

F.A.C.E C.O.V.I.D

MENTAL HEALTH DURING COVID-19 A QUICK TIPS GUIDE

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F.A.C.E. C.O.V.I.D. is a simple acronym that outlines practical steps you can take to respond to the global pandemic of COVID-19 and the mental health challenges that it presents. Some early indicators show that depression and anxiety are on the rise in the wake of this widespread uncertainty. Taking these steps will help you to cope with uncertainty and build resiliency for the potentially long lasting effects ahead.

To the right is a quick summary of the steps that the next few pages will cover in more detail. Also, stay tuned for a complete guide to practices for mental health rooted in an Acceptance and Commitment Therapy perspective.

HOW TO BOOST YOUR MENTAL HEALTH BY EFFECTIVELY RESPONDING TO COVID-19

F = Focus on what you can control
A = Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings
C = Connect with your body
E = Expand and Engage your senses

C = Connect with others
O = Open up
V = View yourself and others with compassion
I = Identify your values
D = Do what matters

FOCUS

on what you can control

PANDEMICS MAKE US FEEL POWERLESS.

FOCUSING ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL IS EMPOWERING.



UNCERTAINTY

Uncertainty underlies many difficult thoughts and feelings and COVID-19 has created significant uncertainty in our studies, finances, health, and social wellbeing. These are real disruptions and challenges that can make us feel powerless.

FEAR & ANXIETY ARE INEVITABLE

It won't come as a surprise that the uncertainty created by the COVID-19 crisis results in rising fear and anxiety. This is an absolutely normal human response to dangerous situations. The only problem is that focusing on all of the uncertainty only works to make us feel more powerless!

WHAT IS IN YOUR CONTROL

The alternative to uncontrollable worry is to focus on what actually is in your control. Unfortunately, we can't reliably control our thoughts or feelings. But we do have control over what we do right **here and now**. This might be as basic as reaching out to loved ones, exercising, starting a gratitude journal, or following any of the other fantastic tips you have heard. It can also mean learning how to simply "drop anchor" in the midst of the emotional storm. Keep reading for more on how!

ACKNOWLEDGE

your thoughts and feelings



Awareness

Sometimes our thoughts and feelings are so difficult, unpleasant, or just overwhelming that we do everything in our power to try to ignore them. It can be a powerful shift to choose to simply acknowledge whatever thoughts, feelings, physical sensations, or even urges are rising up inside of you.

See if you can take the stance of a curious scientist who is just trying to describe what is happening rather than to control it in any way. Sometimes it is helpful to silently use phrases for yourself like, "I am having the thought that I am getting sick," or "I am noticing the feeling of loneliness."

Normal emotions in a global pandemic

- Anxiety, worry & panic
- Overwhelm or helplessness
- Social withdrawal
- Sadness, loneliness, & grief
- Difficulty concentrating & boredom
- Anger, frustration, & irritability
- Increased sensitivity to physical sensations
- Hypervigilance to our (& others') health

TRY OUT THESE ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

MINDFULNESS OF THOUGHTS

One helpful way to learn how to non-judgmentally acknowledge your thoughts is to practice this posture of curiosity with mindfulness meditation. Check out this [extended exercise](#).

MINDFUL CHECK-IN

Looking for a quick 5-minute option to do a guided meditation check-in with yourself? Utilizing meditations like this can help bring some intentionality to your practice even when it is difficult to give yourself some time and space! Check out this [exercise](#).

CONNECT WITH YOUR BODY

GET PHYSICAL

Exercise, yoga, stretching, and all sorts of activities can be helpful in getting you connected with your body. When you get physical, it helps you to not get so caught up in your mind. Worries and fears tend to feed the mental and emotional storm, but getting connected with our body helps to interrupt that cyclone of COVID-19 worries. However, you don't have to do anything dramatic. Try these:

Activity Ideas

- Slowly push your feet into the floor to feel the solid ground beneath you
- Intentionally straighten your spine and notice your head held high
- Subtly press your fingertips together being sensitive to the sensation
- Mindfully move and stretch your arms, legs, and neck
- Take 5 deep and slow mindful breaths



A special note:

It may be helpful to remember that these exercises are not meant to be a workout. Instead, connecting with your body is an opportunity to physically experience how these simple actions are things in your control. If you can do these things while continuing to acknowledge your thoughts and feelings, you will get a taste of what it is like to maintain presence and control even in the midst of difficult experiences.



