

COVID-19 Fatigue: How to Better Support our Communities and Ourselves

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Atlantic Health System
Behavioral Health

COVID-19 Fatigue: How to Better Support our Communities and Ourselves

Discuss the impacts of the pandemic and how they affected us

Tips to acceptance and learning to live with uncertainty

Understand stress related disorders, compassion fatigue and burnout

Tips and techniques to combat stress and burnout in our communities

Importance of self care

Know where to get help



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Emerging from the Pandemic

Signs of “normalcy” are beginning to emerge as the coronavirus pandemic wanes, the states are rolling back restrictions and warm weather is luring people outside.

But what that normal looks like may not be the same for everyone.

Local health officials continue to encourage people to get vaccinated to help inch the community toward herd immunity. Moving forward also means taking stock in how the pandemic has affected people’s well-being.

Let's take a look back so we can move forward.....



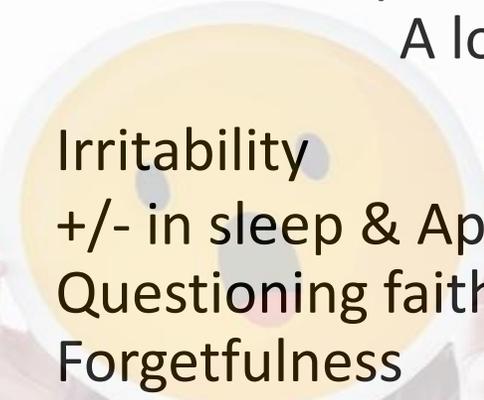
LOSSES FROM COVID-19

- Loved ones
- Employment
- Routine
- Regular gatherings with friends/family
- In-person School
- Sense of identity
- Future plans
- Sense of safety/security
- Predictability
- Freedom
- Control
- Income
- Health
- Loss of physical touch (hugs/handshakes)

Traditions whether they are milestone gatherings (birthday, anniversaries), holidays (thanksgiving) or others (marriages, graduations, etc.)

COVID-19 Elicited Grief, Loss & Difficult Emotions

We experienced a loss. A loss of control, a loss of our expectations.
A loss of what once was. Common reactions include:



Irritability

+/- in sleep & Appetite

Questioning faith or religion

Forgetfulness

Loneliness



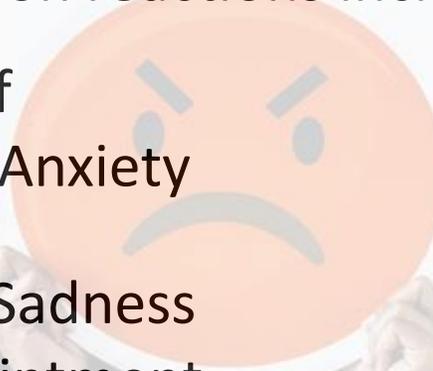
Disbelief

Panic & Anxiety

Fear

Grief & Sadness

Disappointment



Feeling “numb”

