

# Offer Coping Strategies to Distressed Patients or Colleagues

You'll hear **COVID-19 is fueling a “parallel pandemic” of mental health concerns**...anxiety, depression, substance use disorder, etc.

The many triggers include fear, financial pressure, and isolation...along with a plethora of misinformation.

And the impact can be broad...affecting healthcare workers, patients with mental health conditions, and the general population.

Be ready with “psychological first aid” strategies...and keep in mind that adding or increasing meds is often NOT needed.

Routinely ask patients and colleagues how they're coping.

Urge those in crisis to contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255) or Crisis Text Line at 741741 for help.

Also listen for patients or colleagues with difficulty concentrating, excessive worry, insomnia, etc. Offer help if symptoms affect daily function for several days in a row or more.

For example, suggest contacting the Disaster Distress Helpline by calling 800-985-5990 or texting “TalkWithUs” to 66746. Or consider a telemedicine visit with you, another prescriber, or therapist.

But start with reassurance and coping tactics in most cases.

Advise limiting news. For instance, suggest checking news or social media once or twice daily...instead of as a constant stream.

And educate about reliable sources of information...to replace fear with facts. For example, refer patients to CDC.gov or WHO.int.

Share self-care tips to promote resilience and limit burnout.

For instance, suggest 1 min of deep breathing or a 3-min “body scan”...focusing and releasing tension from one body part at a time. Consider apps that may help...*Headspace, Mindfulness Coach, etc.*

Emphasize staying connected via email, video, etc. Explain that “social distancing” doesn't mean eliminating social interactions.

Recommend exercise that complies with physical distancing, such as a walk outside...or an online fitness or yoga class.

Encourage gratitude, such as journaling a few positive points from the day. And recognize your team for the good you're all doing.

Find resources and apps in our chart, *Dealing With Stress*.

## Key References:

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- Lancet Psychiatry 2020;7(4):e21
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