

Dealing with COVID-Related Anxiety While Living With a Brain Injury (Or With Someone Who Has One)

We are all dealing with a level of uncertainty and anxiety as widespread as the Corona Virus that brought it on. For people with brain injury, who may already be dealing with anxiety, or have difficulty processing complex information, they may experience these issues in a more profound way.

Here are some general tips that can apply to those living with a brain injury, family and caregivers.

*Not all these ideas will apply to everyone.

1. Model Calmness

Lead the way by modeling calm and others can follow your example. Be careful of the way you communicate. The tone of voice and how quickly we speak are non-verbal cues that can set a tone. If you need to take a break, say so, and/or if you notice someone is getting tense or nervous, identify it.

2. Maintain Normalcy/Create Structure

Sudden changes in structure and routine can be hard on everyone. Come up with daily schedule together; try to find things that are familiar, enjoyable and productive. Depending on how much organization or focus is an issue, it may help to break down parts of the schedule into smaller pieces.

3. Listen Actively

Listen to others and allow them to talk about how they're feeling and what they're worried about. Allow them time to express their questions and concerns. Give them your full attention and show them you are present and interested in hearing their thoughts and feelings.

4. Acknowledge and Validate Anxiety

Encourage people to notice and talk about their anxiety rather than avoiding or ignoring it to help process emotions and experiences. Acknowledge what others are feeling without dismissing or downplaying it. Validating someone's feelings doesn't mean you agree; it shows you see how another person might feel the way they do.

5. Practice “Mindfulness”

Mindfulness is a relaxation strategy to find calm in a chaotic time. It involves pausing to pay attention to the physical process of breathing, or making the conscious decision to notice and appreciate things we

6. Know the Facts

Make sure you are getting your facts from reliable sources, such as the Centers for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html>. If there are problems with understanding the material or simple language is needed, check out [Corona Virus Information in Plain Language](#)

7. Reach Out to Others

Doing something for someone else makes us feel better! Use social media, phone a friend, send a card or a letter, volunteer to make phone calls from home for an organization that needs help.

8. Limit and Monitor Exposure to News and Social Media

Obsessively watching the news or social media feeds can increase fear, anxiety, depression and other stress reactions. Limiting and monitoring how much you take in is a step towards regulating anxiety.

9. Consult and Collaborate with Healthcare Professionals

Not everyone is going to react to this the same way and that’s OK. If you or someone else feels increasingly anxious, consider consulting with a mental health professional. If you are already getting such care, work closely with your provider to help navigate this unusual time.

10. Practice Compassion

This disease outbreak is stressful and challenging for everyone. Practice being kind, gentle and compassionate to yourself, your loved ones and others around you. Learn more about compassion based exercises here: <https://centerformsc.org/practice-msc/guided-meditations-and-exercises>

Additional Resources

- Practice Active Listening:
 - <https://www.lifehack.org/833813/active-listening-skills>
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/parents/essentials/communication/activelisting.html>
- Cope Together: Find things to do that take your mind off the stress and anxiety.
 - <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-recovery-coach/202003/10-healthy-activities-take-your-mind-coronavirus>
- Learn Something New: <https://www.ted.com/talks>

- Relaxation Strategies:
 - <https://www.healthylivingwithhope.com/incorporate-mindfulness-into-your-life-with-these-3-steps-at>:
 - <https://www.headspace.com/meditation/kids>
- Everyone's Behavior is Different during a Pandemic: In a serious situation, we should expect that some people are going to have behavioral changes which will require close monitoring. Practice active listening and seek professional support when necessary.
 - <https://www.helixtreatment.com/blog/dealing-with-stress-and-trauma-during-a-pandemic>

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This article was adapted from <https://adaa.org/learn-from-us/from-the-experts/blog-posts/consumer/how-talk-your-anxious-child-or-teen-about> It is provided for informational and educational purposes only. The information is not intended as a substitute for professional advice, diagnosis or treatment, and you should not use the information in place of the advice of your medical, psychological, or legal providers.

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