

COVID-19 Well-being Guide Contents

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This mental health guide was written by members of the University of Georgia's Clinical Psychology Program to provide information and recommendations to members of the UGA and Athens community who are struggling with significant life changes accompanying the COVID-19 pandemic. The spread of the coronavirus throughout the United States and broader world poses a number of significant stressors, each with effects on our mental health and well-being. These stressors include the threat of dying or becoming ill, the pressures of self-quarantine, stressor-induced relationship conflict, and the hardships associated with economic insecurity. A range of mental health symptoms may emerge or worsen during such times of stress. The following sections describe some of these symptoms ([Section I](#)), recommend evidence-based and straightforward ways to improve your mental health and sense of well-being ([Section II](#)), and provide resources for the UGA community and beyond ([Section III](#)).

SECTION I: THE MENTAL LANDSCAPE

Anxiety of Illness

As our community experiences an increase in new confirmed (and suspected) cases of COVID-19, it is only natural to be concerned about our health and safety. We know that in previous times of infectious disease, such as the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) of 2003 and the middle eastern respiratory syndrome (MERS) of 2015, [anxiety](#), [despair](#), [anger](#), and [chronic fatigue](#) all rose in the communities they affected. While some of us in our community are fortunate enough to be able to practice self-quarantine and social distancing, others continue to serve society in busy marketplaces and healthcare settings. As we inevitably make contact with other people, it is normal to experience worry about the possibility of contracting COVID-19 or transmitting it to others. There are very reasonable concerns about COVID-19 that make heightened attention to and efforts at social distancing and personal hygiene necessary right now. However, it is also important that we remain aware of the difference between being *reasonably* concerned about our health and being irrationally fearful of the unknown. We each have the power to make choices that increase our chances of keeping ourselves and our loved ones healthy. Using

appropriate hygiene (e.g., washing hands for 20 seconds or more), refraining from being in close physical proximity with others, and taking steps to protect loved ones (e.g., disinfecting common areas) can make us feel more confident that we are taking the proper steps to ensure our sense of safety.

Financial Stress

Many in the Athens community rely on UGA students and faculty as sources of economic vitality, and social distancing has already impacted the health of the hospitality, entertainment, and other service industries we know and love. Students who were working at UGA may have lost important sources of income, and some have found themselves relying on families who have themselves been financially affected during this time. [Being unemployed can cause emotional distress](#) in a number of ways, including [depriving individuals of social contact, status, activity, and a sense of purpose](#). Many individuals in our community are concerned about job insecurity amidst growing layoffs and lowered commerce. These concerns are understandable because [job insecurity is related to anxiety, depression, and decreases in well-being](#). There are numerous stressors during this period, including financial stress and those stressors involving unplanned responsibility for the care, support, and protection of family members. Lowering financial stress through utilizing available support from governmental and family resources (see [Resources](#) below) will allow us to productively accomplish our goals during these uncertain times.

The Psychological Effects of Quarantine

New county, state, and national policies around sheltering in place, self-quarantine, and social distancing practices are very much at odds with the social lives of many Americans. These policies can feel restrictive in ways that can hurt our spirit, especially as spring and summer are typically periods of increasing activity. In previous times of infectious disease outbreak, quarantining produced higher levels of [exhaustion, isolation, irritability, insomnia/sleep problems, stress, anxiety, and anger](#). These negative emotions and psychological symptoms have historically been the highest among individuals who thought they had been in contact with confirmed infectious cases, but individuals with no suspected contact also showed elevated [depression. Quarantining may also affect our mental and physical health by leading to social isolation and loneliness](#), and by stopping our routines that have been important to our health and well-being, like going to the gym or church, walking a dog, participating in extracurricular activities, and being with our friends. Therefore, it is important that we work hard and think creatively to develop new ways of meeting our basic human needs for social support, activity, purpose, and exercise under these new conditions to maintain our mental health.

Many of us are practicing quarantine with roommates, partners, friends, and family members. It can be a challenge to be in close proximity with others for prolonged periods while learning to cope with COVID-19-related stressors. Disagreements about effective social distancing, hygiene, sharing limited resources (e.g., toilet papers; tablets; televisions) and our general preparedness (e.g., food, toiletries) can lead to conflict. In these circumstances, you may find yourself feeling frustrated with others' behavior. During this time, communication that reflects our opinions and supports overall harmony can be most helpful.