Additional Resources

- Try out this foundational 3-minute mindfulness [Body Scan Meditation](#)
- Want to try a longer practice? Experiment with 35-minutes of [Mindful Movement](#)



EXPAND & ENGAGE

your senses



For a guided audio example of a 5-4-3-2-1 grounding exercise, try following along with [this video](#).

**EXPANDING AND
ENGAGING OUR 5-SENSES
IS THE MOST POWERFUL
TOOL WE HAVE TO DROP
ANCHOR AND
EXPERIENCE STABILITY
RIGHT HERE AND NOW**

When we engage all of our senses, we can help shift our mind from all the worries that COVID-19 produces and fix our full attention on the present moment—the only point in time where we actually have some control.

All of the exercises so far have invited you to use your attention to expand your awareness of your thoughts, feelings, and body. Now, it is time to subtly shift your attention from your internal experience to your immediate surroundings. A simple challenge you can use to get this effect is to see if you can notice:

- 5 different colors you can see
- 4 things you can physically sense/touch
- 3 different sounds (not you)
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

This simple 5-4-3-2-1 exercise helps to ground our body and experience in the current situation and helps to root us in the present moment where anxiety holds less power.



CONNECT WITH OTHERS

Connecting with others can be especially challenging during this time of social distancing, stay at home advisories, and shelter in place mandates. Of course, you have probably heard plenty of recommendations for how to use technology to connect with others. These are great tools for us to use! Try identifying 2 to 3 people who you can set regular times to connect with. Then challenge yourself to spend time talking about aspects of life beyond the latest COVID-19 updates for deeper and richer connection!

When we are able to cultivate these connections, we get to experience the wonderful mental health benefits of reduced psychological distress and stronger ability to cope with new sources of stress!

**SOCIAL SUPPORT AND
CONNECTION IS MORE
IMPORTANT THAN EVER,
EVEN IF IT LOOKS A
LITTLE DIFFERENT.**

A quick note...

Social media can be a powerful tool to help you connect with loved ones. But be wise. Too much social media exposure to a crisis can actually result in more (and longer lasting) mental health difficulties. The same goes for traditional news outlets! Stick to just a couple of trusted sources for your COVID-19 updates.

1. [Centers for Disease Control & Prevention](#)
2. [World Health Organization](#)

A background image showing a hand reaching up towards a sunset over water. The hand is in the foreground, silhouetted against the bright light of the setting sun. The water is calm, and the sky is filled with soft, orange and yellow clouds.

IT'S TIME TO DROP
THE STRUGGLE

OPEN UP

All of the F.A.C.E. steps help to provide you with increased awareness and curiosity about all of your daily experience. Connecting with others helps to provide you additional stability and support. Now, it's time to gently open up to the difficult thoughts and feelings of worry, fear, anger, grief, guilt, loneliness, confusion...or whatever else you might be noticing. *Opening up* means increasing the amount of internal space we have for all of our experiences—both the pleasant and unpleasant. Often times, the human instinct is to push away unpleasant experiences and even to struggle with them to get them to take up less space in our lives.

However, opening up provides an alternative. By breathing into these experiences, holding them gently, and imaging that we are expanding around them, we can actually benefit from a big dose of flexibility. When we create more internal space for ourselves, we can fill it with the things we actually want to do, **without having to struggle to get rid of all the unpleasant stuff.**

Struggling to understand what this could look like? Try giving the next step in a go...

The self-compassion antidote

Sometimes we have difficulty opening up to unpleasant experiences in life because our minds have a hard time letting go of judging us and others. These thoughts sometimes come in the form of: "You shouldn't think/feel this way."

When we struggle with these thoughts, it becomes easy to mentally beat ourselves up and generally feel defeated. The antidote is to practice extending ourselves kindness and compassion. Self-compassion allows us to be gentle with ourselves and to cease the constant mental struggle for control of the uncontrollable.

