

# ANXIETY

## What you need to know

The Coronavirus is causing anxiety in individuals around the world, especially in those who already experience anxiety. Social Distancing, loss of employment, closing of stores and schools, postponement or cancellation of community activities and vacations, and worrying about it in ourselves and our loved ones can raise anxiety.

**Definition:** a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome.

**Risk Factors:** trauma, stress due to an illness, stress buildup, personality, other mental health disorders, presence of IDD, having blood relatives with an anxiety disorder, drugs or alcohol.

### Signs/Symptoms of anxiety:

- \* Rapid/pounding heartbeat
- \* Headache/Aches and pains
- \* Insomnia
- \* Unrealistic/Excessive fear
- \* Depressed mood
- \* Sweating
- \* Trouble sleeping
- \* Avoiding things that trigger anxiety
- \* Shortness of breath
- \* Nausea/Vomiting/ Diarrhea
- \* Dry mouth/Trouble swallowing
- \* Irritability/Anger
- \* A sense of impending danger, panic or doom
- \* Trembling
- \* Gastrointestinal (GI) problems
- \* Dizziness
- \* Trouble concentrating or thinking about anything other than the present worry
- \* Feeling Nervous/Restless/ Tense
- \* Muscle tension
- \* Confusion
- \* Feeling weak or tired
- \* Difficulty controlling worry

It may be difficult to identify anxiety in individuals who are diagnosed with intellectual disabilities. They may have difficulty describing internalizing symptoms of anxiety. Deficits in communication, social skills, and Intellectual functioning, as well as challenging behaviors, might mask anxiety.

What we might see due to anxiety in individuals with IDD:

- \* Mood Swings
- \* Tantrums/ Behavioral Issues — “Acting Out”
- \* Aggression
- \* Unexplained aches and pains,
  - \* Headaches (stress related)
  - \* Stomach aches
  - \* Body aches
- \* Self Injurious Behaviors
- \* Hypervigilance

### It is also important to know that:

- \* When anxiety increases to the point that the person cannot sleep or concentrate, it leads to a tendency toward excessive suspiciousness, bordering on paranoia
- \* Forcing an unwanted change on a person with any Anxiety Disorder tends to worsen the Anxiety Disorder.
- \* If a person needs help, contact a mental health specialist as soon as possible.

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## SUPPORTING OTHERS WITH ANXIETY

- Don't force confrontation. Don't force a person to do something they are afraid of.
- Provide validation. Other people's anxiety doesn't have to make sense to you, but it is important to understand that what they are experiencing is real and requires sensitivity.
- Express Concern. Approach them in a warm, positive way. You can start by telling them you have noticed a change in their behavior. You might ask them if you can help them cope with their anxiety.
- Guide them back to reality. For those who have exaggerated the "horrible outcome," help guide them to real, more positive thoughts.
- Brainstorm together. Sometimes there are steps to solving an issue or a negative thought that may be causing anxiety. Help brainstorm a solution or a plan.
- Help them stay connected. Set up video chats or phone calls with family and friends so there is still communication between them so they can know how everyone is doing.
- Online Purpose. Having a purpose helps build self-esteem, helping others builds self esteem, is there something that can be done on line to help support others? Even a simple blog or start a support group.
- Help them focus on the positive. Happy thoughts = happy brain. People are happier focusing on positive thoughts. Sometimes it is difficult when anxiety overcomes us to stay positive. Helping others do this over and over helps the brain become more automatic in producing these happier, more positive thoughts.
- Help them create a daily routine. Create a schedule to identify what can be done each hour of the day. Include things like, exercising, cooking meals, cleaning, reaching out to family and friends.
- Help them label their emotions. Putting a name to emotions can help to ease them. Check in with those you are supporting. Help them identify how they are feeling: overwhelmed? Frustrated? Sad? Confused? Acknowledging feelings can help them move forward.
- Help them balance their emotions with logic. Experiencing intense feelings is normal in a crisis, but leads to unhelpful, sometimes catastrophic, thoughts, which can fuel anxiety. Balancing emotions means looking at the facts and reminding others that things may be tough right now but pandemics end, economies rebound and people survive.
- Help them externalize their anxiety. Externalizing anxiety can help those suffering recognize how it affects them and how they can fight it. People may want to journal or participate in art therapy.

### Tips: Talking to others about COVID19

- Don't be afraid to discuss the coronavirus. Not talking about something can actually produce more anxiety. Use this opportunity to convey the facts.
- Be developmentally appropriate. Don't volunteer too much information, as this may be overwhelming. Instead, try to answer their questions. Do your best to answer honestly and clearly. It's okay if you can't answer everything; being available is what matters.
- Take your cues. Invite them to talk about what they have heard about the coronavirus, and how they feel. Give them ample opportunity to ask questions. You want to be prepared to answer (but not prompt) questions. Your goal is to avoid encouraging frightening fantasies.
- Deal with your own anxiety: If you notice that you are feeling anxious, take some time to calm down before trying to have a conversation or answer questions.
- Be reassuring. Hearing about the coronavirus on the news may be enough to make people seriously worry that they'll catch it. It's helpful to reassure them that the safety precautions that are being taken will help slow the spread of the Coronavirus.
- Focus on what you're doing to stay safe. An important way to reassure others is to emphasize the safety precautions that you are taking. People feel empowered when they know what to do to keep themselves safe.
- Keep talking. Tell others that you will continue to keep them updated as you learn more. Let them know that the lines of communication are open.

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## TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

### Ways to relieve anxiety during the pandemic:

- \* Listening to reliable news sources
- \* Limit the amount of news you watch or listen to
- \* Recognize what you can control; let go of what you cannot
- \* Develop an action plan
- \* Practice self care

### SELF CARE TIPS

- \* Get help early - the earlier one gets help, the easier and the less amount of time for recovery.
- \* Stay active - exercising is the body's natural way of combating stress and anxiety.
- \* Eat a healthy diet - Foods such as onions, mushrooms and garlic can help with anxiety.
- \* Avoid Caffeine - Caffeine stimulates the "flight or flight" response, which can make anxiety worse.
- \* Avoid alcohol and drugs - Some drugs and alcohol can cause anxiety either before or after use.
- \* Practice Deep Breathing - To trigger a relaxing response, breathe in 3 seconds then exhale for 6.
- \* Body therapies (yoga, Tai Chi, etc.)
- \* Check your thoughts - Are the thoughts you are experiencing good thoughts or bad thoughts? Write them down, this helps get what you are thinking, out of your head. Ask, can I absolutely know this is true? Try flipping your thoughts to see if the opposite is true or not. If you practice this, it will help train you to manage your mind.
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(Sources: <https://www.verywellmind.com/managing-coronavirus-anxiety-4798909>, 3/31/2020  
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PFQ email about talking to your kids about coronavirus