

How Mindfulness Can Help During COVID-19

Tips for calming anxiety during a difficult time

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With schools closed and many parents working from home without childcare for the foreseeable future, it's hard not to start spiraling. Responsibilities seem endless, the situation dire, and it seems like time to yourself has become a thing of the past...

Take a deep breath. Literally. Feel a little better?

These are trying times, but incorporating mindful practices into your daily routine can help calm anxiety and build [healthy coping skills](#). Here are some tips from our clinicians on making mindfulness work for you and your family.

It doesn't have to be complicated

Being mindful is what it sounds like. Taking time to focus on the present, being intentional and thoughtful about where you are and how you are feeling. Trying to center your thoughts and be in the moment. Sounds simple, but it takes work, especially now when concerns about what the future holds feel so pressing. Mindful activities can help. "Mindfulness isn't complicated," says Jill Emanuele, PhD, a clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute. Here are some simple activities she recommends:

- **Squeeze Muscles:** Starting at your toes, pick one muscle and squeeze it tight. Count to five. Release, and notice how your body changes. Repeat exercise moving up your body.
- **Belly Breathing:** Put one hand on your stomach and one hand on your chest. Slowly breathe in from your stomach (expand like a balloon) and slowly breathe out (deflate).
- **Mindful Meal:** Pay attention to the smell, taste and look of your food. No multitasking.
- **Meditation:** Sit in a relaxed, comfortable position. Pick something to focus on, like your breath. When your mind wanders, bring your attention back to your breath.
- **Blowing Bubbles:** Notice their shapes, textures and colors.
- **Coloring:** Color something. Focus on the colors and designs.
- **Listening to Music:** Focus on the whole song, or listen specifically to the voice or an instrument.

Make time for mindfulness

Right now much of the personal time that used to be part of our daily routines — commutes, time alone at home, going to the store — is not available. This means it's extra important to be intentional about creating space to recharge. Deciding to set time aside each day to practice mindful activities is a great place to start, says Dr. Emanuele. "The morning, before everyone is awake, can be a great time to really ground yourself." Morning mindfulness can help set the tone for the day. "Do deep breathing, meditate, exercise, whatever mindfulness activity works for you," she recommends. Mindfulness doesn't have to be elaborate: "You can try mindful eating or mindful drinking with a cup of coffee. Sit there and just be in the moment. That's mindfulness. Taking five minutes to do that before the day begins is even more important now because this is not our typical routine and we're going to feel very, very out of sorts."

Limit multi-tasking

Right now it can feel like trying to do ten things at once is the only way anything will get done. For example, trying to fold laundry, make dinner and watch your child all while on a work call.

But, explains Joanna Stern, PsyD, a clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute, multitasking rarely works, and can actually *increase* stress. "Multitasking is a myth," says Dr. Stern. Instead, she suggests achievable goals for the day, trying to focus on one thing at a time. For example, scheduling work calls during naptime, allowing kids to have a little extra screen time while you make dinner, or asking older children to help fold the laundry while you finish cleaning up.

Practice mindfulness as a family

Mindfulness, explains David Anderson, PhD, a clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute, is "Anything that helps everyone take a moment to slow down, stay present, and come together." Designating time to practice mindful activities as a family will help everyone feel less anxious. It could be a daily family yoga session, or a quiet walk in the woods as a group, taking time to focus on the way the air feels, the sound of the birds and the smell of the trees. Another good family mindfulness idea is asking everyone to mention one good thing they heard or saw that day over dinner.

Make peace with uncertainty

This situation is one of extreme uncertainty. We don't know what will happen, how long it will last or what things will be like when it's over. One thing we do know, however, is that worrying about it won't change the outcome. Learning how to tolerate the uncertainty is a huge part of building healthy coping skills for ourselves, which we then want to model for our children. "Right now it's very easy to let your brain spin out with the frightening possibilities," warns Dr. Anderson. "Practicing mindfulness helps bring us back to the present, and away from the brink."

Who do I want to be during COVID-19?

FEAR ZONE

LEARNING ZONE

GROWTH ZONE

I think of the others and see how to help them

I make my talents available to those who need them

I start to give up what I can't control

I stop compulsively consuming what hurts me, from food to news

I live in the present and focus on the future

I grab food, toilet paper and medications that I don't need

I spread emotions related to fear and anger

I identify my emotions

I am empathetic with myself and with others

I complain frequently

I become aware of the situation and think how to act

I thank and appreciate others

I forward all messages I receive

I evaluate information before spreading something false

I keep a happy emotional state and spread hope

I get mad easily

I look for a way to adapt to new changes

I recognize that we are all trying to do our best

I practice quietude, patience, relationships and creativity