

OBH Guidance & Resources for Stress/Coping During COVID-19

With the uncertainty surrounding COVID-19, stress and distressing emotions are heightened. Acute stress in times such as these are typical/normal, and we have to work to manage our emotions, and manage them well.

Stress during an infectious disease outbreak [such as COVID-19] can include:

- Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones.
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns.
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating.
- Worsening of chronic health problems.
- Worsening of mental health conditions.
- Increased use of [alcohol](#), [tobacco](#), or [other drugs](#).

People who may respond more strongly to the stress of a crisis include:

- Older people and people with chronic diseases who are [at higher risk for severe illness](#) from COVID-19.
- Children and teens.
- People who are helping with the response to COVID-19, like doctors, other health care providers, and first responders.
- People who have mental health conditions including problems with substance use.

How one responds to the outbreak can depend on their background, the things that make them different from other people, and the community one lives in. Research has revealed that some specific – and possibly common – reactions related to the COVID-19 pandemic include:

- **Concern about protecting oneself** from the virus because an individual may be at higher risk of serious illness.
- **Concern that regular medical care or community services may be disrupted** due to facility closures or reductions in services and public transport closure.
- **Feeling socially isolated**, especially if they live alone or are in a community setting that is not allowing visitors because of the outbreak.
- **Guilt** if loved ones help them with activities of daily living.
- **Increased levels of distress** if they:
 - Have mental health concerns before the outbreak, such as depression.
 - Live in lower-income households or have language barriers.
 - Experience [stigma](#) because of age, race or ethnicity, disability, or perceived likelihood of spreading COVID-19.

During this pandemic some are viewed as being more vulnerable than others regarding their susceptibility to exposure, reactions and responses. Thus, it will be especially important to provide the supports they need during this time. For the formerly mentioned reasons, a short list of tips for coping and staying balanced during this event that may be helpful for all populations, especially for the vulnerable populations:

- ▶ **Communication** (Communication is vital so keep the lines open and dispel rumors and myths. Make sure to communicate with those who may be more vulnerable due to isolation.)
- ▶ **Connectedness** (Stay connected virtually and in other ways while adhering to the physical distancing guidance.)
- ▶ **Support** (Remember to support yourself and others. While it may be difficult do things that uplift and celebrate yourself, as well as those things for others.)
- ▶ **Safety** (Physical and emotional safety are important. During this time of heightened stress be sure to remain aware of your surroundings and seek help if you feel your safety or the safety of your loved ones is in jeopardy at any time.)
- ▶ **Limiting Media Intake** (Research suggests limiting media intake to 2-3 times/day as watching specific scenes reported on and replayed over an extended period of time may lead to heightened emotions.)
- ▶ **Routines** (Stick to routines and develop new ones. Routines provide structure and structure often helps to give individuals some semblance of normalcy during times such as this COVID-19 pandemic.)
- ▶ **Overall Health** (Stay healthy physically and emotionally. We understand that each affects the other, so attention to health in all aspects is encouraged. People with preexisting mental health conditions should continue with their treatment and be aware of new or worsening symptoms.)
 - Nutrition/Diet
 - Rest/Relaxation
 - Exercise/Staying Active
 - Avoid Substance Use & Maintain health appointments and treatment regimens as much as possible

The Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) is committed to the advancement and promotion of positive health, and specifically positive behavioral health practices. As such, the following resources have are currently published and accessible to the public for assistance during this current pandemic. The information is updated regularly, and the agency is open to feedback and other information that will assist the citizens of Louisiana as we navigate this unprecedented health event. Below are several resources that are currently available.

- The Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) COVID-19 Behavioral Health Information link on the OBH webpage (<http://ldh.la.gov/index.cfm/page/3883>) provides information, guidance and other resources for citizens and providers specifically related to the COVID-19 pandemic, coping and maintenance of behavioral health, information for parents and families, provider flexibilities and allowances, etc. Below are some areas on the webpage that may be of particular interest to many:
 - The “**Info for Parents**” section has articles about caring for children and family-related information that may be helpful. Information about returning to school and other activity-related exercises and practices that may help families with children is available, also.
 - The “**Links and Helpful Info for Public and Community**” section has several links of resources for individuals regarding behavioral health maintenance and coping during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Other LDH – OBH Webpage & Suggested Resources

- The LDH Coronavirus Webpage (<http://ldh.la.gov/Coronavirus/>) has a wealth of information about all things COVID-19 and health related including data, tips, resources, etc. This page is updated daily with statistics and COVID-19 related information.
- The Local Governing Entities (LGEs) are the behavioral health clinics that provide direct services and guidance about where to obtain these services. There are 10 LGEs, all of which provide direct services to individuals with or without insurance coverage. Here is the link with all of the contact info for each LGE: <http://ldh.la.gov/index.cfm/directory/category/321>
- The Keep Calm Through COVID Toll-Free Helpline is the LDH-OBH sponsored toll-free confidential helpline (1-866-310-7977) that offers support to individuals struggling with the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic who may be experiencing anxiety and/or emotional distress 24/7. Trained individuals are available to receive the callers and assist with coping and managing emotional distress.
- The newest addition to resources for citizens is the Behavioral Health Recovery Outreach Line, which is a Warm Line available to callers on a 24/7 schedule. The line is toll-free and confidential line and aims to prevent a crisis from occurring by calling 1-833-333-1132. Louisianans on the verge of a crisis can always find a listening ear through the new Behavioral Health Recovery Outreach Line, and can receive real-time support to avoid, prevent or intercept a crisis from occurring.
- ConquerCOVID19.LA (<https://conquercovid19.la/>) is an initiative and launched as the CrisisText line for crisis de-escalation. This text line was introduced and is promoted on the website noted above, and provides immediate connection for crisis support by texting REACHOUT to 741741. Texters have access to a 24/7, free, confidential crisis counselor to guide and assist as they are experiencing a heightened emotional state to a calmer state by the end of the contact. [Please note - Provision of a Licensed Mental Health Supervisor is available if the texter needs more intensive assistance and/or services.]
- *Resources to Support Mental Health and Coping with the Coronavirus (COVID-19):*
<https://www.sprc.org/covid19>
- World Health Organization (WHO) page: https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1
- Centers for Disease Control (CDC) page: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2Findex.html