

Help for Health Care Providers during COVID-19

Psychologists routinely treat anxiety, but never have we had to *normalize* such high levels of anxiety. The reality is that we are all having a normal reaction (anxiety) to an abnormal event (COVID-19 pandemic). Health care providers are working around COVID-19 day in and day out, and face even greater challenges than the general public. This could have a negative and lasting impact on their mental health. Here are some common challenges faced by health care providers, and some tips for coping better and improving resilience.

Challenges	Example	Tips
Information overload	<i>I need to stay informed and learned new policies, rules, expectations.</i>	Reduce information overload by limiting social media and news. Use a watch/clock instead of phone. Decide how many times a day to listen to the news. Do not listen to it on the way home.
COVID-only conversations	<i>My family comes to me for credible information.</i>	Plan one virtual chat per week. Connect with those who understand. Set boundaries for others, and remind friends/family to have some non-COVID conversations
Fear and anxiety	<i>What if there's not enough PPE? What if I get my family sick? What if I have to self-quarantine?</i>	Anxiety is normal. Try to be more in the moment vs. in the future. Deal with problems only once they are problems. You feel a lot of pressure, so have some self-compassion because you're doing your best.
Difficulties accessing support system	<i>I'm just too tired at the end of the day. It's too much extra work.</i>	Practice expressing your needs and be honest about how you feel. It's OK to express fears. You don't have to protect those around you when you are the one seeking support.
Rules and responsibilities are different than public	<i>I must go to work, yet others are told to stay home.</i>	Sense of responsibility is heightened, and you might experience moral distress: talk this out as it can be hard to sort through in your own head.

Transitions/life plans interrupted	<i>I like to make plans and now it's impossible to. I was going to marry, divorce, graduate, start fertility treatment, go on a dream vacation... etc.</i>	Cancelled and delayed plans are happening for many people. Remind yourself to live in the "now" and take it one week at a time.
Difficulty staying present	<i>It's not easy being efficient and engaged when I'm feeling anxious and scared.</i>	At work: take a moment to stretch, breath, drink water. On the way home: listen to a song, focus on what you see out the window, and the feel of the steering wheel.
Increased conflict	<i>They're not listening: the hospital, my leader, my spouse, the general public.</i>	Recognize stress can lead to "Me vs. Them" mindset. Choose you battles and disengage when possible. Choose assertiveness over aggression. Spend some time refocussing on gratitude.
Problems sleeping	<i>I only have so much time to sleep, but then my mind won't stop</i>	Recognize that some sleep disruption is normal during times of stress. Limit screen time during rest and sleep preparation.
Emotional distress	<i>I can't stop crying I feel isolated and alone I'm exhausted from not sleeping I can't handle this feeling of panic I'd be fine if I didn't wake up tomorrow</i>	→ Seek some professional help → Call a local distress line → If feeling suicidal, go to your nearest hospital

To connect with a psychologist for a virtual appointment, please visit www.archways.ca