

Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Avera 



Dear Friend of Avera,



The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a great deal of change to our lives. Even though we are re-engaging in daily routines and finding a new normal, that new normal is a world where COVID-19 still poses a risk.

We know more about COVID-19 now than we did at the beginning of the pandemic, and we are better prepared to mitigate the risk it poses – still there are unknowns, and that can be overwhelming at times.

Avera's Behavioral Health team has developed a mental health toolkit with resources to help you and your loved ones navigate the stress and anxiety that may also be a part of our new normal. Those resources include:

- Alcohol Use and COVID-19
- Coping with Stress
- Talking with Children about COVID-19
- Helping Staff or Teammates on Reduced Hours
- Developing Resiliency

Avera is taking measures in clinics, hospitals and other facilities to ensure that our patients feel safe. So please don't ignore your physical or mental health during this time. We are here for you! You can reach us 24/7 by calling 800-691-4336 or 605-322-4065.

For additional COVID-19 resources, visit [avera.org/covid-19](https://www.avera.org/covid-19).

In health,

Matthew Stanley, DO
Clinical Vice President, Behavioral Health Service Line



Alcohol Use and COVID-19

Alcohol is a way some people are choosing to cope with events that feel out of control in our current circumstances. But how much alcohol is too much? The following questions and guidelines offer a starting point in determining if you or a loved one is drinking excessively.

A general rule of thumb is that, for men, 5 drinks per sitting or 14 drinks per week is considered at-risk drinking. For women, the threshold is 3 drinks per sitting or 7 drinks per week.

Another tool that can be helpful is the CAGE screening tool. The tool is named for the key words in the questions – cut, annoyed, guilty, eye-opener, or CAGE.

- Have you ever felt you needed to cut down on your drinking?
- Have people annoyed you by criticizing your drinking?
- Have you ever felt guilty about drinking?
- Have you ever felt you needed a drink first thing in the morning (eye-opener) to steady your nerves or to get rid of a hangover?

For men, two “yes” responses indicate alcohol may be a problem; for women, one “yes” response indicates reason for concern.

If you’re concerned for a loved one, start with a caring conversation to assess your loved one’s understanding of their drinking and if they also feel it is a problem. Sometimes there’s a lack of awareness; occasionally, there’s more awareness there than you might realize.

These conversations can be difficult to navigate. Please know that our experts at Avera are here to walk with you every step of the way. You can reach out to us at any point for help.

Access additional information and resources at Avera.org/covid-19.



Stress and COVID-19: Here's How to Cope

Stress happens to all of us from time to time. But what about stress that's due to an ongoing situation – like COVID-19 – and no one really knows what's going to happen or when it's going to be resolved?

1. Identify exactly what's causing you stress, then set a structure for dealing with that stress.

For example, limit the sources you are reading to one or two credible sources rather than just surfing the Internet. Make sure your source presents facts rather than just someone's opinion.

2. Keep a clear head and follow the recommendations that are out there. For example, wash hands often and practice social distancing. Keep the common good at top of mind and take good conscientious care of yourself and others.
3. People who deal with mental health conditions may already experience crippling fear and anxiety. Medical and mental health resources are available to care for needs such as anxiety and depression. Don't hesitate to reach out.

4. Remember anxiety can show itself in various ways. For example, someone might become irritable and snappy, which can escalate if another person responds in the same way. Show compassion.
5. When the entire family is home from school or work, it's good to spend time together. But there's also stress that comes with too much togetherness. Come away from that at times to seek out your own space and your own activities.
6. If you need to quarantine or isolate at home, remember that it does not mean reduced communication. Keep reaching out to loved ones.
7. Continue to care for yourself and create structure throughout the day. Get plenty of exercise and sunlight, and eat a healthy diet.
8. During times of stress, it's not unusual to have trouble sleeping. Practice good sleep hygiene:
 - Have the same approach or ritual every night to wind down and get ready for bed.
 - Go to bed at the same time each night and get up at the same time each morning.
 - Give yourself space and time to decompress and calm down.
 - Read or watch something that's calming and enjoyable rather than looking through news sites during the late evening hours.
 - Don't spend time at your phone or computer before bed as the blue light of screens can keep you up.
 - Don't jump to a sleeping medication right away. Try the sleep hygiene measures first.
9. Overall, for the sake of your mental health, choose to be hopeful.

Access additional information and resources at Avera.org/covid-19.



