

Managing Anxiety in Times of Stress

Feeling anxious is a normal human response

The spread of CoViD-19 has sparked widespread change. Periods of significant transition are often accompanied by high levels of anxiety. Feelings such as concern, worry about the future, anger, and fear are normal human responses. However, they can be difficult to deal with. Here are some things you can do:

Look after your basic needs

During these times we can easily forget to attend to our basic needs. It is important we eat well, exercise regularly, get enough sleep, bathe/shower regularly, and maintain supportive relationships (even if this has to be via digital technologies).

Control what you can

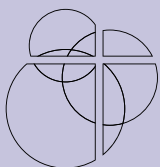
Anxiety often arises when we feel our situation is out of our control. However, there are many things we can control which help reduce anxious feelings:

- Keep as much of your daily/weekly routine as possible;
- Attend to personal hygiene practices and handwashing;
- Focus your attention on other things you may have neglected in recent times (hobbies, friends, unread books, chores, etc.);
- Make a checklist of things that need to happen if someone in your home gets COVID-19; and,
- Set time aside for prayer.

Work with transitions

One of the biggest sources of anxiety for many during a pandemic is the accompanying life changes. This is very normal. Several things can help when it comes to adjusting to difficult transitions:

- Know change is unavoidable;
- Plan for change;
- Pay attention to self-care;
- Recall other times you've successfully managed change before (moving house, changing jobs, etc.);
- Be ready to let go of the old and to be flexible; and,
- Ask for help if needed.



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Faith in a Time of Crisis

Over 360 times in scripture God reminds His people, "Be not afraid," and "I am with you always." In speaking of hope, our Catholic Catechism tells us, "Christian hope unfolds from the beginning of Jesus' preaching in the proclamation of the beatitudes." The beatitudes speak of challenges many of us may be able to relate to at this time. However, as the Catechism reminds us, "the beatitudes raise our hope toward heaven... We can therefore hope in the glory of heaven promised by God to those who love him and do his will. In every circumstance, each one of us should hope, with the grace of God, to persevere."

A phenomenon like the COVID-19 global pandemic raises many difficult feelings. Often, it's not just one feeling but many mixed in together. These feelings can challenge our relationship with God and raise many questions.

These things are a challenging mystery. However, Mary and Jesus experienced suffering, too. We are not alone. The beatitudes are the promises of Christ to those who are suffering. As Holy Week approaches, we're reminded of the words of Christ on the Cross to the thief, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." Even amid His greatest suffering Christ was able to remain hopeful.

Many people find that turning to prayer at times like this, and giving God their challenges, difficult feelings and frustrations can be a source of comfort, strength and grace. We are blessed to have, in the words of Archbishop Costelloe, "a great cloud of witnesses (cf. Hebrews 12:1) who always accompany us on our journey of faith. Mary, the Mother of God, walks with us in company with the Saints who never stop praying with us and for us. God continues to send his angels to protect us and guide us".

Some people may be feeling frustrated or confused about not being able to celebrate the Mass publicly as a Catholic community at this time. These feelings reveal to us our own personal deep love for faith and the sacraments. We can still strive to keep the Lord's Day holy and make a spiritual communion, following the prayer of saints such as St. Pio of Pietrelcina. Through our personal prayer, we can speak to God about feelings of love for Him, as well as our anxieties. We are blessed with an array of spiritual traditions that our Catholic faith offers. As long as we maintain a safe distance from each other, we can:

- Seek His grace in the sacraments of Reconciliation and (where appropriate) the Anointing of the Sick;
- Praying the rosary; and,
- Visit Our Lord in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

A Prayer of Spiritual Communion

(St Pio of Pietrelcina)

My Jesus, I believe that you are truly present in the Most Blessed Sacrament. I love You above all things and I desire to possess You within my soul.

Since I am unable at this moment to receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as being already there, and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. *Amen*

Dealing with a Panic Attack

Anxiety can become so intense, we experience a panic attack, which can be scary and may come on suddenly. If you've never experienced one before, it can even feel like you're having a heart attack. However, here are strategies that can help:

Practice deep breathing

Hyperventilation is a common symptom of panic attacks and it can make other symptoms worse.

Remember that it will pass

Recognise that you are having a panic attack, not a heart attack, and you can get through it.

Close your eyes and reduce sensory stimulation

Some panic attacks come from triggers that overwhelm your senses. Something as simple as closing your eyes can help enormously. This can make it easier to focus on your breathing.

Find an object to focus on

Combat racing thoughts by finding an object in clear sight and make a conscious effort to study everything about it.

Do some very light exercise

Panic attacks release hormones in our bodies that motivate us towards action. Very light exercise can help with this "flight or fight" response.

Symptoms of a Panic Attack

- sweating, trembling or shaking
- increased heart rate
- short of breath or feeling like you are choking
- feeling nauseated or having butterflies or pain in your stomach
- dizzy, lightheaded or faint
- numb or tingly
- hot or cold flushes

Talking to Children

Children experience anxiety, too, and many parents worry about what to tell their child about CoViD-19. A 2011 study of the Swine Flu epidemic found that children's level of fear was significantly related to how openly fearful their parents were. So, the first step is to care for you!

In addition to caring for your own mental health, here are some things you can do to help your child:

Uncertainty contributes to anxiety

Help your child understand the facts. Research suggests that this leads to better coping mechanisms and less severe symptoms of anxiety than adults experience.

Help them gain a sense of control

Enable them to protect themselves and others from CoViD-19 by teaching them safe hygiene practices.

Help them think about what they are seeing in the media

Some news headlines and stories can be quite frightening for children. Speak with them about that they are seeing.

Talk about feelings

Ask your them what they are thinking and feeling. Affirm and help them sort through their emotions.

Maintain as many routines as possible

Try to keep as many of your usual routines as possible. For those routines that change, let them know this is new to you, too, but you'll work together as a "family team" to get through safely.

- scared of losing control or going crazy
- fear of dying
- derealisation (feelings of unreality) or depersonalisation (feeling detached from yourself or your surroundings)

Everyone experiences panic attacks differently, at different severities. You may not experience all of the above either.

“Do not be afraid. Have courage. I am with you.”

Matthew 14:27

Need further support?

You can obtain additional support by talking to your parish priest or contacting:

Centrecare

08) 9325 6644

www.centrecare.com.au

Beyond Blue

1300 22 4636

www.beyondblue.org.au

Lifeline Australia - 13 11 14

A Helpful Grounding Exercise to Reduce Panic

5: Name FIVE things you see around you.

4: Name FOUR things you touch around you.

3: Name THREE things you hear around you.

2: Name TWO things you smell.

1: Name ONE thing you can taste.