



March 2020

Emotional Health and Well-being and the COVID-19 Virus

Anxiety is a normal reaction to uncertainty and things that may harm us. For so many of us, the COVID-19 virus is fueling our anxiety and our sense of vulnerability. What can we do to look after our emotional and physical well-being at this time?

To begin with, it's important to be kind to yourself. This is an anxious and stressful time for everyone, and it's okay if you feel more of these things than usual...it's also okay to take time for yourself to engage with the resources in your life that protect and reinforce your emotional health and well-being. You are doing the best you can in a time when simply turning on the news can feel overwhelming.

While anxiety is a normal and expected reaction to this unprecedented time in all of our lives, too much anxiety can start to cause us harm. Our minds might race, our anxiety spikes, and our bodies and minds “keep score” of the emotional impact. When anxiety and fear lead to panic, people may also take precautions that ultimately cause disruptions, like demanding a lot of tests or medical care when it isn't necessary or stockpiling certain supplies to the point that those things aren't available to others who may need them.

Anxiety can cause us to go in the opposite direction if we deny, minimize or refuse to believe that the situation is serious. When people deny the severity of a situation in order to avoid anxiety, they may do little or nothing, ignore the need to take action, or disregard the recommendations from health authorities. This places self and others at serious risk. Complying with our BC Provincial Health Officer's direction is not optional.

A healthier response to our anxiety is to acknowledge we are having it and that it is common and expected at times like this. And, then, to talk about it with caring and supportive family, friends or a trusted counsellor. When we share our anxious thoughts, we loosen their grip on us and create space inside us to understand the reality of what we face and the need to align our choices and behaviors with best professional medical instruction. Our best thinking becomes more available to us. We connect to our personal agency and power and can use that to take positive and protective actions—things like practicing good hygiene, staying home when you feel sick, ensure social distance, follow the advice of our BC Health Office and considering a plan in case you need to self-isolate.

What can I do about the COVID-19 virus?

When you feel anxious and uncertain about the future, it's easy to feel hopeless. COVID-19 may seem out of your control, but that isn't entirely true. Here are some things that might be helpful:

1. Taking reasonable action can help you take back control and reduce anxiety. Look to trusted organizations and agencies like the BC Centre for Disease Control, our Provincial Medical Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry and the World Health Organization for information about steps you can take to reduce your risk of getting sick or passing the illness on to others. If you are more vulnerable to the coronavirus or are in contact with others who may be vulnerable, seek advice from medical professionals about any additional measures that may be required.
2. Take care of yourself. Eat as well as possible, exercise regularly, get enough sleep, and make time for things that you can enjoy. Indulge your senses in nurturing ways: good music, good food, good family times.

3. Stay connected with family and friends. Isolating yourself from others, such as staying home from school or working from home for longer periods of time, can affect your mood. Find ways to connect with people you care about in other ways. If you can't see someone in person, you can still reach out by phone, text, or video call. Who needs to hear from you right now?
4. Help others if you can. People who are more vulnerable to this coronavirus may have to take extra precautions or isolate themselves more than others. Ask friends, family members, or neighbors if they need anything, such as groceries or other household needs. Simply checking in regularly by phone, text, or video call can make a big difference. Helping others also includes being mindful of the supplies you keep at home. Excessive stockpiling means that your neighbors and other community members no longer have access to those supplies and it increases costs.
5. Cut back on the amount of time you spend on social media and the news. It's important to be informed, but constantly checking for updates or reading sensationalized stories can really take a toll on your mental health. Stick to trusted, verified news sources and limit yourself if social media or news stories increase your anxiety. Consider the BC Center for Disease Control and the messaging of our Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry.
6. Some people find it helpful to talk through anxiety-provoking situations like COVID-19, while others may find that conversations make their anxiety worse. If you need to limit conversations, it's okay to tell family, friends, and co-workers that you can't participate. Just make sure you don't ignore all news and important messages—the goal is to take in the information you need and cut down on the excess, not ignore the situation altogether.
7. Explore self-management strategies like mindfulness, yoga, tai chi, meditation, art, or exercise to manage anxious thoughts. Consider YouTube videos for instruction in these things and experiment at home.
8. Have a plan. It's hard to predict exactly what will happen next, but preparing for situations like self-isolation can help reduce some uncertainty about the future. This includes recommended amounts of food, household products, prescription medications, over-the-counter medications, and supplements.
9. Commit to being kind to yourself, being kind to others and letting others be kind to you. “If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. And if you want to be happy yourself, practice compassion”. Let’s see if we are able to NOT let our anxieties “drive the bus” in our relationships with self, others and our planet. When we can, let’s allow our kindness to “take the wheel”.
10. Seek extra help or support when you need it. People feel anxious about the future at the best of times, and many people have never encountered a pandemic like this before. It's okay if you need help. All of us at Vancouver Island Counselling remain available (by phone) to you if we can be helpful right now.



Vancouver Island Counselling

Duncan 250 746 6900

Nanaimo 250 754 8222

Port Alberni 250 723 7001

**Victoria / Lower Mainland
1 877 746 6911**