Extending loving kindness and compassion

For some, starting with self-compassion might actually be more difficult than extending compassion toward others. This can actually can be a great place to start as well! When we open ourselves up to other people's pain we are able to share in the common experience of human existence.

Pain is inevitable in life and when we lovingly and kindly connect with others in the midst of this uncertain and painful time we are able to gently start to see ourselves as worthy of the same compassion as our fellow friends, family, and community. We are humans too!

**GIVE THESE GUIDED
MEDITATIONS A TRY**



10-min [loving-kindness](#)



20-min giving & receiving [compassion](#)



VIEW YOURSELF AND OTHERS WITH COMPASSION

IDENTIFY YOUR VALUES

Life Worth Living

One of the things that past pandemics have taught us about mental health is that having a clear sense of purpose can make a big difference. Values are the things that matter most to us. Values are not goals we want to accomplish or even ways that we want to feel. Instead, values describe the type of person we want to be and the direction we want to head in life.

Some questions to help you discover what your values might be in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis are:

- What do I want to stand for in the face of COVID-19?
- How do I want to treat myself and others?

**CORE VALUES HELP US
EXPERIENCE DEEP &
LASTING FLOURISHING
THAT DOESN'T DEPEND
ON FLEETING FEELINGS**



Values Checklist

Struggling to identify how you might describe your values?

Here is a checklist that you can use to get started (there are many other values),

- **Acceptance**
- **Adventure**
- **Caring**
- **Commitment**
- **Contribution**
- **Courage**
- **Creativity**
- **Curiosity**
- **Efficiency**
- **Engagement**
- **Fairness**
- **Friendliness**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Genuineness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Honesty**
- **Integrity**
- **Intimacy**
- **Kindness**
- **Loving**
- **Respect**
- **Responsibility**
- **Self-care**
- **Supportiveness**
- **Trust**

DO WHAT MATTERS

COMMITMENT IS WHAT TRANSFORMS A PROMISE INTO REALITY. IT IS THE WORDS THAT SPEAK BOLDLY OF YOUR INTENTIONS. AND THE ACTIONS WHICH SPEAK LOUDER THAN THE WORDS. IT IS MAKING THE TIME WHEN THERE IS NONE. COMING THROUGH TIME AFTER TIME AFTER TIME, YEAR AFTER YEAR AFTER YEAR. COMMITMENT IS THE STUFF CHARACTER IS MADE OF; THE POWER TO CHANGE THE FACE OF THINGS. IT IS THE DAILY TRIUMPH OF INTEGRITY OVER SKEPTICISM.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Now that you have clarified what matters most to you, it is time to take action! Remember, action is an antidote to anxiety and the effect is even more powerful when we are guided by our core values. It takes commitment to be able to pursue action in the midst of a crisis that generates so much uncertainty, but taking action can free us from the chaos of the news cycle and liberate our love for those around us, our community, and our world.

Of course, social distancing, hand washing, etc. are important and meaningful ways to contribute to the public health. Keep doing these things! But how else might you live out your values right now?

It may look different if the current crisis places constraints on ways to take action. However, challenge yourself to be creative and flexible.

Ask yourself, "What can I do at this very moment that takes a step toward my values...no matter how small?" Then, take action—***do what matters.***



STUDENT HEALTH
AND WELLNESS

Resource Links

Student Health and Wellness—Mental Health

860-486-4705

For up to date UConn counseling information and mental health resources

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-8255

Toll free hotline dedicated to preventing suicide

Crisis Text Line (Text HOME to 741741)

For support through text messaging.

Text STEVE to 741741 for a young person of color specialist.

Trevor Project

(Text START to 678678 or call 1-866-488-7386)

Supporting LGBTQ youth through text, call, and community.

National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-799-7233

Supporting victims and survivors of domestic violence

Inspired by and adapted from:

Harris, R. (2020). FACE COVID. Retrieved April 1, 2020, from

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1MZJybtT9KmiE9Dw9EKvPJsd9Ow7gXaMe/view>