

7 mental health coping tips for life in the time of COVID-19

June 2 2020, by Linda E. Carlson



Stay in touch with family and friends while practising physical distancing.
Credit: Unplash

Half of Canadians reported a worsening of their mental health due to the COVID-19 pandemic [in an April poll](#). In Alberta, a similar government

poll found [74 percent of Albertans](#) felt the pandemic had negatively affected their mental health.

These stats are not surprising, because a pandemic is a perfect "anxiety stew." It has [all the ingredients that go into causing worry](#) even in people who are not typically anxiety-prone. These include: uncontrollability, uncertainty and high consequence.

Besides following public health guidelines, there is little any one individual can do to control the spread of the virus or the magnitude of the pandemic. How this will unfold locally and around the world is highly uncertain, and there is no shortage of speculation (much of it not based on evidence). Humans dislike uncertainty and tend to "fill-in-the-blanks" in situations like this, which often results in highly improbable worst-case scenarios.

Finally, the consequences of not getting it right are high: you or family members contracting the virus, potential sickness and untold deaths worldwide.

Add to this job loss and financial strain, [social isolation](#) and loneliness, close contact that may lead to arguments or abuse, stress of working from home while being responsible for childcare and home-schooling, and worrying about far away or elderly family members. It is no wonder there are reports of escalating [mental health](#) problems. In these circumstances we need to look out for one another and do what we can to ease the burden.

It's a tough situation, but there are actions individuals can take to cope with the circumstances and ease the suffering.

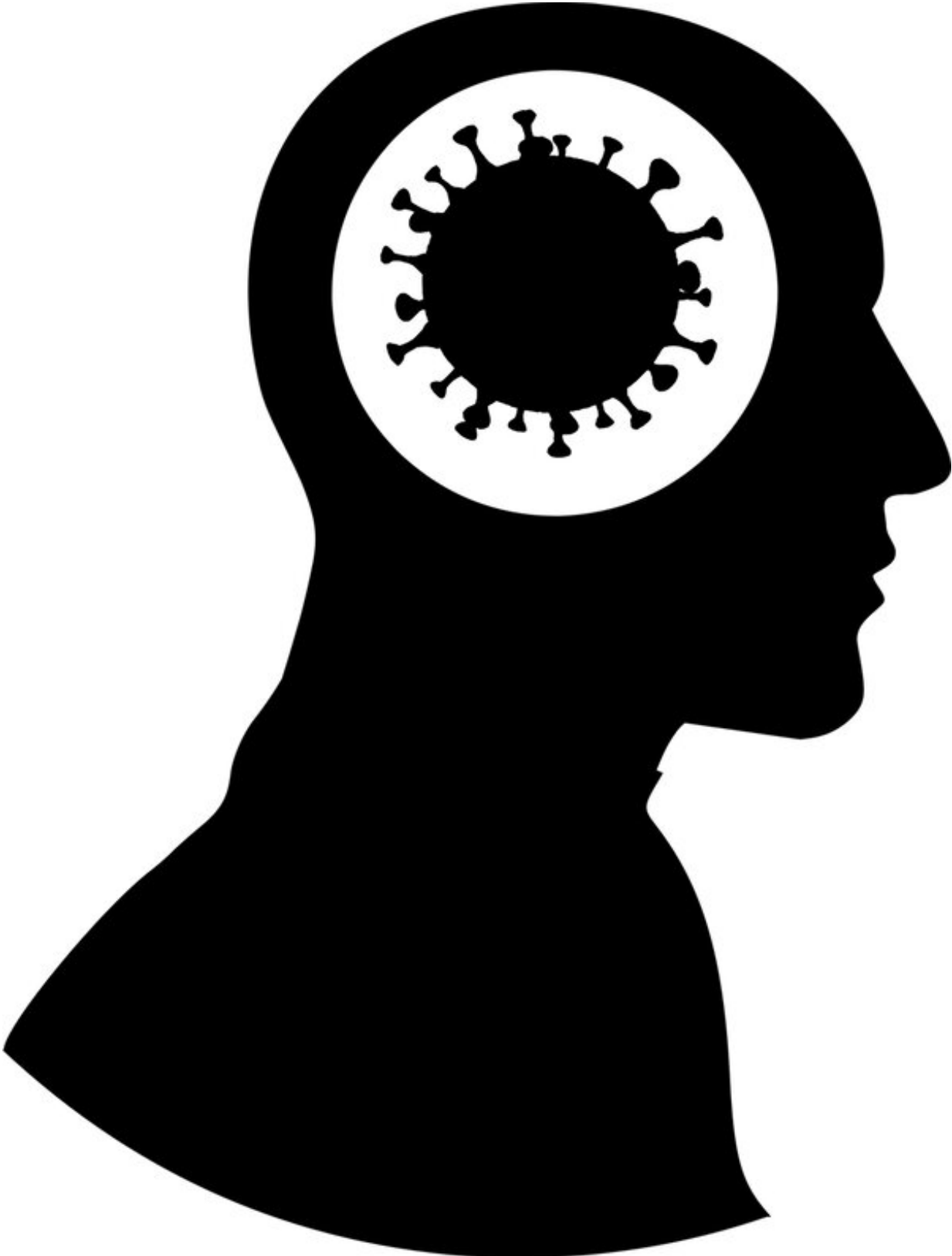
1. Be kind to yourself (and others)

