

PLA Webinar: Public Libraries Respond to COVID-19: Managing Stress and Anxiety

April 9, 2020 Presented by Debra Keane and Susan Voss-Rothmeier

Library work is rapidly changing under the pressures of the pandemic. We all manage stress differently. This handout is a summary of some best practices for coping during this evolving crisis, using the evidence-based model of Skills for Psychological Recovery.

Gathering Information

For trusted, accurate information:

Nationally, look to the [Center for Disease Control](#) and the [National Institutes of Health](#).
Locally, consider your state and county public health department websites.

Resources are available in your community:

[211](#) is collaborating with many communities to provide up-to-date information about resources. Your state and county Human Service dept websites will have information on benefits available locally.

Social media and watching the news:

Pay attention to how “panic scrolling” and watching the news on loop makes you feel and behave. Anxious? Look out for these common signs:

- Tightness in chest
- Increased heart rate
- Trouble sleeping (or sleeping too much)
- Eating too much (or too little)
- An increase in drug or alcohol use

Limit your exposure for your wellbeing. Consider reading or watching the news only once a day, for a set amount of time. “Overexposure” can have detrimental effects on your sense of safety.

Distract yourself. Take breaks from the crisis by engaging in completely unrelated activities. Exclusively thinking about the pandemic will increase stress hormones and decrease overall functioning.

Problem-Solving Skills

A 4-step model for problem solving:

1. Define the problem and who “owns” it – is this issue something you have agency in solving?
2. Set the goal – what do you want to see happen?
3. Brainstorm – how can the solution happen? No idea is too out-there!
4. Evaluate and choose the best solution – what might work or be worth trying?

Promoting Positive Activities

Feelings, thoughts and behavior are connected

Positive experiences tend to create calmer emotions while negative experiences can do the opposite.

Make time for activities that you know have a calming influence on you.

Examples may include breathing/meditation, music, reading, journaling, walking, puzzles.

Find meaningful activities.

Make a list of what gives you meaning.

Think on how to incorporate this into your schedule.

Examples may include creative outlets, accomplishing a task, time with family.

Practice good self care

Good sleep hygiene

Heathy eating

Exercise

Relaxation

For more information on self care:

Five Self Care Practices by Elizabeth Smart, MS

<https://www.verywellmind.com/self-care-strategies-overall-stress-reduction-3144729>

Maintain a daily routine if isolated at home

Get dressed each morning

Exercise

Fresh air outside

Meaningful activities

Managing Reactions

Managing your emotions can help protect yourself

from anxiety and further stress.

Mindful acceptance

Notice your feelings and thoughts that may be intrusive and are adding to your anxiety.

Don't judge the feelings, but observe them and then set aside any that seem negative.

Don't feed anxiety and fear

Choose ways to improve the moment.

Examples may include: breathing exercises, meaningful activities, creative outlets.

Focus on what you can control.

Don't let yourself get overwhelmed by what you can't control

Promoting Helpful Thinking

Since feelings and thoughts are connected, managing your thoughts can improve your emotional health

We can change how we think and feel about what's happening around us.

Remind yourself of your resources for emotional health

What tangible assets do you have in your life?

What new opportunities is this experiencing offering me?

What coping skills have worked for me in the past?

Avoid magnifying the negative

When things feel unpredictable, think about what *is* predictable in your life.

Avoid all-or-nothing thinking

Don't jump to the worst scenarios

Building Healthy Social Connections

Identify your social supports. Who is in your circle right now?

There may be people important to you that can you reach online, by phone, by video and through the mail. Consider making a list or drawing a map to help you visualize who is available to you. Think about how you can connect and what social needs can be filled.

Consider the following questions:

Who is most important for you to connect with?

Who can hear your feelings and worries?

Who can help with advice that you need?

Who might need you to connect with them?

Who can you be silly with and can help distract you?

If you find a social need is missing, consider problem-solving and creative brainstorming to help you fill it.

Consider professional help:

Counselors and therapists are able to provide tele-health services. Check with your employee assistance provider, insurance company, or local community mental health center to get connected.

Also use national hotlines for support as needed:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255

SAMSHA's Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985- 5990 (or text TalkWithUs to 66746)

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233

Additional Resources

Center for Disease Control's page on

"Taking Care of Your Emotional Health" (specific to the corona outbreak):

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/selfcare.asp>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) page on

"Taking Care of Your Behavioral Health During an Infectious Disease Outbreak":

<https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Taking-Care-of-Your-Behavioral-Health-During-an-Infectious-Disease-Outbreak/sma14-4894>