

Helping Survivors Cope during Covid-19

By Olga Trujillo, JD, Patricia Moen & Jorge Vidal

March 2020

During this current health crisis, the survivors we serve are dealing with a real and uncontrollable threat. The impact of Covid-19 is raising fear and anxiety. Although understandable given the situation, many survivors are experiencing intense feelings including dizziness, racing thoughts, difficulty thinking, shortness of breath or hyperventilating and tingling in their hands and feet. Others might also be feeling shaky, or experiencing increased heart rate and blood pressure, sweating, nausea, and hot and cold flashes. These reactions are the body's natural response to fear.

As advocates, you can help survivors manage these fears and help them cope with the anxiety that this crisis brings up. We've compiled tips for survivors below.

We've written these with the survivor as the audience. Feel free cut and paste these tips into emails, text, and message apps. You can also use these to create your own fact sheets.

Eat, Sleep and Stay Hydrated.

Eating regularly and eating well will help carry you through a crisis. Fear and anxiety can disrupt appetite and eating habits. Try to be mindful of eating regular meals even if you don't feel hungry. The meals don't need to be big, but it will help you to think and sleep if you remember to eat.

Drink water and stay hydrated. This also can impact on your ability to think and take care of yourself.

Sleep. Fear and anxiety interrupts sleep. You know that. You've probably dealt with a lot of that in your life. Right now, is a good time to use the skills you've developed to get good sleep. Limit how much news you read, watch or listen to about the coronavirus. Keep or re-establish a routine for going to bed around the same time every night and getting up every morning. Engage in relaxing activities a couple hours before bed. Things like watching lighthearted tv or videos, lighthearted reading or even engaging in mindful creative activities like coloring, drawing, or music. It helps to maintain your sleep schedule to relax in the evening and go to bed around the same time each night.

Maintain Structure and Routine.

Try to keep a routine. Getting up around the same time each day, making your bed, taking a shower, eating breakfast. All these regular activities build on themselves and help you get through the day.

The more you do this, the more your brain will want to do this each day. Then on days when you are struggling, you'll still be able to get up, make your bed, shower and eat breakfast. Activity helps you manage anxiety and depression.

Connect with Others.

Social distancing and sheltering at home can leave people feeling isolated. Try to reach out to friends. If possible, set up regular contact whether it be through text, phone or video conference. Check in on people you're worried about. Hearing their voice, seeing their texts and seeing their faces can be reassuring and helps calm anxiety and fear.

Reconnect with Hobbies or Start New Indoor Activities.

Work on things that you like to do as long as it's not restricted right now. If you aren't restricted to do so, go outside and sit and enjoy the weather for a few minutes, if you can go for a walk or run. Drive and meet a friend so you can see they are okay. Stay in your own cars and wave and talk via phone. Go to a place where you can enjoy wildlife and sit in your car and take it all in. Most streets are empty right now. If you are not ordered to shelter in place take a drive and see how your city or town looks. There is a reason you live there. This is a good time to remind yourself.

If you aren't able to go outside, pick up old hobbies or start new ones. Read the books you haven't had time for if you can focus. Color. Play cards, musical instruments. These are all good mindful activities that can help center you.

Balance Distraction with Limits on Social Media & News.

Find ways to distract yourself for periods of time. Watching movies, playing video games, checking social media. Be cautious with social media though. Limiting how much you see and focus on the coronavirus is important and checking social media right now may be overwhelming. Plan what you'll check and how much you'll read or watch the news.

Manage Anxiety.

Try to pay attention to your worries and see if you can tease out what you can control and what you can't.

Of the things you can control, are there steps you can take to resolve the worry? The more you can do to

plan or address the specific worries the more you'll be able to manage your anxiety and fear.

For things you cannot control try to ground yourself to help reduce the stress and anxiety you feel.

Ground yourself. When you feel any of the above listed feelings, try and center yourself back into your body and out of the fear and anxiety gripping you. There are a few ways to do this.

- a. **Take a few long slow breaths.** Slowly breathe for a count six, hold your breath for a count of two, slowly release your breath over a count of four.
- b. **Bring yourself back into your body.** Draw your attention to your extremities. Notice how your feet feel on the floor, notice your legs against your chair, your arms on the chair, and your back and then move your head side to side.
- c. **Bring yourself back into the room.** Look around the room and identify four things that are blue, three things that are yellow, two things that are orange and one thing that is red. (You can substitute shapes for colors if you prefer.)

Be Gentle with Yourself.

We are all transitioning now to a new normal. Many of us have never worked from home. Others now have our children at home full-time and need to cook three meals a day, home school them or help them with online studies. We might have been laid off or had our hours reduced are worried about bills, are caring for elderly parents. Any and all of these make it hard to focus and concentrate. We are not going to be perfect right now and we don't need to be. Let's just do the best to get through it together.

*Authors: Olga Trujillo, JD, Patricia Moen and Jorge Vidal
Caminar Latino/Latinos United for Peace & Equity
Resource Center Partners for Trauma-Informed, Culturally Responsive Practices*

This document was produced by the Vera Institute of Justice under award #2016-XV-GX-K015, awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this document are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.