/7 text message service
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255 (TALK)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): 1-800-950-NAMI (6264)
- Veteran's Crisis Line: (800) 273-8255
- National Domestic Abuse Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) – available 24/7 and in 200 languages

During times of uncertainty, emotions can easily become overwhelming. You are not alone, and there are people and resources to support you. Learning to cope with your emotions can make you, the people around you and your community stronger. Take advantage of the personal and professional well-being tools available in your EAP to improve your mental and physical safety.

**Sources:**

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