Denial

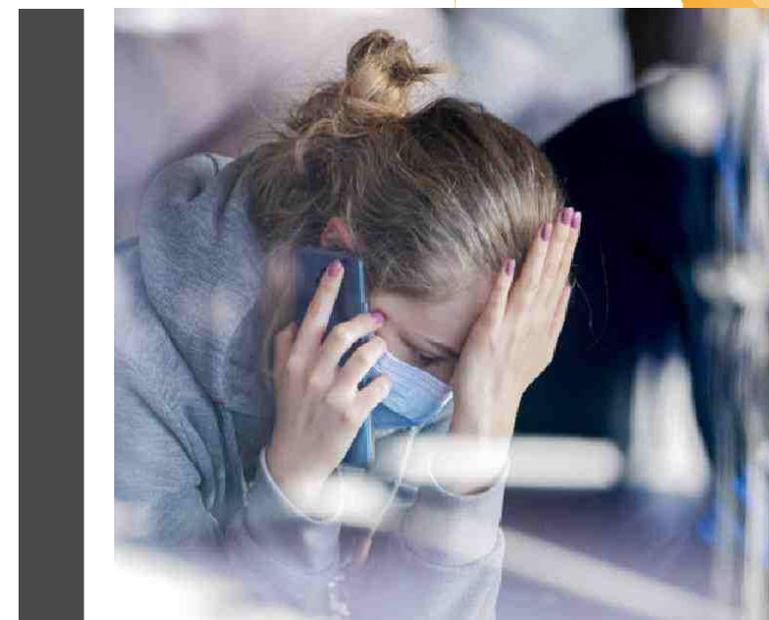
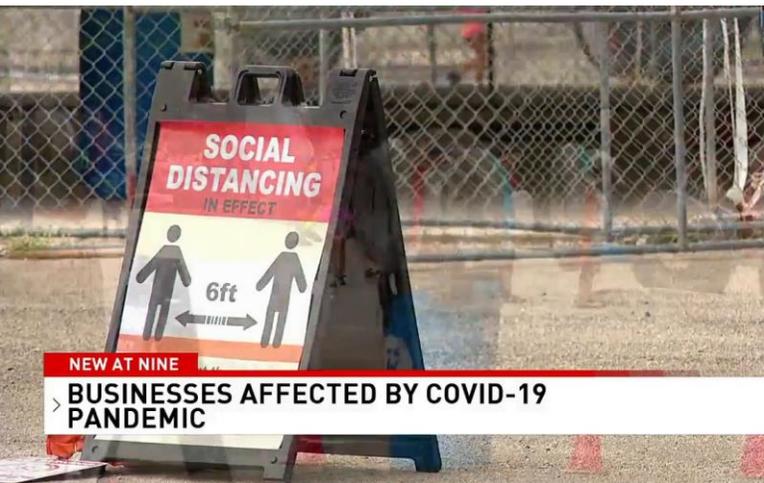
Confusion

Becoming Obsessive

Guilt

Each person will react differently to grief and loss, and that is OK and expected.

It is important to reflect and understand how you have reacted, mentally and physically and to know that it is perfectly normal to not be feeling completely better or the same right now. It will take time to heal and allow emotions to settle into what is comfortable to you once again. Some may be able to do so on their own and others may need some support.



Understand How the Pandemic Has Impacted You

Some people were impacted by physical responses such as loss of appetite and sleep disturbances to headaches, nausea, and gastrointestinal issues. Some people were left with a feeling of general weakness, and a lack of endurance or ability to concentrate.

For others the impact was more emotional. Maybe people had a strong reaction to mask-wearing, or strain from the inconsistency between working and schooling from home and in person, and loss of contact and routine.

For those who lost loved ones or fell ill themselves, there may be a complicated emotional stress reaction tied to trauma.

Understanding your personal impact will help you develop your path to healing. This is also an important thing to understand when working in the community. People will be in different stages of healing.

**When we
name it, and
feel the
feelings, it
empowers
us.**

"When you name it, you feel it and it moves through you. Emotions need motion. It's important we acknowledge what we go through. . . Your work is to feel your sadness and fear and anger whether or not someone else is feeling something. Fighting it doesn't help because your body is producing the feeling. If we allow the feelings to happen, they'll happen in an orderly way, and it empowers us. Then we're not victims."

-Scott Berinato

Accept What You Can Control as Restrictions are Lifted

Learning to Live With Uncertainty

It is important for us to accept the reality as it is. Our lives have been and will be different, what will the future look like? We will be dealing with uncertainty for some time.

Acceptance is empowerment. It gives us the admission ticket for moving forward and making choices.

Acceptance doesn't mean that you agree with what is happening. It means that you accept what is out of your control, so that you can focus and manage what is in your control. This is key.

Humans are inherently resilient. Look at what we have survived so far this year!!

- We can do hard things.
- We can make choices within limitations.
- We can take actions to manage what is in our control.



Arthur Frank on *Letting Go of Control*

“One lesson I have earned from illness is that giving up the idea of control by either myself or my doctors, made me more content. What I recommend, to both medical staff and ill persons, is to recognize the wonder of the body rather than try to control it.”

"Wondering at the body means trusting it and acknowledging its control. I do not mean that we should stop trying to change the direction the body is taking. I certainly did all I could and value all that my physicians did, to use treatment to change the direction my body was taking. Wonder and treatment are complimentary; wonder is an attitude in which treatment can best proceed."

"Wonder is almost always possible; control may not be. If the ill person can focus on the ideal of wonder in place of control, then living in a diseased body can recover some of its joy."

(At the Will of the Body, 59)



Stress-Related Disorders, Compassion Fatigue, and Burnout

For loved ones, coworkers, neighbors and others in contact with victims of COVID-19, that have been directly impacted by the virus, they may have experienced it as trauma.