Those in relationships involving a history of domestic violence or abuse are particularly vulnerable and should take extra care in choosing safe environments, to the extent possible. Many people experiencing COVID-19-related stressors may feel that they are losing control over their lives. Under circumstances of heightened stress, individuals with aggressive tendencies may be more likely to exert control over people around them. If you or someone you know is in an unsafe living environment, consider reaching out to mental health professionals for guidance (see [Resources](#) below).

A note to those with pre-existing conditions:

We encourage those in the community with pre-existing mental health conditions (that is, a psychiatric history of mental illness) to take extra care with their health and well-being during this time. Such individuals [tend to experience more distress during disasters](#), and may benefit from greater support from family, friends, and mental health professionals. More information is provided in the [Resources](#) below.

MENTAL HEALTH CHECKLIST

It is normal to experience strong and mixed emotions in response to a distressing event. Because emotions can sometimes be hidden and reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic may differ greatly from person to person, it can be difficult to reflect on how you are doing emotionally. Have *you* taken a moment to consider your emotions during the COVID-19 pandemic? If you are experiencing emotions that are making you uncomfortable, it may be important to explore them in more detail. To get a better idea about how you're responding to the pandemic, complete the ratings below by putting a check mark to indicate the level of intensity for each emotion:

	Not at all	Mildly	Moderately	Extremely
Anger				
Fear				
Sadness				
Surprise				

If you indicated that you are experiencing moderate to extreme levels of intensity for any of the negative emotions listed above, write down how you have been coping to reduce the discomfort caused by them:

SECTION II: COVID-19 ACTION PLAN

This “action plan” is meant to give you some science-based education about what helps keep people healthy in stressful times, and to give you space to think about what your own personal goals and available resources are. What are some things you could do to take care of yourself during this difficult time?

PREVENTION

Set goals for yourself. Focus on what you *can* do during this time. Make a schedule for yourself, and plan to:

- ★ **Be kind to yourself.** It is normal to feel stressed, anxious or sad, and it can also be normal to feel joy and a whole range of other emotions, in the face of a situation like this pandemic. Sometimes you will not be able to do everything you set out to do and that’s okay. Accept where you are and what you have been able to accomplish.
 - **What can I tell myself when I need encouragement?** _____
- ★ **Eat regular healthy meals when possible.** We may be relying more on groceries these days rather than take-out, which gives you an opportunity to be intentional about what you are putting into your body. Choose foods that are full of nutrients and that you enjoy eating. If you hate broccoli, that’s ok! Find vegetables and fruits and protein and healthy fat sources that you do like. As you find yourself eating more food at home, preparing big batches of food that don’t require too much daily effort can help you keep up regular healthy eating. Remember that healthy food intake is good for healthy immune system functioning.
 - **Some healthy foods that I can eat:** _____

- ★ **Move every day.** The gym may be off-limits, but you can still go for a walk outside, do jumping jacks in your bedroom, watch free online exercise classes online, or move your furniture around. Physical exercise is great for positive mood and healthy immune system functioning.
 - **Here are 3 ways I can stay active:**
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
- ★ **Keep a routine. Go to bed and wake up around the same time every day.** Our normal routine may have been disrupted, but a consistent sleep schedule can help your sleep quality, which can support your physical and mental health.
 - **I plan to go to sleep at _____ PM and wake up at _____ AM.**

★ **Reach out to family, friends, and colleagues.** COVID-19 is a respiratory infection, it is not a computer virus! So, there's no need to socially distance when it comes to social media. You can schedule a virtual get-together over platforms like Zoom or Skype, or even watch a movie with friends. Try not to give in to social anxiety that might be leading you to avoid social contact right now. There are many people who are bored and looking for something interesting to do.

○ **Who do I want to stay in touch with?** _____

★ **Do activities you enjoy.** Take the opportunity to make the most of your increased time at home. Read, knit, listen to music, play an instrument, take a warm bath, or revisit an old hobby. Give yourself permission to spend time on things you enjoy.

○ **Hobbies I want to spend time on:** _____

★ **Select goals that matter.** Take the opportunity to do something you've always wanted to do but haven't had the time for. Maybe that's drawing, coloring, or painting, getting in better shape by walking or jogging, updating the backyard and gardening, learning a new skill, fixing the car or updating the house, singing, or watching/reading something you've been putting off. There are loads of worthwhile activities that will leave you stronger and wiser after this is all over.

