

Lesson 4

Coping With COVID-19: What Works? What Doesn't?

Beginning

- What were the main points from our last lesson/call/meeting?
- Did you complete any action steps since that lesson/call/meeting?
- If so, how did they go?
- Today's lesson is "Coping with COVID-19. What works? What doesn't?". Have you been trying to cope with this crisis? How?
- Why is this an important topic?
- Today we're going to talk about ways of coping that may be helpful to you, and consider your own coping plan. Let's begin by discussing some important information.

Important Information

The presence of the COVID-19 virus is creating a lot of stress for people. People are worried about getting sick, being alone, staying at home, not going to work or school or their treatment program. People are also worried about the health of their family and friends. Many people who are no longer meeting their therapist, doctor, nurse or other healthcare provider for mental health, physical health or substance use concerns worry about problems getting worse. These worries are very stressful and can harm our health and wellness.

When people experience stress, they naturally try to reduce the tension they feel. Most people want to know how to cope with stress in a way that is healthy and works for them. Some ways of coping work well and others may cause more harm than good. A way of coping that works well is one that relieves tension and doesn't cause other problems. A way of coping that doesn't work well is one that may relieve stress for a short time but ends up causing more problems in the long run.

The stress of this crisis is very new. We haven't experienced this type of stress before. Everyone is trying to find ways to cope that really help and avoid ways of coping that don't.

In this lesson you will...

1. learn about possible ways of coping that may work for you during this difficult time
2. learn about ways of coping that may cause more harm than good.
3. have an opportunity to learn and practice some simple relaxation techniques

WAYS OF COPING THAT MAY BE HELPFUL TO YOU

Below is a list of ways of coping that includes an example of one person's experience. Many people have found these ways of coping very helpful in situations that were stressful.

KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH AND TALKING TO OTHERS.

“When I was packing up my stuff to move to a new place, I started having headaches and trouble sleeping. I called my sister and told her how stressed out I felt. She told me she felt the same way when she moved the last time. She even offered to help me pack. It made a huge difference.”

KEEPING A POSITIVE ATTITUDE: FOCUS YOUR THINKING ON WHAT IS GOING WELL AND REMINDING YOURSELF THAT YOU WILL GET THROUGH THIS DIFFICULT TIME.

“Before when I was under stress, I used to blame myself and think that there was no way out. Now I try to think more positively. I say to myself, ‘This is hard, but I can do it,’ or ‘If I take this one step at a time, I’ll be able to handle it.’ Thinking more positively is hard to do sometimes, but it makes me feel better about myself.”

MAINTAIN YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR.

“For me ‘laughter is the best medicine.’ When I’ve been on a subway ride that lasted two hours instead of 45 minutes, I feel very tense and agitated. I have some funny videos at home, and I’ll pull one out and have a good laugh. Believe it or not, it helps me to watch a Monty Python movie or one starring Adam Sandler.”

PARTICIPATE IN RELIGIOUS OR SPIRITUAL ACTIVITY.

“I grew up in a religious home. Although I’m not sure I believe every aspect of that religion, I still find it comforting to go to services. And sometimes instead of going to services I go for a walk in the park and see how beautiful nature can be. That’s very spiritual for me.”

EXERCISE AND INCREASE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY DAILY.

“I like to ‘work off’ my stress by getting some exercise. Sometimes I go for a run and sometimes I just do some jumping jacks until I calm down.”

WRITE IN A DIARY OR JOURNAL.

“I’ve started keeping a journal to write down my thoughts and feelings. I don’t care about the grammar or spelling—I just write down what comes into my head. Sometimes I write about stressful things and that seems to help. Writing helps me think things through.”

MAKE OR LISTEN TO MUSIC.

“I’m a music person. I put on my headphones and blow away the stress of the day. I can even do it on the train, to distract myself on the long ride.”

DO ART OR GO TO SEE ART.

“I like to sketch. I especially like drawing cartoons. I must admit I sometimes make some unflattering cartoons of people who are bugging me.”

PLAY GAMES OR DEVELOP A HOBBY.

“I like playing card games. When I don’t have anyone to play with, I like solitaire. It’s relaxing to me.”

