Is Staying Home Putting Your Safety or Mental Health at Risk?

Social distancing, working from home, self-quarantining, sheltering in place...we are all implementing some combination of these COVID-19 responses to keep ourselves, our families, and our communities safe. But actions that keep us at home and away from public spaces put some community members at risk in other ways. For example, those who are living with an abusive partner or a person with a substance use disorder are now more likely to be exposed to unsafe situations. And those who struggle with depression, anxiety or substance use may be feeling isolated and lonely, with worsening symptoms.

Sound familiar? Reach out for help now – call 9-1-1 if you or someone you know needs urgent help, call the EAP at 877-313-4455, or contact one of these resources:

Domestic Violence/Abuse –
- Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or text LOVEIS to 22522;
- Also see Staying Safe During COVID-19

Suicide/Depression/Anxiety –
- Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or text HOME to 741741 (the Crisis Text Line);
- Also see Taking Care of Your Mental Health in the Face of Uncertainty and Coping with Stress During an Infectious Disease Outbreak

Strengthen Your Immune System

You and your family are working hard to limit your exposure to COVID-19 by social distancing, washing your hands, not touching your face, cleaning frequently-touched surfaces and more: all of the actions recommended by the CDC, Washington State Department of Health and World Health Organization (WHO). What else can you do? To support your immune system to function at its best, it’s more important than ever to take these commonly recommended self-care actions: 1) get adequate sleep (7-9 hours for most folks); 2) eat a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables rich in antioxidants; 3) move your body regularly; 4) avoid smoking and heavy alcohol/substance use; 5) maintain a healthy weight and 6) manage your stress. This advice is even more important for older adults because they are at greater risk for severe illness from COVID-19, as the immune system becomes less efficient with age. Examine gaps in your immune system maintenance plan, and talk to your medical doctor, health/wellness adviser or an EAP counselor for support with healthier self-care actions and overcoming any roadblocks. You can also watch the EAP's on-demand webinar on self-care during COVID-19 or visit our COVID-19 Resources page to sign up for an upcoming live webinar.
Two Strategies to Help Us Support Each Other through COVID-19

Here are a couple of strategies you can try right away to help all of us be our better selves and work together through the COVID-19 outbreak, adapted from the Greater Good in Action and Center for Healthy Minds websites:

- **Maintain a calm, stable presence**

We know that maintaining a sense of calm presence is better for us, our families, our workplaces and our communities. And, we're human, so sometimes without realizing it we suddenly find ourselves caught up in anxiety and fear – maybe we feel our racing heart, or hear our irritated voice while talking to our child or partner or colleague.

How can we regain our sense of calm? In addition to taking a walk or talking with a calm friend, another way to find a sense of calm is by shifting your breathing pattern so your out-breath extends longer than your in-breath. This activates the **vagus nerve**, the major channel of the parasympathetic nervous system that helps us to “rest and digest.” Following stimulation of the vagus nerve, your heart rate slows down, your blood pressure decreases, your muscles relax and your body calms. The vagus nerve communicates your body's new sense of calm to your brain, so the brain relaxes as well, and you experience a sense of peacefulness. *To try this practice, breathe in through your nose for 3 seconds and out through your mouth for 6 seconds. Start with 6 cycles, which will take about 1 minute.*

- **Remember our common humanity: combat stigma and cultivate loving kindness**

Throughout human history, marginalized groups have been scapegoated and blamed for disease outbreaks and other crises. During the current COVID-19 outbreak, news reports have continued to show people of Asian descent across the US being attacked, harassed, shunned or otherwise victimized because the virus appears to have originated in China. In addition, some political leaders and media influencers have referred to COVID-19 by names that encourage stigma and bias, such as “the Chinese virus” or “Kung flu.”

What can we do? We can speak up to combat racism and stigma, refer to the virus by its official names of “COVID-19” or “Coronavirus”, model acceptance and compassion to our children and take other anti-racist actions. In addition, we can consciously practice loving kindness. Studies show that a loving kindness practice is one of the most effective ways to increase empathy and compassion for others and potentially decrease bias towards stigmatized groups. And, when people feel more connected to others, they feel a greater sense of personal happiness. *Try this 15 minute loving kindness practice.*

For additional tools and resources, see EAP's COVID-19 Resources page or contact the EAP for further support, at 1-877-313-4455.

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