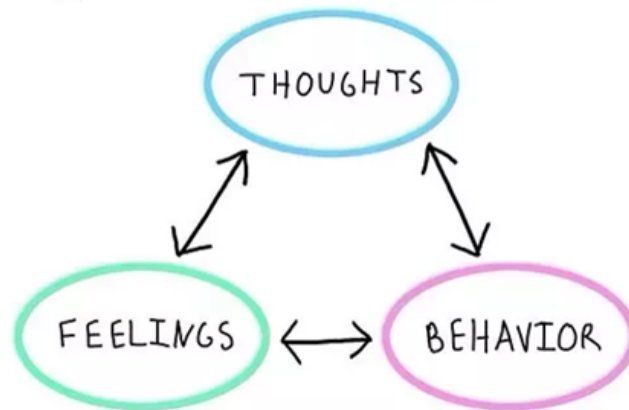
○ **Personal goals I want to spend time on:** _____

★ **Limit time spent checking news and social media.** Stay informed, but also know that *constant* exposure to COVID-19 news may not be helpful. Schedule a time to check social media and/or news outlets, rather than checking continuously throughout the day. When you do check into news, take care to connect with high-quality content from our nation's experts.

○ **When will I check news or social media?** _____

REFRAMING UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS

Based on decades of research, we know that thoughts have a strong influence on how we feel. Challenging irrational or unhelpful thoughts can help change those emotions.



Worry is natural during these times, but it's important to be reasonable about our true level of risk. Here are a few thoughts that might be inaccurate and can lead to unnecessary worry:

1. I am going to die.
2. My family members will die.
3. I have lost my economic future.
4. My immune system is not strong enough to weather this.
5. There is nothing I can do to protect myself and those I love in this pandemic.
6. My daughter is too reckless, and will contract the illness and die.
7. I work as a healthcare worker, and will die, regardless of the safety measures I put in place.

Think of a worrisome thought about the COVID-19 pandemic that's been with you during this time, and use the following questions to challenge it:

My thought:

- What evidence goes against this thought?
 - Example: A lot of people who contract COVID-19 are okay.
 - [Click here to track recovered cases in real time](#)
 - Example: I am actually self-quarantining very effectively, and I have a strong immune system
- Am I only thinking about the negative?
 - Example: I am only watching negative news, but missing out on the positive ones (e.g., benefits of quarantine on nature).
- Am I falling into catastrophic thinking (i.e., thinking the worst)?
 - Example: Yes, I may have been exposed, but I have been fine for the past seven days and been keeping myself safe since.
- Am I failing to see the positive?

- Example: Actually, yes, I'm fairly safe, and my family is there to help me during this difficult economic time.
- Are my thoughts based on feelings, rather than facts?
 - Example: Sometimes, yes. I do notice that when I'm distressed, I see the true risk of infection less accurately.
- In my relationships, am I reading other people's minds and jumping to conclusions?
 - Example: I do this sometimes, like the other day when I might have been unfair about thinking my spouse doesn't appreciate the importance of safety precautions.
- Am I exaggerating? Is it really so bad, or am I only seeing things in black and white?
 - Example: Maybe so. Even if I get COVID-19, chances of recovery are in my favor.
- Am I drawing conclusions without knowing all the facts?
 - Example: Maybe. I'm assuming that I will definitely be infected, even though I'm taking the recommended precautions and I'm currently in an area with lower confirmed cases.
- What are some other, helpful thoughts I could be thinking about?
 - Example: I actually do have some power in this situation, like I have some resources for keeping myself safe and healthy. I know what to do.

WHEN THINGS GET HARDER

Know the warning signs. Our response to stress can look different for different people. Here are some common warning signs that your mental health may need attention:

PHYSICAL: Headaches; neck tension; GI/gastrointestinal problems; difficulty sleeping; lower (or greater) appetite; lower energy

PSYCHOLOGICAL/EMOTIONAL: Virus-related worries and insecurity; feelings of being overwhelmed by events, powerlessness; self-verbalization that does not always reflect reality; negative interpretation of things or daily events; feelings of discouragement, insecurity, sadness, anger, etc.

