



Mental Health in the Face of COVID-19: Building Strength During Uncertain Times¹

“The sun shines not on us but in us” -John Muir

1. Validate your feelings. Each person experiences are different. In times of uncertainty, some may feel scared or sad, others may become irritable, yet other experience intense fear, sadness, and irritability. These, and other emotions are understandable. There is no “right” way to feel. Give yourself permission to observe your emotions and experience them without judgment.

Resource:

- ✓ Consider journaling, talking to friends or family, or talking to a counselor
- ✓ There may be validation in hearing stories of others experiencing similar feelings and/or events
- ✓ Embrace the need for silence as needed and give yourself permission to make space for yourself

2. Recognize symptoms of stress. Symptoms of stress vary across people. It is important that you pay attention and learn to recognize what are *your* symptoms of stress so that you know when might be a good time to step away, take a break, or find a safe place to rest for a moment. Here are some common symptoms of stress:

- Feeling overwhelmed, anxious/nervous, and/or irritable (continually feeling “on edge”)
- Dramatic changes in your mood
- Display of intense emotions, or emotional outbursts
- Feeling numb, empty, hopeless, helpless, and/or worthless
- Isolating from your peers, friends, and/or family
- Trouble sleeping, concentrating, remembering things, or making decisions
- Difficulty managing everyday responsibilities or relationships
- Obsessive thinking or rumination (e.g., can’t get certain thoughts out of your head)
- Changes in energy or motivation level (e.g., lack of energy, inability to stay still)
- Talking, thinking or writing about death and dying
- Unexplained physical symptoms (e.g., stomach aches, headaches, dizziness, palpitations)

Resources:

- ✓ Consider engaging in some form of physical activity. Physical activity helps relieve stress
- ✓ What is meditation and how it can help me? Available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

3. Identify your triggers. Pay attention to things, people, and/or situations that may trigger *your symptoms of stress*. For instance, a common trigger is watching the news. Although it is important to stay informed, following the news too closely may increase your stress. If you notice that this makes you feel anxious, if you can’t fall sleep, or if it makes you feel sick, consider taking a break .

Resources:

- ✓ Remember that it is ok to remove yourself from social media sites, even temporarily
- ✓ Pray or engage in religious or spiritual practices that help you cope with stress, or read a good book

4. Build on your strengths. Rely on your past experiences and knowledge to remain strong in uncertain times. Focusing on your past experiences and your sources of personal strength can help you learn about what works and what doesn’t work so that you can stay strong. Remember to: (1) maintain a positive view of yourself and trust your instincts; (2) take care of yourself by developing a routine that you can safely do at home; (3) look for opportunities to learn more about yourself as you face this time of uncertainty; and (4) spend time with your loved ones for support and encouragement.

Resource:

- ✓ Consider building your [Tree of Life](#)

¹ Adapted from [Mental Health in the Post-DACA Era](#) by Luz Garcini, Melanie M. Domenech Rodríguez, Alfonso Mercado, and Manuel Paris.

5. Connect or reconnect with your joys. Take a moment to remember the things that bring you joy. It can be reading a good book, playing with a pet, watching a movie, looking at family pictures, or talking to a friend or family member. It could be something creative like painting, writing, or drawing. What are the activities that help you feel renewed? Worthy? Loved? You may have to modify some of your favorite activities to keep yourself and others healthy and safe, but take a moment to remember them and find ways if possible, to engage in them, even if you have to modify them.

Resources:

- ✓ Spend time with your friends and/or family thinking about good times and sharing stories.

6. Learn and practice new skills for healthy coping. Staying strong requires you to maintain flexibility as you deal with uncertain circumstances. Learning new coping skills can help you manage stress better. Some skills that you may consider exploring include: (1) engaging in prayer or religious practices that give you comfort; (2) finding ways to express your thoughts and emotions through art or writing; (2) learn and practice mindfulness, meditation, or relaxation; (3) develop your problem-solving skills; (4) create safe spaces for you and your loved ones; and (5) create a plan to stay healthy during these uncertain times.

Resources:

- ✓ Free [guided meditations](#) in English and Spanish for downloads
- ✓ Practice [grounding skills](#) to manage anxiety
- ✓ Develop a [plan to stay healthy](#)

7. Take your mental health seriously and seek help if needed. Whether mild, moderate, or severe, seek help to alleviate your stress. It is important that you share your feelings and concerns with someone that you trust. Consider talking to a therapist, medical provider, or a member of your faith-based community via conferencing or telehealth.

Resources:

- ✓ National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255
- ✓ Mental Health America Resources: Available in [English](#), and [Spanish](#).

8. Keep informed with reliable sources of information. Knowledge is empowering, and can help reduce stress when the information is accurate and reliable. Locate resources, services, and agencies that can keep you informed about COVID-19 and how to keep healthy and safe, but avoid getting your news from social media.

Resources:

- ✓ The [CDC](#) is a great source of reliable health information and updates.
- ✓ [Salud America](#)

9. Share your knowledge to help others. It is important to share reliable knowledge and sources of information with others; however, be careful not to share or distribute information that will increase panic and fear around you. Try to share knowledge about how to stay healthy or successful and heartwarming stories. It is important to share ways to help you and your loved ones get through COVID, such as sharing recipes, workouts, crafts, shows, and so on. Also remember to listen to other people who may have questions or may need help, but are afraid to ask.

Resources:

- ✓ Ways to share knowledge: [Snapchat](#), [Instagram](#)

10. Know that YOU ARE NOT ALONE! We can be strong together. Now more than ever, we need to support each other. Make sure to stay connected with your loved ones by using different means such as phone, computer, or even old-fashioned techniques such as writing letters to your friends and family who live farther away.

Resources:

- ✓ Tips for [staying socially connecting](#)
- ✓ [HouseParty](#), an app to help you stay connected

For any questions or comments about the information provided, please contact Dr. Luz Garcini at garcini@uthscsa.edu