USE RELAXATION TECHNIQUES. (See examples at the end of this lesson)

“If I’ve had a stressful day, it helps me to do some deep breathing. I put on some relaxing music, and sit in my favorite chair. Then I start by taking ten deep, slow breaths. I let my breath out very slowly. As I exhale, I try to imagine that when I let out my breath, I’m letting out the tension in my body. Then I take about 20 or 30 more breaths. Sometimes I try to imagine a peaceful scene, like the ocean, when I’m breathing. I usually feel more relaxed after that.”

KEEP IN TOUCH WITH HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS FOR PHYSICAL, MENTAL HEALTH OR SUBSTANCE USE PROBLEMS.

“Sometime I feel like I don’t want to rely on my therapist or counselor for help. I try to make it on my own. I now understand that reaching out to professionals and peers is taking charge of my life. I’m the one making that decision and I deserve the support of others who can help”.

Discussion Points

- How are you trying to cope with this very difficult situation?
- What do you feel has been working for you?
- Are you concerned about some of the ways you are trying to cope that might cause more harm than good? Let’s talk about them.

Let’s Get Personal

You might find it helpful to think about which ways of coping you currently use and which ones you might want to start using or use more often. *Check all that apply to you.*

Ways of Coping	I already cope in this way	I don’t cope in this way	I want to try this or do it more
Keep in touch with family/friends by phone, text messaging or video chat.			
Use relaxation techniques such as breathing or muscle relaxation exercises			
Keep my sense of humor and positive mood (watch movies and read stories that are funny)			
Participate in online religious /spiritual activities and/or engage in prayer during this difficult time.			

Increase physical activity including exercising regularly at home or outside when it is safe			
Write down your feelings and thoughts in a journal or diary.			
Listen to music that is relaxing or uplifting.			
Get involved in online social and recreational activities (games, movies)			
Start a new hobby or creative activity (art, dance, singing,)			
Read books that are inspiring.			
Use positive affirmations: focus your thinking on what is going well and reminding yourself that you will get through this difficult time.			
Practice meditation with deep breathing			
Keep in touch with your healthcare providers (therapist, counselors, doctors, nurse)			
Other ways you cope			

Action Step

Create your individual coping plan during this Covid-19 crisis.

One way of coping I would like to try now or in the next few days is _____

When will I try this? _____

What steps do I need to take? _____

What do I need from my therapist to support me in trying out this way of coping?

Relaxation Techniques

You may be interested in practicing relaxation techniques. If yes, here are two simple relaxation techniques to consider.

1. Muscle tension–relieving exercise
2. Deep-breathing exercise

Muscle tension–relieving exercise

When we are stressed, the tension we feel is usually in the muscles of our face, shoulders, arms, hands and neck. These simple exercises can help to relieve the tension in those areas where you feel the most tension. They can be done when you are sitting, walking or lying down, and they only take a minute or two.

- Tilt your head backward and try looking right up, feel the tension in your neck. Then allow your head to return to its normal balanced position. Notice the difference.
- Try hunching up the shoulders as far as they will go, and then let them go. Notice the difference.
- Try clenching your teeth or opening your mouth as wide as possible, then let the tension go. Notice the difference. Let all the expression go from your face. Look straight ahead and into the distance or, if you prefer, close your eyes.
- Try stretching your hands and fingers and then let them fall to your side or on your lap.

Deep-breathing exercise

One of the easiest ways to relieve tension is deep breathing. Under stress, people often take short breaths or breathe in a shallow manner. Deep breathing can be very effective in relieving tension. Here are some tips for breathing deeply.

- Find a comfortable place to lie down or just sit in a comfortable chair.
- Slowly breathe in through your nose. Your stomach should feel like it's rising.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth, emptying your lungs completely and letting your stomach fall.
- Repeat several times until you feel calm and relaxed. Practice daily.

You can practice and use these techniques almost anywhere, at any time.

Ending

- What were the main points of this lesson?
- How do you feel about what we have covered today?

AFFIRMATION: You might find it helpful to affirm (state out loud) your ability and motivation to apply what you have learned to improve your health and wellbeing.

I have the knowledge and determination to use what I learned to understand how I cope with the difficulties associated with the Covid-19 crisis. I will use this knowledge to choose smart ways of coping that work for me and avoid ways of coping that cause me more harm than good. I am a worthwhile person who deserves to have the information I need to successfully cope with Covid-19 and stay safe and healthy