Talking with Children about COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus)

As public conversations around COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019) increase, children may worry about themselves, their family and friends getting ill with COVID-19. Parents, family members, school staff and other trusted adults can play an important role in helping children make sense of what they hear in a way that is honest, accurate, and minimizes anxiety or fear. CDC has created guidance to help adults have conversations with children about COVID-19 and ways they can avoid getting and spreading the disease.

General Principles for Talking to Children

Remain calm and reassuring.

- Remember that children will react to both what you say and how you say it. They will pick up cues from the conversations you have with them and with others.

Make yourself available to listen and to talk.

- Make time to talk. Be sure children know they can come to you when they have questions.

Avoid language that might blame others and lead to stigma.

- Remember that viruses can make anyone sick, regardless of a person's race or ethnicity. Avoid making assumptions about who might have COVID-19

Pay attention to what children see or hear on television, radio or online.

- Consider reducing the amount of screen time focused on COVID-19. Too much information on one topic can lead to anxiety.

Provide information that is honest and accurate.

- Give children information that is truthful and appropriate for the age and developmental level of the child.
- Talk to children about how some stories on COVID-19 on the Internet and social media may be based on rumors and inaccurate information.

Teach children everyday actions to reduce the spread of germs.

- Remind children to stay away from people who are coughing or sneezing or sick.
- Remind them to cough or sneeze into a tissue or their elbow, then throw the tissue into the trash.
- Discuss any new actions that may be taken at school to help protect children and school staff. (e.g., increased handwashing, cancellation of events or activities)
- Get children into a handwashing habit.
 - o Teach them to wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing their nose, coughing or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food.
 - o If soap and water are not available, teach them to use hand sanitizer. Hand sanitizer should contain at least 60% alcohol. Supervise young children when they use hand sanitizer to prevent swallowing alcohol, especially in schools and child care facilities.

Facts about COVID-19 for Discussions with Children

Try to keep information simple and remind them that health and school officials are working hard to keep everyone safe and healthy.

What is COVID-19?

- COVID-19 is the short name for “coronavirus disease 2019.” It is a new virus. Doctors and scientists are still learning about it.
- Recently, this virus has made a lot of people sick. Scientists and doctors think that most people will be OK, especially children, but some people might get pretty sick.
- Doctors and health experts are working hard to help people stay healthy.

What can I do so that I don't get COVID-19?

- You can practice healthy habits at home, school and play to help protect against the spread of COVID-19:
 - o Cough or sneeze into a tissue or your elbow. If you sneeze or cough into a tissue, throw it in the trash right away.
 - o Keep your hands out of your mouth, nose and eyes. This will help keep germs out of your body.
 - o Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Follow these five steps — wet, lather (make bubbles), scrub (rub together), rinse and dry.

You can sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice.

- o If you don't have soap and water, have an adult help you use a special hand cleaner.
- o Keep things clean. Older children can help adults at home and school clean the things we touch the most, like desks, doorknobs, light switches and remote controls. (Note for adults: you can find more information about cleaning and disinfecting on CDC's website.)
- o If you feel sick, stay home. Just like you don't want to get other people's germs in your body, other people don't want to get your germs either.

What happens if you get sick with COVID-19?

- COVID-19 can look different in different people. For many people, being sick with COVID-19 would be a little bit like having the flu. People can get a fever, cough or have a hard time taking deep breaths. Most people who have gotten COVID-19 have not gotten very sick. Only a small group of people who get it have had more serious problems. From what doctors have seen so far, most children don't seem to get very sick. While a lot of adults get sick, most adults get better.
- If you do get sick, it doesn't mean you have COVID-19. People can get sick from all kinds of germs. What's important to remember is that if you do get sick, the adults at home and school will help get you any help that you need.
- If you suspect your child may have COVID-19, call the health care facility to let them know before you bring your child in to see them.

Call your clinic or use the Avera Medical Call Center with questions

Call your clinic or the Avera Medical Call Center at 877-282-8372. This number is answered 24/7 by a qualified staff with access to on-call doctors. Please select the prompt for COVID-19. Our trained team is happy to help you with your questions.

Avera's mission is to make a positive impact in the lives and health of persons and communities by providing quality services guided by Christian values. If you think you may have problems paying part of your bill, contact your local business office or billing staff. We can discuss payment options that may be available to you.

