

Dear Parents and Families,

May is National Mental Health Awareness Month. As counselors, we cannot think of a better time to focus on our families' mental health. A big part of this is being able to better manage our emotional stress. We found the following article to have several helpful tips.

### **Managing Stress During COVID-19**

To say we as a world are under a lot of stress right now is an understatement. Every time you turn on the TV or check your phone there seems to be another reason for your stress level to increase.

Some level of stress is good — it can help us rethink that extra trip to the grocery store when we went yesterday or reconsider the in-person check-in we had planned with a friend when we've been asked to stay home. Stress can help keep us safe.

It can also have negative impacts on our wellbeing. Stress can impact our ability to concentrate and make decisions, may leave us feeling angry, irritable or out of control, or perhaps manifest as a headache, stomachache or low energy. Understanding our body's signs of stress is the first step to knowing what to do about it.

#### **How has your body been letting you know that you are getting out of balance, heading into stress?**

Often, we adjust our habits related to caring for our body in response to stress. What patterns do you notice in the following three areas of your health habits?

#### **What are you noticing about your eating habits when you are stressed?**

#### **What are you noticing about your physical exercise habits when you are stressed?**

#### **How about your sleep pattern?**

If we know we eat more unhealthy foods while stressed, how can we plan healthy snacks and limit our access to unhealthy ones? If we know stress leaves us wanting to sit on the couch all day, how can we set up a routine that infuses movement or even set an alarm every hour to remind us to get up and move around? If we find we can't fall asleep as easily, how can we start our bedtime routine earlier to allow for more time to wind down, possibly eliminating media that causes stress before bed. Knowing how our bodies respond to stress can help us best plan for how to manage it.

When making your stress management plan, consider these five basic tips provided by [The Cleveland Clinic](#) on how to manage stress during COVID-19.

- 1. Exercise regularly.** Movement helps us feel better and remain positive. While we're restricted from attending gyms and yoga classes, we can still go for walks, runs and play outside. And YouTube provides lots of free virtual options for workouts at home.



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2. **Maintain a healthy diet.** Our diet and mood are so closely linked. When we can put healthy foods into our body, it helps our energy level, creativity and mood.
3. **Take a break.** Find ways to take a break from the constant COVID-19 coverage and stress of living in today's conditions. Start a new hobby, read a fictional novel, reorganize a part of your home, or work on a home project you've been putting off.
4. **Connect with others.** Connection with others can help us reduce our stress level and provides opportunities for joy, laughter and fun. Do a coffee date with a friend over video chat or organize a virtual book club.
5. **Get sleep and rest.** Stress becomes even more overwhelming when we don't get enough sleep. Maintaining a routine that allows us to get the recommended amount of sleep will help us manage the stress ahead of us.

After you have created a plan, take some time to tell a friend or family member about it. Soliciting help from others can help you stick to your plan and gives you another reason to practice connection with others.

Something equally important as eating right, exercising, and sleeping is our ability to practice self-compassion when our strategies don't go as planned. When we choose the cookies over the carrots or the extra TV show over the run, let's give ourselves a break and tell ourselves we'll try again next time.

To view this article and other helpful articles on resilience during this time, please visit <https://compassionresiliencetoolkit.org/staying-resilient-during-covid-19/>.

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