BEHAVIORAL: Difficulty concentrating; irritability or aggression; crying; withdrawal; difficulty making decisions; increased use of alcohol, drugs, and/or medication

What can you do if you notice these or other signs of emotional distress?

Here are 3 (or more) things that I can do to cope even if I am by myself (e.g., write in a journal, move my body to some music, try meditation or breathing exercises):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Here are people I can reach out to for socializing (list with contact info):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Here are people I can reach out to for support, to talk about how I'm feeling (list with contact info):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

WHEN I NEED MORE SUPPORT

Professional, community-based, and governmental support can be helpful for many people. Scroll down to the [Resources section](#) for resources related to mental, physical, and financial health.

TALKING WITH CHILDREN DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

As children and youth hear about the COVID-19 pandemic, they can feel just as nervous, scared, confused, or worried as adults. However, children and youth express emotions differently than adults. Therefore, it is important to know when a child needs help.

Possible Stress Responses in Children

- **Infants and toddlers** do not completely understand when something bad is happening. However, they may sense changes in their caregivers' mood and behavior. They may express this through crying, or hyperactive, aggressive, or withdrawn behavior.
- **Children, 3–5 years old**, may be able to understand the effects of COVID-19. If they are very upset, they may have trouble adjusting to their new routines. As such, they may rely on adults for support more than usual.
- **Children, 6–10 years old**, may have trouble paying attention and struggle with schoolwork during the current transition to online instruction. Some may become aggressive for no apparent reason. Others may act younger than their age, by asking to be fed or dressed by their parents or caregivers.
- **Youth and Adolescents, 11–19 years old**, may struggle to cope with the anxiety that may be associated with hearing and reading news of COVID-19. Older teens may deny their reactions to themselves and their caregivers. They may respond with a routine "I'm okay" or even silence when they are upset. They may also experience some physical symptoms because of anxiety about the pandemic. Some may start arguments at home and/or at school, resisting any structure or authority.

How to Support Children During the COVID-19 Pandemic:

- **Be attentive and listen.** Children may need help expressing their emotions through conversation, writing, drawing, playing, and singing. The majority of children want to talk about things that make them anxious and cause them stress and may simply need the opportunity. Accept their feelings and tell them it is okay to feel sad, upset, or stressed. Crying is often a way to relieve stress and grief.
- **Allow them to ask questions.** Ask your teens what they know about COVID-19. What are they hearing about COVID-19? Try to watch news coverage on TV or the Internet with them. Also, limit access so they have time away from reminders about COVID-19; although limiting access to older children may prove difficult, access may be limited by encouraging positive activities. Don't let talking about the pandemic take over the family or classroom discussion for long periods of time.
- **Encourage positive activities.** Adults can help children and youth see the good that can come out of the pandemic. Heroic actions, families, neighbors, and friends who are assisting with the response to the pandemic, and people who take steps to prevent the spread of all types of illness, such as hand washing, are examples. Children may better cope with the pandemic by helping others. They can write caring letters or emails to those who have been sick or lost family members to illness. They can be a source of support to their friends (at a distance). Children may also be encouraged to have virtual play dates.
- **Set a positive example of taking care of yourself, set routines, eat healthy meals, get enough sleep, exercise, and take deep breaths to handle stress.** Adults can show children and youth how to take care of themselves. If you are in good physical and emotional health, you are more likely to be readily available to support the children you care about.

Tips for Talking with Children

Infants, Toddlers, and Preschool Children, 0 – 5 years old

- Speak to them calmly, in a way they can understand.
- Tell them that you always care for them and will continue to take care of them, so they feel safe.
- Keep normal routines, such as eating dinner together and having a consistent bedtime.

Early Childhood to Adolescence, 6 – 19 years old

- Ask your child or the children in your care what worries them and what might help them cope.
- Offer comfort with gentle words or just be present with them.
- Spend more time with the children than usual, even for a short while.
- If your child is very distressed, excuse him or her from chores for a day or two.
- Encourage children to have quiet time or to express their feelings through writing or art.
- Encourage children to participate in recreational activities so they can move around and play with others.
- Address your own anxiety and stress in a healthy way.
- Let children know that you care about them—spend time doing something special; make sure to check on them in a nonintrusive way.

- Maintain consistent routines, such as completing homework and playing games together.

Much of this information came from the [National Commission on Children and Disasters](#).

