The Oak Orchard Health Behavioral Health team prepared this material with content from the American Psychological Association.

Anxiety and Depression and the Coronavirus: Coping!
Some thoughts from your Oak Orchard Health Behavioral Health Team

The coronavirus pandemic has caused anxiety and fear in many of us: fear of the unknown, of troubles that may lie ahead, and uncertainty in the very fabric of our day-to-day routines and lives. It is critical, however, that we manage our anxiety and fears, both for our own self-care as well as for others around us for whom we love, care for, and support. Consider the following self-care and coping strategies.

Focus on what you can do, not what you can't. Although it is true that our day-to-day lives have been interrupted and changed, there are things we can do to protect ourselves and our loved ones and to practice self-care.

- Know how to keep yourself, your family and friends, your community safe and healthy
- Increase social distancing; be three to six feet between those outside your home
- Decrease emotional distancing; get emotionally closer to those people you support and love
- Practice self-care: read, play, relax, music, deep breathe, meditate, journal, write an appreciation letter or a love letter, stay in contact with positive friends and family, practice your spiritual and/or religious beliefs, watch favorite TV series and movies, talk with your family and friends

Look for the positive perspective despite the fear. The platitude is “look for the silver linings.” Although our situation is serious and critical, crisis and challenge will bring out the positives in our humanity.

- We work together and support together in times of crisis
- This, too, shall pass

Maintain a daily routine. Sticking to your daily routine around the house will help give us a sense of normalcy in this otherwise non-normal time. Good routines and good habits will provide us some comfort.

- Get up in the morning and go to bed at your regular times
- Whatever your daily routine is, keep following it; getting dressed, personal hygiene, regular meal times, favorite TV or other shows, exercise
- Start a routine if you don’t already have one; regular activities at regular times helps us through the day

Manage your news. It is all too easy to get caught up in our new sources and binge watch TV news, social media, internet news, and paper news. Too much news and misinformation can make us more anxious and fearful. Use the following strategies to manage your news intake.

- Get accurate information at CDC.gov. Be skeptical of social media news. Go to the source.
- Limit your time and exposure to news – online, TV, social media. 30 minutes twice a day.

Know your resources. Remember, there are supports, accurate information, and helpers in the world. Reach out.

- The Center for Disease Control and Prevention; coronavirus.gov
- Crisis text support; text to 741741 and say “hello”
- Suicide prevention and emotional support; 1-800-273-8255
- New York State coronavirus medical hotline; 1-888-364-3065
Talking to Your Kids about Coronavirus. It is likely that children absorb the information and stress about the coronavirus from adults. Rather than leave this education up to siblings, media, and friends, parents and guardians play an important role in helping children and teens better understand what is happening and help them manage their own related worries or anxiety.

For all ages. Understand that this is new and stressful for your children. They will be looking to the adults in their lives to know how to handle this situation. If you are panicking, your child will start panicking.

- Do not try to downplay the virus. Although you do not want to cause your child unnecessary anxiety, they need to be aware of the severity of the situation in an age appropriate way.
- Hand washing is not the only way to prevent germs! Educate your children on the numerous ways they can keep themselves safe from germs.
- Validate what your child is feeling. Let them know that it is normal to be stressed in these situations and that it is healthy to talk about how they are feeling.
- In many cases, your child’s social life is now on hold. Make sure to keep your child stimulated at home and validate any feelings of disappointment.
- Remind your children to practice kindness. Talk about people who are working to stop the virus and keep everyone safe. It is comforting to know that people can remain compassionate in hard times.

Talking to elementary school children. School-age children will be more aware of what is going on. They have probably had discussions at school and with friends.

- Explain what happened while reassuring them that you will do everything to keep them healthy and safe.
- Children this age are also concerned about their own health, as well as that of family and friends. For example, they may have heard that kids are not impacted by coronavirus but that older people are, triggering fears about grandparents. Try to spend extra time together. This will provide extra reassurance.
- Do not be surprised if they are more irritable and touchy. Be extra patient.
- Limit exposure to media coverage.
- Try to continue normal home routines, especially at bedtime. If routines are disrupted, explain that this is part of the precautions grown-ups are taking to prevent people from getting sick.
- Ask them if they have any questions. If they do, stick to the facts and tell them what you know without exaggerating or overreacting.
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Talking to middle school children. Children this age will be very aware of what is going on. They have probably seen news coverage and discussed the virus at school or with friends.
- Talk to your middle school children and answer their questions. This will help you determine how much they know and may help you correct any misinformation they might have.
- Acknowledge any feelings of anxiety, worry, or panic.
- Children this age will be more interested in what might happen in the future. Stick to the facts and do not burden them with your own anxiety.
- Some children may act out scary feelings through misbehavior. Others may become more withdrawn. Pay attention to these cues and ask them to tell you about their feelings.
- Talk to your kids about what they see on TV or read online and help them understand which sources are reliable and which are not when it comes to information about the virus.
- Help guide your child’s worry into things they can do – like learning more about how to prevent the spread of the virus including washing hands and getting enough sleep. Use these resources to spark conversations.

Talking to high school children. High school students have probably had conversations with their peers and teachers. They might have fears about what this will mean for their own health, schooling, schedule or safety.
- Questions about health, the economy, and public policy are all legitimate issues for this age group. It is important to discuss these topics with them if they are interested.
- Acknowledge any worry, anxiety or fear they have and remind them that these feelings are normal.
- Help guide your teen’s worry into things they can do – like learning more about how to prevent the spread of the virus including washing hands, and getting lots of sleep.
- Some teens may want to block out the whole thing. It may appear that they do not care. This might be masking real worries. Ask questions and be ready to listen.
- Some teens may make jokes. Humor can be a way to help them cope, but discourage them from using humor as the only way to talk about the virus.
- Stick to the facts in your conversations and talk to your teens about what they see on TV or read online.