

# MANAGING ANXIETY AND FEAR

## DURING COVID-19

Here are some helpful tips for positive coping, using three antidotes to fear and anxiety: **creativity, humour, and curiosity.**

### CREATIVITY

Activities that draw on our creativity allow our emotions and actions to come together in order to help our emotions move and shift. This can be anything that has a beginning and an end, and allows us to use our senses to create something we enjoy.

#### EXAMPLES:

- crafts
- cooking
- baking
- puzzles
- building
- sewing
- organizing
- drawing
- making music
- scribbling
- dancing
- woodworking

### HUMOUR

Spending time with anything that brings you joy – whether it's through your own activities or enjoying other people's expressions of joy – relaxes our minds and bodies.

Tell a joke, read a funny book, get silly with your family, or watch a comedy. Finding humour and engaging in joy is a healing activity!

### CURIOSITY

When we are under a lot of stress, it is easy to catastrophize and have fearful thoughts take over. This is part of our mind's way of trying to protect us by getting ready for anything that might happen. This is when it is important to remember:

**DON'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU THINK!**

#### Some strategies to help us stay curious:

- Catch the “what-ifs” and worries in your thoughts, and label them. They are just thoughts – label them as “anxiety,” “fear,” or “worry.”
- Use reality checking to sort out which thoughts to listen to, and which ones to let go.

#### Reality checking steps:

- Notice and name it: “anxiety,” “fear,” “worry.”
- Is this true? Even though something is possible, is it probable?
- What parts do I know are true, and what parts of it might not be true?
- What steps can I take? What is in my control?

# STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING CHILDREN

## DURING COVID-19

### ACKNOWLEDGE FEARS & BE REAL

- Be honest and give age-appropriate information
- Occasionally be open about your own emotions
- Help children see it is okay to have feelings AND show them that you can manage them

### HELP MANAGE NEWS INTAKE

- Children look to the adults around them to learn how frightened they should be
- It's helpful if adults take in the news and then convey it to children, rather than children viewing news on their own
- Discuss news in the context of a supportive relationship and in manageable bits
- Help children learn about credible news sources

### BE CURIOUS WITH THEM

- Ask about what they are hearing and thinking
- Respond to their questions with facts
- Use developmentally appropriate language and relatable examples
- Follow their lead of where their thoughts are going, and help them limit
- the amount of time spent focusing on them.

### YOUR PRESENCE AND ATTENTION ARE KEY

- Be available for questions or expressions of emotion
- It's okay if you don't have all the answers; your presence can help them tolerate not knowing
- Find simple activities to keep busy and shift attention when they're ready

### ROUTINE!

- Participate in regular activities as much as possible
- Eat, sleep, bathe, and play at regular times that children are used to
- Help children know what they can do – this builds self-efficacy (this may include chores around the house, creating new things, continuing to play, etc.)

# MINDFUL BREATHING TIPS

Mindful breathing exercises (when practiced regularly) have been proven to reduce stress and promote a feeling of calm. They can be used anywhere and may be of significant benefit to individuals struggling with emotion regulation. Relaxed, abdominal breathing (as opposed to shallow, chest breathing) greatly increases the effectiveness of these exercises.

## COUNTING BREATHING

Breathe in.....Breathe out, say, **"One."**  
Breathe in.....Breathe out, say, **"Two."**

Continue until "ten" is reached, then start over.

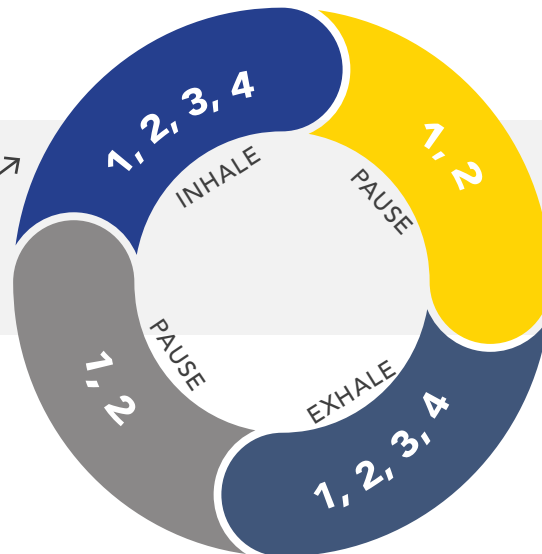
## BECOMING CALM BREATHING

Breathe in, think or say, **"I am."**  
Breathe out, think or say, **"becoming calm"**  
or **"letting go."**

Use any phrase that promotes relaxation.

## CYCLE BREATHING

START HERE →



Inhale (*count to four*),  
Hold (*count to two*),  
Exhale (*count to four*),  
Hold (*count to two*).

## RAISED ARM BREATHING

Sit with a forearm resting on each leg, palms down.  
Breathe in (bend elbows and raise back of hands to shoulders).  
Breathe out (return arms to lap).

## WALKING BREATHING

Walk very slowly, synchronizing your breath with your steps: one step for each inhalation, one step for each exhalation.