SECTION III: RESOURCES

This section is meant to give you some good direction for resources in the Athens community, the state of Georgia, and the nation more broadly. You'll find resources for your well-being and mental health, resources for children and families, resources for financial assistance during tough times, and resources for COVID-19 testing and tracking. We will be updating this section periodically to keep it current.

Mental Health Resources in Georgia

- [Georgia Crisis and Access Line](#)
 - If you are **in a crisis or need advice for someone in a crisis, call 800-715-4225**. They have a team of crisis-trained counselors standing by and access to any information or resources you might need, including a team who can be brought on-site in a crisis.
- [Advantage Behavioral Health](#) Crisis Stabilization Unit
 - The Crisis Stabilization Unit (CSU) is a 30-bed unit offering short-term residential stabilization services for individuals with psychiatric and/or substance abuse disorders. Individuals are accepted on a voluntary or an involuntary basis. **240 Mitchell Bridge Road, Athens, GA, 30606**
- [Crisis Text Line](#)
 - Anyone in Georgia experiencing an emotional crisis can **text GA to 741741** to communicate with a trained Crisis Counselor. Children and Teens are especially welcome. The service is free, confidential and available 24/7.
- [UGA Health Insurance](#)
 - Students enrolled in the UGA Student Health Insurance have access to licensed therapists and psychologists at no charge. Visit www.telehelp4students.com to start seeing a counselor.

General Mental Health Resources

- **UHCSR Emotional-Support Help Line**
 - To support students who may be experiencing anxiety or stress following the recent developments around COVID-19, UHCSR is offering an Emotional-Support Help Line, through Optum, providing access to specially trained mental health specialists. Optum's toll-free help line number, **866-342-6892**, will be open 24/7, for as long as necessary. The service is free of charge to all students.
- [Free Guided Meditation Sessions](#)
- [Healthcare Workers: Free Access to Headspace App](#)
 - Headspace just announced that they are providing free access to healthcare workers during this time
- **SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline**

- Toll-Free: -877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727) - English and Español
- SMS: Text TalkWithUs to 66746
- SMS (español): “Hablanos” al 66746
- TTY: 1-800-846-8517
- **24/7/365 Treatment Referral Information Service in English and Español**
 - Toll-Free: 1-800-662-HELP
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness**
 - COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Information and Resources from National Alliance on Mental Illness - <https://www.nami.org/getattachment/About-NAMI/NAMI-News/2020/NAMI-Updates-on-the-Coronavirus/COVID-19-Updated-Guide-1.pdf>
 - This includes online communities that may be helpful to people.
- **National Suicide Hotlines**
 - Available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress
 - Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK
 - 1-800-SUICIDE: 1-800-784-2433
- **National Suicide Chats**
 - <https://www.imalive.org>
 - <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat/>

Resources for Children and Families

- **Child Welfare Information Gateway**
 - Toll-Free: 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453)
- **Darkness to Light**
 - www.darkness2light.org
 - (866) FOR-LIGHT (367-5444)
 - Darkness to Light provides programs that raise awareness on the prevalence and consequences of child sexual abuse by educating adults about preventing, recognizing and reacting responsibly to child sexual abuse.
- **Prevent Child Abuse America**
 - www.preventchildabuse.org
 - Information and Referral Hotline: 1-800-CHILDREN (1-800-244-5373)
 - Prevent Child Abuse America builds awareness, provides education and inspires hope to everyone involved in the effort to prevent child abuse.
- **National Child Abuse Hotline**
 - 1-800-422-4453
 - www.childhelp.org
- **National Domestic Violence Hotline**
 - 1-800-799-7233
 - www.ndvh.org
- **Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network**
 - 1-800-656-4673
 - www.rainn.org
- **National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline**
 - 1-866-331-9474

- www.loveisrespect.org
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**
 - 1-800-273-8255
 - www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Financial Assistance Resources in Georgia

- [Georgia Department of Labor Unemployment Assistance](#)
- [UGA Graduate Student Emergency Fund](#)
- [Garrie Vereen memorial Emergency Relief Fund Athens Entertainment Industry](#)
- [Congressional “Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act” or “CARES Act”](#)

Physical Health Resources

- [Free COVID-19 screenings for UGA faculty and staff](#)

COVID-19 Virus Tracking

- [Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center](#)