Even for those who have not been directly affected by COVID-19, the disruption to routines, work, constantly changing expectations and rules, vigilance for one's own health and the health of those they care for, the experiences evoke intense stress.

The weeks of lockdown and restrictions that millions went through brought emotional and psychological challenges that few had ever experienced.

We are all connected, so in watching others suffer, we all suffer. In this particular case, the unknown nature of the virus has led us to experience a heightened state of awareness and anxiety for a long time...and despite the re-openings, we still do not know when the pandemic will fully resolve.



Stress-Related Disorders, Compassion Fatigue, and Burnout

Being in a constant state of high alert and uncertainty is exhausting.

The COVID-19 pandemic has meant that as a species we have collectively gone into a form of flight-or-fight mode, an evolutionary self-defense mechanism that can kick in when faced with a crisis. But what happens when that crisis lasts for months with no end in sight? For many, this protracted emergency is resulting in pandemic fatigue.

10 Signs of *Pandemic Fatigue*

1. You're not as diligent about wearing a mask or washing your hands.
2. You're less careful about social distancing than you were.
3. You're getting enough sleep but still feel exhausted.
4. You're feeling more impatient and more irritable.
5. Things are upsetting you that previously hadn't.
6. You're feeling stressed by tasks or situations you typically manage well.
7. You're not engaging in things you used to find enjoyable.
8. You're feeling hopeless about the future.
9. Your consumption of alcohol, substances, or food has increased.
10. You're finding it harder to focus and concentrate.



What You Can Do to Reduce the *Impact* of Pandemic Fatigue

Recognizing the signs of pandemic fatigue and understanding techniques to combat it can lead to meaningful conversations about mental health and self care.

- Masking, social distancing and hand hygiene continue to be the few ways in which people can assert control in the situation. Doing these things will make people feel more empowered to keep themselves and their family/community safer.
- Instead of turning to food or substances to manage difficult feelings, encourage people to identify and name the feelings they are trying to numb.
- Speak to friends and loved ones who might be struggling with similar negative feelings to get validation and support and to share coping strategies.
- Engaging in activities you used to enjoy is a good way to feel a sense of normalcy and reconnect to your sense-of-self. It can also be a good de-stressor that will then help concentration and focus.
- Closer connections with others will nourish you emotionally and buffer you against unavoidable stressors and challenging circumstances.



Taking Care of Yourself

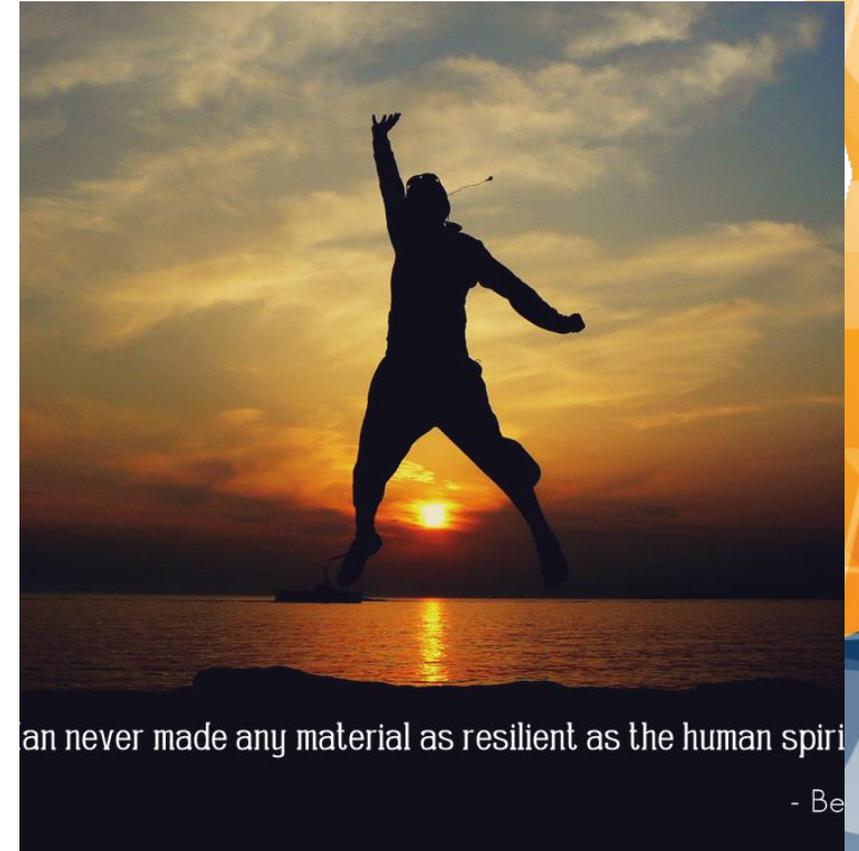
After World War II, President Harry S. Truman called public health nurses “one of the most important groups of health workers in the country.”¹ Today, as we wage a different kind of war, one against the coronavirus disease, the work of you, the public health professionals is more vital than ever.

