

Seven ways to manage 'COVID Stress Syndrome'



The world is experiencing a historic challenge in the face of the global pandemic. Not only are people concerned both for their own health and the health of their loved ones, but the restrictions on normal activities and the economic repercussions of the crisis have everyone on edge. Psychologists have coined the term “COVID Stress Syndrome” to describe the pandemic’s impact on emotional health, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has released recommendations for dealing with the mental health impact of the crisis.

Although it’s normal to feel stress in stressful times, there are some ways of managing stress that are healthier than others. The following suggestions come from both the CDC’s recommendations and the empirically based strategies for managing anxiety that I discuss in my book, [“Unworried: A Life Without Anxiety”](#) (OSV, \$17.95).

1. Limit social media/news exposure

It’s important to stay on top of news about closings as well as strategies for keeping yourself and your loved ones healthy and safe, but it isn’t healthy to be glued to social media, gorging on angst-ridden posts from questionable sources. Obsessive social media checking gives us a false sense of control and raises our overall stress level significantly.

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By all means stay informed, but be selective about your sources. Check credible, mainstream news sources once or twice a day. Make a point of scrolling past posts from anyone except

closest friends and family, and do your best to be a positive voice in your own social media posts. Use social media as a tool to encourage and support others through the crisis.

2. Practice good self-care

When we're stressed, we tend to jettison good sleeping, eating and exercise habits. Make a point of insisting that you and your loved ones stick to healthy schedules and keep up (or step up) healthy habits. Getting plenty of rest, eating well and exercising boosts your immune system's ability to fight disease and helps you cope.

3. Engage in productive activities

When we feel overwhelmed we often try to lose ourselves in screens (TV, laptops, digital devices, etc). The problem is that research shows that while consuming digital and other media can numb our minds, the stress tends to return immediately upon switching off the TV or turning off our phone. That's why these things are so addictive. We literally feel punished every time we step away from them.

A better way to process stress is to consciously engage in an activity that is physically and/or intellectually stimulating. Go old-school and play a board game, do a puzzle or read a book. Take on a project you've been waiting for the time to do. You'll feel better for learning something, accomplishing something or connecting on a deeper level with the people in your home.

4. Build relationships

Which reminds me. Connect with the people in your home. Connection is the best antidote for stress and anxiety. While you're sheltering in place, make an effort to strengthen your family rituals. Make a point of working, playing, talking and praying together everyday – even for a few minutes each.

Simple, intentional activities such as doing the dishes together, playing a few hands of cards, discussing the best and worst moments of the day, and praying for (and over) each other can help you feel closer to the people God has placed in your life to love and support you through this challenging time.

And don't forget to call, message or text friends and family members to make sure they're OK and strengthen your support system.

5. Pray

In difficult times, our prayers tend to sound like, "GodhelpmeGodhelpmeGodhelpme..!"

While God welcomes any effort we make to reach out to him, it can be more productive to offer a prayer such as the following: "Lord, help me respond to the challenges I'm facing in a way that gives you glory and helps me be the person you want me to be." Ask God to work in you, through you and with you so that you can make a positive difference and respond proactively to the challenges you may be facing.

6. Praise

When we encounter a new trial, we can sometimes forget all the other storms we have weathered through God's grace. Intentionally call to mind times when God brought you through a difficult period. Write them down. Praise God for these experiences. Let them serve as a reminder of his presence and providence in the face of your current difficulties

7. Seek help

Social distancing doesn't mean going it alone. If your emotions are getting the best of you, seek professional help. Many counselors, such as those that work with me at

CatholicCounselors.com, offer tele-mental health services that allow clients to access quality mental health care from the comfort of home. More insurers than ever reimburse for tele-health services.

This is a uniquely stressful time for all of us, but with good sense, God's grace and a little support from the people we love, we can make it through together.

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