

Views from VanDeWalle

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Coping in Changing Times

By Dr. Sandra Frerichs, Nebraska Extension 4-H Youth Development

How can someone like me cope with something so unexpected? As I searched for this answer, I read recommendations for different groups of people: individuals living alone, families, children with special needs, empty nesters, and seniors. I found suggestions that can help all of us cope.

Create a routine.

Consistency and structure may be calming during times of stress. This is true whether we are creating a work and learning schedule for the whole family, or creating routines for ourselves when we are home alone. Use routine to create reasonable expectations for yourself and others.

- Build off familiar routines from school or work. Create cues for the start and end of each day. For example, take a quick walk around the block or in the backyard before starting work.
- Healthy routines include adequate sleep, healthy meals, exercise, and time for social interactions.
- Plan to work or learn in bursts. Children need learning bursts of 15 to 45 minutes. Adults can focus longer, but still need regular breaks. Stretch for 5 minutes every 20 minutes if sitting or get up and walk around for 10 minutes.

Check-in with yourself and others.

It is important to take time to check in with yourself and with friends and family. When connecting with others follow these tips.

- Acknowledge feelings. For young children use a feeling chart to help them express themselves. Also, remember to acknowledge your own feelings. Avoid passing judgement on yourself and other. There is no right or wrong way to feel.
- Treat yourself with as much gentleness as you treat others.
- Resist the need to solve other's problems. Ask, "How can we work together to make this experience more bearable?" Then be quiet and listen.
- Encourage yourself and others to be mindful of the present. Avoid worrying about "what ifs."

Try something new.

With so many events we can't control, it is important to focus on what we can control. Trying new activities can give a sense of accomplishment. You may discover new coping strategies that you can use for the rest of your life.

- Don't try to do everything, but do try new things. For example, start a new arts or crafts project, make a new recipe, or read a book for enjoyment.
- Try yoga or a new exercise video with a spirit of adventure and fun.



- Try new ways to connect with friends and family like connecting through video calls, virtual play dates, or writing letters.

Use your network.

- Remember to use your social network. Friends, family, neighbors and co-workers can help you cope. Make plans to celebrate birthdays, holidays, and other special events in new ways.
- Use your network to find opportunities for learning, traveling, or playing online.
- Use your network for support. Would your child be more motivated to do his homework on a video chat with a friend? Would a virtual story time with grandparents at 5:00 help you get supper ready?

During this time of unexpected and unprecedented events, remember it is okay not be the perfect parent or family member, employee, or person. Simply, don't expect perfection from yourself or others. Healthy coping skills will help you and your family navigate this experience. More information and resources on coping can be found at <https://disaster.unl.edu/families> or by contacting your local Nebraska Extension office.

Resources to Support Coping in Changing Times

Child Mind Institute provides daily tips and a collection of resources for parents on coping during COVID-19, including resources for supporting children with special needs.

<https://childmind.org/coping-during-covid-19-resources-for-parents/>

The Center for Disease Control has resources for Daily Life and Coping in response to COVID-19 that cover both physical and mental health concerns. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/index.html>

Child Trends has brought together a great set of resources on promoting resiliency in response to the COVID19 pandemic. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/ways-to-promote-childrens-resilience-to-the-covid-19-pandemic>