COPING WITH ANXIETY

Anxiety can be described as a feeling of fear, worry, nervousness, apprehension or uncertainty about what’s to come. Anxiety is our body’s normal and natural response to stress and uncertainty. If there is anything that is certain right now, it is that there is a lot of uncertainty involved with COVID-19.

It is hardly surprising then, that many people are feeling anxious right now. This is an anxiety-provoking and stressful time for everyone and it is okay if you feel more anxious than usual. However, it is also important to recognize that too much anxiety can be harmful and take a toll on our overall health and well-being.

Anxiety is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation. Now that we have identified anxiety, we can begin to practice wellness strategies and healthy coping methods to help us through this time. We have included a section to help children and youth through their anxious feelings as well.

Tools to Manage Anxiety

- Exercise: try some yoga or have a good stretch
- Journal or set aside worry time and write it out
- Tune-in to your senses: What can you hear, see and feel?
- Practice Gratitude
- Meditate or stop to breathe deeply
- Create a plan, problem solve and walk through possible solutions
- Get creative: draw, dance or listen to music
- Identify unhelpful thoughts and gently challenge them

Brought to you by our Community Partners
**Anxiety Coping Statements**

- I allow myself to slow down my breath
- Fighting this feeling won’t help. I will relax and allow it to pass
- When I relax and sit with this feeling, I learn to face my fears
- I choose to slow down and breathe
- I stay present and ground myself in this moment
- I tune in to my body and release tension from my muscles
- I am okay, my anxiety is not always rational
- I’m stronger than I give myself credit for, I always survive this
- I don’t have to get carried away with my thoughts. I focus on my breath and this moment

**Breathing Exercise**

4-7-8 breathing: The 4-7-8 breathing technique helps when you’re feeling stressed, anxious or having trouble sleeping.

Exhale completely through your mouth making a whooshing sound.

Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose for a count of 4

Hold your breath for a count of 7

Exhale completely through your mouth for a count of 8

**Grounding Exercise**

Stand with your feet shoulder’s width apart

Tuck your chin and keep your spine straight

Rest your hands at your sides or place them over your bellybutton

Sink all of your weight into your feet (while standing tall)

Allow any tension or unease to be absorbed into Mother Earth

Imagine roots growing from the bottom of your feet, extending deep into Mother Earth

Breathe
Children and youth experience anxiety as well. As parents/caregivers it is important to empathize with your child so they feel comfortable sharing their feelings and worries with you. If you haven’t already, teach your children about anxiety by explaining how we are wired to deal with threats in 1 of 3 ways—flight, fight or freeze and that your whole body will respond to this feeling. You can also teach your child/youth how to identify the worry signs e.g. feeling tense, heart racing, sweating, stomach ache or headaches. Explain to them it is ok to be a little worried and everybody has worry and anxieties.

**What we can do**

Help your child write down their worries into 2 types of worry - Worries you can do something about & Worries you can’t do anything about. In addition for older children/youth, ask them to keep a worry journal

Help your child challenge worry thoughts by reflecting on their worries: what evidence do they have which supports their beliefs (worries); help them identify how anxiety is tricking them into believing this evidence; and help find a different thought that is more accurate and helpful

Establish a worry time: Have them pick a time of day to think and talk about worries. This may be a hard practice to learn. If a worry comes outside of worry time, have them write it on a piece of paper and put it someplace special. At worry time ask them to take out the paper so you can talk through it together. A suggestion would be to create a worry box or a worry monster box.

Sometimes anxiety can be caused by a real problem. If so, teach and work through problem solving skills: Identify a problem and describe it; generate alternatives, predict outcomes for those alternatives, choose the alternative that best solves the problem & action it.
Breathing Exercise: Lazy 8s

Starting in the middle, go up the left and trace the left part of the 8 while you breathe in. When you get to the middle of the 8 again, breathe out while you trace the right part of the 8 with your finger. Continue breathing around the Lazy 8 until you have a calm body and mind.

Relaxation Exercise: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Start and Finish with 3 deep breaths

1. Squeeze your foot for 5 seconds - relax
2. Squeeze your leg for 5 seconds - relax
3. Squeeze your stomach for 5 seconds - relax
4. Squeeze your arms/hands for 5 seconds - relax
5. Squeeze your whole body for 5 seconds - relax