

# Stressed about COVID-19? Here's what can help

March 24 2020, by Joseph F McGuire

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As the new coronavirus continues to spread, so do anxieties about COVID-19, the illness it causes.

Joseph McGuire, Ph.D., M.A., a [child psychologist](#) with Johns Hopkins Medicine, shares some tips for you and your family on how to manage

coronavirus-related stress.

## **Prepare, don't panic**

From the news to social media, a lot of information is circulating about the new coronavirus. Some is true, but much of it may be misinformed or only partly correct, especially as information rapidly changes.

McGuire recommends using credible sources such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the World Health Organization to obtain up-to-date, scientific information about the illness and how to prevent it.

"Knowledge and preparation can help reduce feelings of panic," says McGuire. "Individuals can use information from trusted resources to develop personal plans of action."

## **Talk to your children**

Children may feel afraid or anxious about the new coronavirus. It's important to validate feelings of worry and not dismiss them outright, advises McGuire. He offers the following tips:

- Listen. After hearing their children out, parents can fill them in with correct information to calm their worries.
- Provide accurate information. Determine what your children already know about the virus and give them accurate information to reduce their risk of catching it. "This might include asking children about specific concerns or what they know about the coronavirus, and providing practical solutions to help them minimize any risk," explains McGuire.
- Focus on prevention. Keep discussions focused on preventive

actions. Set up and praise healthy hand-washing habits, and maintain regular routines for playtime, meals and other activities.

If someone in your family is sick with COVID-19 or another illness, it can be hard for [children](#) to understand. "This is where it is important to have an established plan to minimize the worries and keep focused on proactive solutions," says McGuire. "You know your child and how they learn best—make sure that your explanations are clear and helpful."

## **Be mindful**

Stress can affect the [immune system](#), but it is uncertain whether short-term stress makes someone more likely to catch the new coronavirus, says McGuire. Taking steps to reduce your stress in a healthy way is important.

One way to lessen worry is to ground yourself in the [present moment](#) through mindfulness. "Mindfulness is a great technique that can help reduce stress during challenging times," says McGuire. You can practice mindfulness by sitting quietly and focusing on your breathing and senses.

Another way to manage [stress](#) is by limiting computer screen time and media exposure. "While keeping informed about [current events](#) is important, too much attention can cause problems," explains McGuire. "Setting boundaries can prevent feeling overwhelmed by the situation.

"It is important to not let fear control your life."

Provided by Johns Hopkins University

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