Providing care to others during the COVID-19 pandemic can lead to stress, anxiety, fear, and other strong emotions. How you cope with these emotions can affect your well-being, the care you give to others while doing your job, and the well-being of the people you care about outside of work. During this pandemic, it is critical that you recognize what stress looks like, take steps to build your resilience and cope with stress, and know where to go if you need help.

- Recognize the symptoms of stress you may be experiencing.
- Feeling irritation, anger, or denial
- Feeling uncertain, nervous, or anxious
- Feeling helpless or powerless
- Lacking motivation
- Feeling tired, overwhelmed, or burned out
- Feeling sad or depressed
- Having trouble sleeping
- Having trouble concentrating

Tips to Cope and Enhance Your Resilience at Work

- Communicate with your coworkers, supervisors, and employees about job stress.
 - Talk openly about how the pandemic is affecting your work.
 - Identify factors that cause stress and work together to identify solutions.
 - Ask about how to access mental health resources in your workplace.
- Remind yourself that everyone is in an unusual situation with limited resources.
- Identify and accept those things which you do not have control over.
- Recognize that you are performing a crucial role in fighting this pandemic and that you are doing the best you can with the resources available.
- Increase your sense of control by keeping a consistent daily routine when possible — ideally one that is similar to your schedule before the pandemic.
 - Try to get adequate [sleep](#).
 - Make time to eat healthy meals.
 - Take breaks during your shift to rest, stretch, or check in with supportive colleagues, coworkers, friends and family.



an never made any material as resilient as the human spirit

- Be

Tips to Care for Yourself One Small Way Each Day

**Self-Care is
a priority and
necessity
-not a luxury-
in the work
that we do.**



As front-line workers, it is critical to care for yourself! Healthy Public Health Professionals make you, your loved ones, and your community stronger!

Keep home life normal

As soon as you step foot through your front door after work, try to leave your work head at the door. It can be easy to feel like you should be constantly worrying, or preparing and planning for your next day, but instead allow yourself to maintain a home-life that's as close to normal as possible. Switch off phones, enjoy dinner with your partner, run yourself a bath or watch a film you've been wanting to watch for ages. Set aside your weekends or days off (where possible) for family time, lie-ins, and pampering yourself. Letting yourself enjoy your home life is key to keeping your work-related stress and anxiety at bay.

Stay away from the media

During such scary times, it's natural to feel like you want to stay abreast of every little piece of news that's coming in. However, with your work already being incredibly stressful and centered around everything that's going on, give yourself permission to switch off from the news. Any information that's important for you and your job will be given to you by your management as soon as necessary.

Allow yourself to have fun

It can be hard not to feel guilty for enjoying yourself when so much is happening around you, particularly since you work in a role surrounded by difficult situations day in and day out. However, give yourself a break. It's ok to laugh!! Having fun and enjoying yourself will actually help you do your job better, as you'll be more positive.

Stay social

Stay connected with your loved ones and friends as much as possible. Speak to them about how you're feeling and enjoy talking about something mundane and silly to take your mind off things too. It can help you feel more balanced and sharing the burden of what you're dealing with will help take some of the pressure off you. Separate work time and downtime.

Add mindfulness to your day *in only 10-15 minutes*

Here are 4 ways to add mindfulness to you schedule, each way only takes 10-15 minutes of your time:

*Remember, consistency is key.



Created and presented by
Harvard Health Publications.

Create Personal Rituals

"Every day, usually in the mid-afternoon, I have a little tea ceremony at my desk. I get my four-cup tea press, put on a kettle to boil, and meticulously add the leaves and put the press, my tea cup, a little sweetener (usually honey) and a spoon on a bamboo tray that fits nicely on my desk while I work. When the water boils, I take its temperature, pour the water over the leaves, set a timer on my phone, stir, and bring the whole tray to my desk. I relax while it steeps - usually just watching the steam rising off of it. When the timer goes off, I press the tea, pour my first cup, and go back to work. It's elaborate, but it's one of my little rituals that helps me disengage for a bit—something meditative that helps me get through the afternoon."

