

## TIPS SHEET:

# Mental Health During the Pandemic



- Iowa's Healthiest State Initiative has a Mental Health Checklist — [learn more](#).

- For families and individuals, find a list of tips on taking care of your mental health during COVID-19 below, and [learn more](#).

- If you have children, be sure to limit their exposure to the news because it can be overwhelming for them to process. Being mindful about how you talk about COVID-19 around children is important, too.
- Encourage children to draw, write, or journal so they can express their feelings.
- Try to stick to your normal routine as much as possible. Keep the same bedtime and same awake time. Get dressed in clothes you'd work in. Take a walk outside to get exercise and see other people to feel a sense that everyone is in this together.
- Choose activities that soothe you or give you purpose, such as playing board games, reading, putting together puzzles or bathing.
- Make sure you call, text, FaceTime or Skype daily with others. During traumatic times, having a sense of connection and a feeling of community is essential for hope and healing.
- And because fun, meaningful experiences reduce the stress hormone cortisol and raise feel-good hormones like serotonin, dopamine and oxytocin, add humor to your day by reading cartoonists or watching funny movies and comedy shows.



- [Care for Your Coronavirus Anxiety](#)

- Some tips to help with anxiety and loneliness while staying at home during the pandemic, and [learn more here](#).

- Connect daily with friends and/or family. If you're worried that you might run out of stuff to talk about, make a plan with someone to watch a show or read a book separately so that you can discuss it when you contact each other.
- Start a new project — clean out cupboards, make a list of books you've been wanting to read for a while, do some yard work.
- If you live alone or are bothered by the lack of noise or talking, listen to a podcast.
- Set up a group chat either with office colleagues, friends, family, etc.



- Wellbeing is important during these unprecedented times; find tips below and learn more [here](#).

- Plan how you'll spend your time. It might help to write this down on paper and put it on the wall.
- If you aren't happy with your usual routine, this might be a chance to do things differently. For example, you could go to bed earlier, spend more time cooking or do other things you don't usually have time for.
- Think about how you'll spend time by yourself at home. For example, plan activities to do on different days or habits you want to start or keep up.
- Bringing nature into your everyday life can benefit both your mental and physical wellbeing. It can improve your mood, reduce feelings of stress or anger and make you feel more relaxed.
- It is possible to get the positive effects of nature while staying indoors at home. You could try the following:
  - > Spend time with the windows open to let in fresh air.
  - > Arrange a comfortable space to sit, for example by a window where you can look out over a view of trees or the sky or watch birds and other animals.
  - > Look at photos of your favorite places in nature. Use them as the background on your mobile phone or computer screen or print and put them up on your walls.
  - > Listen to natural sounds, like recordings or apps that play birdsong, ocean waves or rainfall. Get as much natural light as you can. Spend time in your garden if you have one or open your front or back door and sit on the doorstep.
  - > If you have safe access to green space like a garden, you could bring some natural materials in to decorate your living space or use them in art projects. This could include leaves, flowers, feathers, tree bark or seeds.
  - > You may be able to buy seeds, flowers or plants online for delivery, to grow and keep indoors. If you order items for delivery, ask to have them left at your doorstep, to avoid face-to-face contact.



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- Try having a clear-out. You could sort through your possessions and put them away tidily or have a spring clean.
- You could also have a digital clear-out. Delete any old files and apps you don't use, upgrade your software, update all your passwords or clear out your inboxes.
- Write letters or emails or make phone calls with people you've been meaning to catch up with.
- Instead of logging onto Facebook or sending a mass text every time you feel lonely, think about the two or five or 10 people who really matter to you, and make it a priority to connect with them via a phone call, FaceTime or Zoom happy hour in the coming weeks.
- These conversations can be short and don't have to be deep or serious to be "meaningful." Joking around and shooting the breeze with your co-worker pals can go a long way. [Learn more.](#)
- In difficult times, it can be hard to remember to do basic tasks like showering, eating, drinking water and moving your body. It's even more difficult when you don't have anyone to say, "Buddy, have you eaten since yesterday morning?" Create calendar notifications or set alarms to help you stay accountable for daily tasks or try the habit tracking app Done. [Learn more.](#)
- Regarding managing your stress about money, find a list of takeaways below or [learn more here.](#)
  - Pause but don't panic. Pay attention to what's happening around you, but refrain from getting caught up in doom-and-gloom hype, which can lead to high levels of anxiety and bad decision making.
  - Identify your financial stressors and make a plan. Write down specific ways you and your family can reduce expenses or manage your finances more efficiently. Then commit to a specific plan and review it regularly. Although this can be anxiety-provoking in the short term, putting things down on paper and committing to a plan can reduce stress. If you are having trouble paying bills or staying on top of debt, reach out for help by calling your bank, utilities or credit card company.
  - Recognize how you deal with stress related to money. In tough economic times some people are more likely to relieve stress by turning to unhealthy activities like smoking, drinking, gambling or emotional eating. The strain can also lead to more conflict and arguments between partners. Be alert to these behaviors.
- Turn these challenging times into opportunities for real growth and change. Times like this, while difficult, can offer opportunities to take stock of your current situation and make needed changes. Think of ways that these economic challenges can motivate you to find healthier ways to deal with stress. Try taking a walk — it's an inexpensive way to get good exercise. Having dinner at home with your family may not only save you money but could help bring you closer together. Consider learning a new skill. Take a course through your employer or look into low-cost resources in your community that can lead to a better job. The key is to use this time to think outside the box and try new ways of managing your life.
- For parents, prioritizing your own well-being benefits your whole family. [Here's some tips](#) on how to demonstrate self-care in times of the coronavirus, with a summary below.
  - Make time for yourself. Designate time to read, walk around the block, etc.
  - Be realistic. It's time to be exceedingly realistic, both at work and as a parent. Avoid burnout by setting realistic expectations and giving yourself grace if you can't meet them.
  - Set boundaries. If you have a friend or family member who's in the habit of sending worst-case-scenario news or is prone to sending anxiety-provoking text messages, practice a little emotional distancing. Let them know you sympathize but that you're taking a break from worrying news, or simply hit the Do Not Disturb button. You can always reconnect when things are calmer.
  - Reconnect with things you enjoy. Get back in touch with hobbies or activities you enjoy but rarely have time for or make the choice to learn a new skill. Maybe there's a knitting project you've always wanted to try, but you've been too busy. Or you've been meaning to learn how to needlepoint. Maybe you love jigsaw puzzles but with rushing between work and home and caring for kids, it's been years since you had the time to do one. If young children make solo activities unrealistic, seek out activities you can enjoy together, like baking bread or making art.