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Avera.org/CDC

Source: Centers for Disease Control (CDC.gov)

Reduced Hours



Some businesses have made the difficult decision to reduce their employees' hours during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic – with all its unknowns – has caused an increase in stress and anxiety for many. For employees, the loss of income and a regular working routine are additional things out of their control.

If your company has made the decision to reduce hours or furlough employees, developing a plan for staying connected is important. Your legal and human resources departments will have guidelines on what methods you can use to communicate with employees. What follows are some tips for checking-in on your team's well-being.

Consider what effect having reduced hours or being furloughed may have on your staff.

Some people may welcome having their hours reduced as it will enable them to care for children or other loved ones. Others will find the process more difficult.

Some staff may feel undervalued or undervalued; others will feel isolated and lonely – or guilty about the work their colleagues may need to pick up on their behalf. Many will worry about the future, and if they'll have a job to return to full-time going forward.

Be clear and transparent with your staff; don't make promises you don't know you can keep. Explain why you are making the decision, and create space for them to share their feelings. Do not take those feelings personally.

Make sure any expectations you have are clear. Are staff on furlough or reduced hours still expected to check work email? If so, how often? If not, explain how you will keep in touch and how often they can expect updates.

Know what resources are available.

Consider each team member's particular circumstances and be prepared to direct them to resources that may help. For example, do they live alone? Or do they have a difficult situation at home, be it relationship difficulties or family health problems? Are finances a concern?

Have a list of company resources, such as an employee assistance program (EAP), and local organizations that can provide help.

If you have an EAP, furloughed staff will still have access to this resource. Remind them of the details and encourage them to use it. Most EAPs provide counseling services and advice on family and financial problems.

Set up regular calls with staff to check on their well-being.

In addition to individual check-ins, you might also schedule an occasional group check-in with staff who are furloughed or have reduced hours; this may help with feelings of social isolation. Practice active listening and be prepared to share some work-related updates and when they can expect to hear more updates.

Encourage staff to keep in contact with colleagues.

First, verify that your staff on furlough or reduced hours welcome contact from colleagues. A phone call or text from a colleague will help the larger team stay connected.

Keep in mind that reducing hours may lead to a decline in staff morale for the entire team.

Providing clear communication is key. Make sure all staff are aware of well-being support available and encourage them to look after their mental well-being.

Help your staff transition back to work.

Staff who have been furloughed or on reduced hours may find returning to work a bigger adjustment than expected. Be prepared to offer resources to help them make the transition, and understand their productivity may be reduced as they find their footing again.

Access additional information and resources at Avera.org/covid-19.

Source: [Mental Health UK](https://www.mentalhealthuk.org/)



Leadership Resiliency and COVID-19

Coping with Stress, Uncertainty and Setbacks

In the wake of the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we must draw upon all available resources to best manage well-being for ourselves and others. Doing so will help us navigate through the unexpected, unplanned and unknown.

Maintaining equilibrium under unprecedented challenges is a skill forged during such times of crisis. The question for every day, every hour, and every minute is, "How do I face this?" Consider these three practices that can help you build and strengthen your resilience.

Manage your resistance through personal energy management:

1. Show up by being present and giving your best.
2. Practice good sleep hygiene. Set a regular sleep schedule (even on weekends). Purposefully disconnect from electronic devices and create a relaxing environment.
3. Prioritize exercise. Make exercise a "when, where, and how" (not an "if"); this will serve to increase your physical energy and help to maintain a healthy disposition during the crisis.

Create a positive framework for adversity by shifting your lenses:

1. Reflect on your beliefs to better understand and intentionally choose your response.
2. Manage your emotions by stepping away, slowing down, or enlisting an ally to help you control your reactions and choose your response.
3. Reinvent social connections by maintaining meaningful and productive relationships through "social distancing."

Maintain a sense of purpose/significance in the current reality:

1. Reaffirm the "personal why" that gives your life purpose and fulfillment to transition well through change.
2. Look at the small picture while keeping the big picture in mind.
3. Reflect on the lessons learned from past experiences.

Remember you can always reach out to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for support. Your EAP is an immediate, confidential, and free resource for whatever life issues you may be facing. Avera EAP can be accessed by calling 800-527-9394 or 605-322-4069.

Written by Laurie Dirnberger, M.A. (2020)
Laurie Dirnberger is a Trainer and Consultant for Avera EAP.
Avera EAP/Management Series

Access additional information and resources at
Avera.org/covid-19 or Avera.org/EAP.



For the latest updates go to [Avera.org/covid-19](https://www.avera.org/covid-19)

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