[How Personal Rituals Can Improve Your Health \(and How to Build Them\) \(lifelife.com\)](https://lifelife.com/how-personal-rituals-can-improve-your-health-and-how-to-build-them/)



Being Mindful of Our Spirit

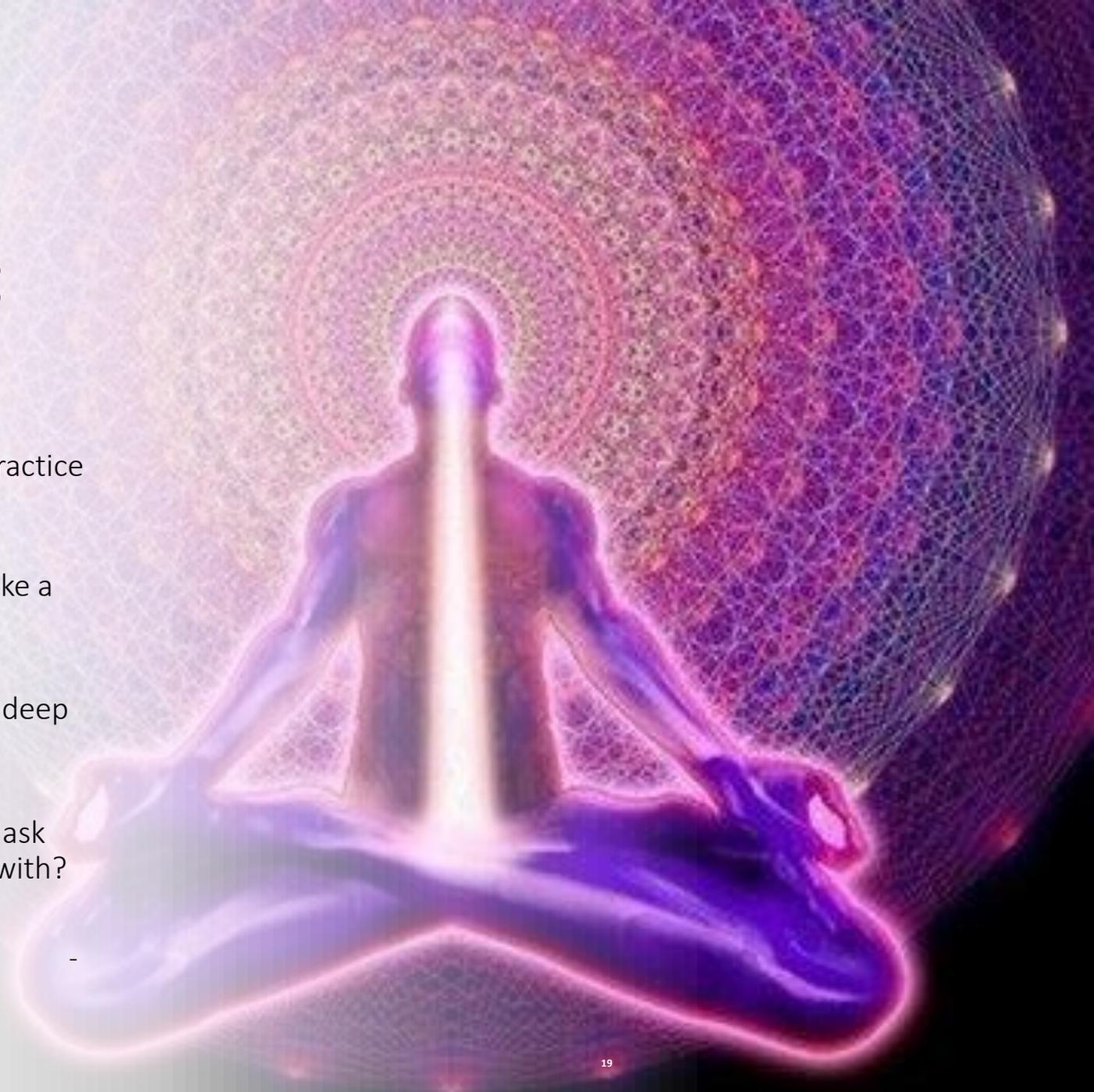
Coming into the Present - Add a 10–15-minute mindfulness practice to your day

Practicing Gratitude - At the beginning and end of your day, take a distinct moment to think of one thing you are grateful for.