Living through this pandemic is tough. Many of us have not been in this situation before. We have no rules or experience or role models to turn to. We are making things up as we go along. You may be feeling lost, confused, anxious and worried. So is everyone else. These are all totally normal emotions. Allow yourself these feelings, [have compassion and patience for your own struggles](#).

Don't try to push away your difficult feelings or force yourself to "think positive," which is not a healthy coping mechanism, as it denies the reality of your current experience. All emotions are OK, even the tough ones, and trying to stuff them down and replace them with "positive thinking" is an [impossible and unhealthy task](#).

2. Manage your feelings

Find a safe and controlled way to acknowledge and express your difficult emotions, for example by writing them down in a journal or letter, talking to a friend, getting physical exercise or practicing yoga or [meditation](#). If your symptoms are severe and interfering with your ability to function, contact a [mental health professional](#). Above all, think about how you would respond to a friend struggling in this situation, and apply that same compassion and advice to yourself; then turn it towards others.



The uncontrollability, uncertainty and potentially high consequences of COVID-19 can cause anxiety even in people who aren't prone to it. Credit: Pixabay

3. Be realistic, lower your expectations

It is not realistic to think you can do it all: homeschool your kids; work full-time from home; maintain a perfect (clean, orderly) household; and take care of yourself and others. The [drawbacks of perfectionism are well known](#).

Instead, try prioritizing one or two things, and let the others slide a little. Leave the teaching to the teachers and focus on parenting. Take time out for self-care. Remind yourself not to worry if you let work projects slide a little, the laundry and dishes pile up for a while or the kids get a little extra screen time. You'll get to it all when you can. Focus on your high priority items and don't expect too much of yourself.

4. Make the best of the situation

Here you need to distinguish between things you can control and things you cannot. In particular, you are totally in control of your response to the situation. Accepting the uncertainties of the future, while at the same time identifying [areas in your life you can control](#) is a good place to start.

Can you go out for a walk in the fresh air and sunshine? Then do that every day. If your kids are around more now without school and other activities, can you try to involve them in household chores and teach them how to cook and do laundry? Are you able to catch up on sleep a bit? Our society is so chronically sleep-deprived, this is a great

opportunity to get some needed rest, and the [benefits are myriad](#).

Can you think of ways to help others in your neighborhood? Volunteer whatever skills you have if time permits; [volunteers are happier and may even live longer](#).

5. Keep your routines

Catching up on sleep is great, but it would be better not to sleep until noon every day. Keep your schedules and routines much as they were before, with modifications to suit your new routine. Have set times to [work, set times for meals, activities and a relatively regular bedtime](#).

Don't drink much more alcohol than usual, and cut back if you're having more than a couple of drinks per day.

6. Keep physical—not social—distance from others

It's easy to become socially isolated when we are advised to keep away from others, especially for people who live alone. Make a special effort to keep in touch with family, friends and colleagues though email, FaceTime, video conferencing and plain old phone calls. Make appointments with your friends to meet for a call just as you would for in-person get-togethers. Have Zoom parties and share some food or drinks with your friends and catch up on a regular basis. The [health benefits of social support](#) are many.

7. Stick to reliable sources for the facts (and skip the dross)

Pick one or two sources of information that you trust, such as Health Canada or reliable news sources. If [social media](#) makes you feel anxious and angry, avoid the threat of "social contagion" and take a break. There

are many [negative side-effects of social media consumption](#), so consider limiting your scrolling time to 20 minutes or so, once or twice a day, or skip the social media altogether.

We can learn a lot from slowing down and taking care of one another. Once this passes, take the opportunity to carefully consider what you really want to add back into your life. Maybe this slower pace isn't such a bad thing. Maybe getting back to "full speed ahead" is not the best choice for you or for our society. Before diving right back in as society begins to reopen, we need to mindfully contemplate what life lessons we can take away from this extraordinary time.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: 7 mental health coping tips for life in the time of COVID-19 (2020, June 2) retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-06-mental-health-coping-life-covid-.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.