

Your Mental Health & Well-being during COVID-19 and under lockdown

A pandemic is a very stressful event for individuals and communities. It's normal to feel some stress and anxiety. It's also very common for people to display great resiliency during times of crisis.

We should remember that this is absolutely the time to lean on each other. Even if we can't be close physically, we need to stay close emotionally. So, while you're staying in, stay in touch with each other, and reach out if you need support.

UNICEF Staff Counsellors put together some resources and suggestions to help support your mental health at this time of uncertainty.

What can I expect to experience?

- **Fear and anxiety**
- **Loneliness, boredom, sadness**
- **Anger, frustration or irritability**

It's ok to feel a range of emotions, and distress is normal in this time

It is important to decide how you are going to position yourself amidst a crisis.

Where you focus time and energy grows that reality. Be aware and up to date, but also consciously look for opportunity in the new reality.

Let's be kind to yourself and others.

Some people are better at dealing with uncertainties than others, so don't beat yourself up if your tolerance for unpredictability is lower than a friend's. Kindness makes us and others feel better.

Stigmatization

Fear can make us self-focused sometimes and we can hurt others through stigma. It is important to respect each other especially now, and to show care for those both infected and affected.

Remember that Preparedness facilitates Resilience.

Resilience is the capacity to engage and disengage: we need to figure out how to engage with the issues arising from the COVID-19 when we need to, and how to disengage in order to give ourselves time to rest and recover from the stress, so that we don't burnout! Keep this in mind during your day.

It is likely that we will be living with Unpredictability and Uncertainty for some time – this will become the 'new normal'.

- **Focus on what's in your control vs. what's outside of your control:**

In our control	Out of control
taking the measures to protect ourselves and our family	who the virus will hit
the amount of media we follow and if this consumes our conversation	actions that govt decide to take
having a wellbeing plan for indoor and outdoor activities	the weather; it may rain for 3 days

- **Many good things have *not* been cancelled.**
- **Assess what is in your control, and then act.**

Reflect on past successes. Get confident about your coping and adapting skills.

Take your own advice.

Ask yourself: If a friend came to me with this worry, what would I tell her/him? Imagining your situation from the outside can often provide perspective and fresh ideas.

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Ask for support.

Your Staff Counsellor is there for you. If you're having trouble managing stress and coping with uncertainty on your own, ask for help. Psychologists are experts in helping people develop healthy ways to cope with stress.

Create a wellbeing plan using some of these tips

Stick to routines or develop sustainable new ones

Establish routines to give your days and weeks some comforting structure. Even if you're working from home, try and get up at the time you usually do (the rhythm your body is used to). Have a shower, get dressed, etc.! (You can be in your casual clothes...but don't fall into pyjama days).

Structure work time at home

Keep your structured working hours or adapt officially with your supervisor based on new situation. Discuss boundaries with family (plan with spouse who will take which child care shift).

Stay connected to colleagues, family and friends

Many people isolate themselves when they're stressed or worried. But social support is important, so reach out to family and friends.

Seek support from those you trust. Reach out to others.

Talk about how you are doing – ask for what you need.

Buddy up with work colleagues in 2 or 3s.

Check on each other – remember those who live alone and may have just moved to the country.

Teams should have a set time in the morning and end of day to check in.

Engage in hobbies and things that you enjoy

Engage in hobbies that you love! Be playful - there is karaoke and The Fitness Marshall on YouTube 😊. There are books to be read. It is important to **distract** yourself and take a break from thinking about the current hardship if you can.

Monitor media intake

Limit exposure to news – a constant flow of messages will increase your sense of threat and danger, thus raising your level of anxiety. Try to limit your check-ins and avoid the news during vulnerable times of day, such as right before bedtime. Help your children do this too

Beware of Fake news:

- Can cause panic
- Can cause stigma
- Can be very convincing

We can play a role in spreading accurate facts. In conversations with your colleagues, know when to walk away; change conversations – ask to speak of a different topic

Monitor your moods, and be proactive

Anxiety can trigger your flight or fight stress response & release a flood of hormones like adrenaline into your system – which can weaken your immune system.

Self-Awareness Scale is a tool used to identify your own level of stress on a scale from 1 (very relaxed) to 10 (extremely stressed), and note whether you're headed towards more or less stress in your current situation. Here's how you can use the Self-Awareness Scale:

First, you simply **check in with yourself and give a number to your stress level**. Am I at a 4, a 5? An 8?

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This simple labeling helps you to pause and identify your stress level.

Seeing where you are gives a chance to **Be With any experiences** that are challenging, or to **Work With the stressors** in any way you need—like getting away from the situation, talking to a friend, taking deep breaths, etc.

Use the Worry Window

Consider writing your worries/concerns during an allocated worry window (15 min-20 min), once or twice a day. In this time, you give yourself and your mind permission to think of all that worries you. When it is outside the worry window, you direct yourself to postpone the worry to the window.

Take advantage of a free app –**Worry Time**

Practice self-care

Each day, aim to complete each of the following:

- **Mindfulness:** Sit restfully for five minutes with eyes closed tuning into your body and slowly breathing. Actively meditate by walking and feeling the sensations in your body or hearing the sounds around you. Take advantage of HEADSPACE app – free for all UNICEF staff.
- **Exercise:** If possible, take a walk upon waking &/or at the end of the day. Go for a run. Do some yoga. We will all be spending more time than usual sitting down....
- **Gratitude:** Reflect on what you are grateful for.
- **Accomplish:** Ensure that you Achieve one thing that aligns to your overall purpose and passion. Make a note of what you've achieved at the end of each day/week.

Keep your sense of humor

While it is important to be informed and be cautious, we also need to find a few minutes to laugh. Laughter might not be the cure, but it is still the best medicine. *However*, avoid the Covid-19 'jokes' based on nationality or origin. A virus does not discriminate, and neither should we.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Wellbeing Plan

[Day four: Executive Director Henrietta H. Fore's video diary amid the coronavirus outbreak | UNICEF](#)

Anxiety of Uncertainty

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S3CU2kOBt3s>

Wellbeing Page

<https://unicef.sharepoint.com/sites/portals/hr/Pages/Wellbeing/default.aspx>

Headspace App

<https://unicef.sharepoint.com/sites/portals/hr/Pages/Wellbeing/Headspace.aspx>

Worry Time App

Interrupts the repetitive thinking by setting aside your worries until later, so you don't get caught up in them and can get on with your day.

Action& Response

https://www.actionforhappiness.org/media/863028/coping_calendar.pdf

<https://www.actionforhappiness.org/news/covid-19-how-to-respond>

Better Mood from Gratitude

The 2-minute Gratitude Exercise

- **Simply think about 3 things in your life you are grateful for within the uncertainty:**
 - That benefit you and without which your life would be poorer.
 - These don't have to be big things, you can be grateful for having food on the breakfast table.
- Do your best to actually feel some gratitude.
- You can try experimenting with carrying out this exercise weekly or even daily depending on how you feel.