Setting a daily intention – When your day begins, take several deep breaths, and ask yourself, “What is my intention today?”

Letting go - At the end of the day, before sleep overtakes you, ask yourself, “What can I put down? What am I ready to be done with? What don’t I need to carry with me for another day?”

Laura van Dernoot Lipsky, *Trauma Stewardship*



Self- Compassion Break

1. Put both hands on your heart, pause, and feel their warmth.
2. Breathe deeply in and out.
3. Speak these words to yourself, out loud or silently, in a warm and caring tone:

This is a moment of suffering.

Suffering is a part of life.

May I be kind to myself in this moment.

May I give myself the compassion I need.



Know where to go if you need help

- If you're concerned that you or someone in your household may harm themselves or someone else:
 - [National Suicide Prevention Lifelineexternal icon](#)
 - Toll-free number 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)
 - The [online Lifeline Crisis Chatexternal icon](#) is free and confidential. You'll be connected to a skilled, trained counselor in your area.
 - [National Domestic Violence Hotlineexternal icon](#)
 - Call 1-800-799-7233 and TTY 1-800-787-3224
- If you feel overwhelmed with emotions like sadness, depression, or anxiety:
 - [Disaster Distress Helplineexternal icon](#)
 - Call or text 1-800-985-5990
- If you need to find treatment or mental health providers in your area:
 - [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\) Find Treatmentexternal icon](#)



Atlantic Health System

Behavioral Health

**Atlantic Behavioral Health ACCESS Center
(888) 247-1400**

Atlantic Behavioral Health Crisis Intervention Services 24-hour hotlines

Chilton Medical Center: 973-831-5078

97 West Parkway, Pompton Plains, NJ 07444

Morristown Medical Center: 973-540-0100

100 Madison Avenue, Morristown, NJ 07960

Overlook Medical Center: 908-522-3586

99 Beauvoir Avenue, Summit, NJ 07901

Newton Medical Center: 973-383-0973

175 High Street, Newton, NJ 07860

Hackettstown Medical Center: 908-454-5141

653 Willow Grove Street, Hackettstown, NJ 07840

For more information about Atlantic Health System, visit atlantichealth.org.



Helping You Be Your Best

Empower yourself with resources to overcome the challenges of Coronavirus

It's important to find support if you're feeling heightened stress and uncertainty brought on by the coronavirus (COVID-19). myStrength's web and mobile tools are safe, secure and personalized – just for you.

Choose from over a dozen activities, including:



Strategies to manage heightened stress



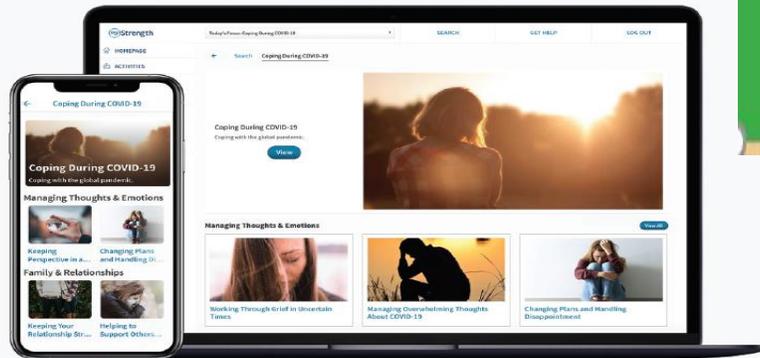
Tips for parenting during challenging times



Ideas to manage social isolation



Other tools and information for emotional support



Register for Your **FREE** Personal Wellness Account

SIGN UP TODAY

1. Visit www.mystrength.com and click on "Sign Up."
2. Enter the **Access Code** marked below.
3. Complete the myStrength sign-up process and personal profile.

BHCovidSupport

Go Mobile! Download the myStrength mobile app, log in, and get started today.



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References

- Laura van Dernoot Lipsky, *Trauma Stewardship*
- [How Personal Rituals Can Improve Your Health \(and How to Build Them\) \(lifehacker.com\)](#)
 - [10 Signs You Have Pandemic Fatigue and How to Cope | Psychology Today](#)
 - [COVID-19 and Workplace Fatigue: Lessons Learned and Mitigation Strategies | Blogs | CDC](#)