



MARIST COLLEGE ASHGROVE

A Catholic boys' day and boarding College in the Marist Tradition

Managing Mental Health amidst COVID-19

The outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has proven stressful for individuals and communities as a whole. People are feeling anxious, overwhelmed, out of control, uncertain and in some cases panicked. We have all seen evidence of this with panic buying and people acting outside of their values in order to ensure they are stocked up and prepared.

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. The emotional impact of an emergency on a person can depend on the person's characteristics and experiences, the social and economic circumstances of the person and their community, and the availability of local resources. People who may respond more strongly to the stress of a crisis include:

- People who have pre-existing mental health conditions
- Children
- Parents of children with a pre-existing health condition
- People with elderly parents
- People who are helping with the response to COVID-19, such as doctors, nurses, pathology or first responders.

Reactions during an infectious disease outbreak can include:

- Fear and worry about your own health status and that of your loved ones
- Catastrophising and thinking of worst-case scenarios
- Changes in sleep and eating patterns
- Difficulty concentrating
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Panic buying
- Increase use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs
- Fear of leaving the house and interacting with others (above the recommendations of social distancing)

While we are not able to control many elements of this pandemic, what we can control is how we choose to manage our mental health. There are many things you can do to support yourself, your children and other loved ones at this time.



Helping children cope

During a crisis, heightened media coverage and ongoing conversations can be distressing for children/adolescents. They may need help to understand what's going on in a way that's appropriate for their age and development.

How to help children/adolescents cope during a crisis:

- Limit the amount of media coverage they see, hear and read. If they do watch the news, be there to explain it to them and answer any questions they may have. Ask them what they already know about the virus so you can clarify any misunderstandings
- Have a conversation with them about what information they are receiving through their Facebook/Instagram feeds. There is a significant amount of exaggerated information or opinion pieces out there.
- Be honest and stick to the facts
- Give them a sense of control by explaining what they can do to stay safe (e.g., wash their hands regularly, stay away from people who are coughing or sneezing). Explain to them the importance of taking preventative hygiene measures. For young children, this video can be useful as a visual tool in explaining why hand washing is beneficial <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HulpYYaQ2Dg>
- Monitor their reactions, and listen to how they feel and what they think. Particularly for those children/adolescents who have existing mental health conditions (e.g. anxiety, depression, OCD).
- Point out the people who are working to fix the situation
- If schools do close down, ensure your children have a regular routine at home that mirrors a school day as this is familiar and predictable. Ensure that they incorporate exercise and family time into their day. Monitor their phone/TV use and model appropriate use with them.
- Use humour to reduce stress
- Your own behaviour plays an important role in helping children deal with the current situation. It's ok to share your own feelings but show your child that you are managing them. This can help them to build important life skills like resilience. If you are feeling distressed, discuss it with other adults rather than your children.



Helping yourself cope

- Read trustworthy news sites. There is so much conflicting information out there. The World Health Organization, the Australian Government Department of Health, and Queensland Health are best placed to provide you with the facts.
- Avoid excessive exposure to media coverage of COVID-19. News is available everywhere, which means it can be hard to switch off. If you feel that you're preoccupied by the news, consider setting yourself reasonable limits. Avoid exposure to news before bed as it can interfere with your sleep.
- Take care of your body. Take deep breaths, stretch or meditate. Download the Smiling Minds or Headspace Mindfulness apps and listen to these with your families. Eat healthy well-balanced meals as this will also help your immune system.
- Connect with others. Share your concerns and how you are feeling with a friend or family member. Maintain healthy relationships by calling, Facetimeing or Skyping with friends. **Please remember to check in with your elderly family members, particularly those who live alone or are in nursing homes. Loneliness and isolation will be a real concern for them. You can set them up on Skype/Facetime or call them regularly.**
- Keep perspective. Remember that crises swamp the headlines because they are so infrequent and out of the ordinary – this is what makes them newsworthy. Worldwide, we have more knowledge and better technology than at any point in history. This means we've never been more prepared to handle crises than we are right now, and this capability will only continue to improve.
- Maintain a sense of hope and positive thinking. Make time to unwind and remind yourself that strong feelings will fade.

When to get support

Most people will feel some distress during a crisis. This is normal, and usually resolves naturally within a matter of days or weeks.

If you or a family member have taken steps to enhance mental wellbeing but are still feeling stressed, overwhelmed, worried, or just not like your/their normal self, it's important to tell someone. You can also seek support from your GP and many Private Psychologists will be offering appointments via telephone/skype.



Available Supports

- Call *13Health* (13 43 25 84) at any time for practical medical advice and assistance
- Visit the *Headspace* website for information on stress related to COVID-19 and other topics (<https://headspace.org.au/>), as well as access to e-counselling support
- Contact *Kids Helpline* (1800 55 1800) or visit their website (<https://kidshelpline.com.au/>)
- *Lifeline Australia's* telephone counselling service on 13 11 14 or visit their website (<https://www.lifeline.org.au/>)
- Obtain help and information from the local *General Practitioner* or *Community Health Centre*.

This information was adapted from the CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html> and QLD Health <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/news-events/news/how-to-look-after-your-mental-wellbeing-in-a-crisis?fbclid=IwAR1rL9fCo-U3eyhLU21QmLoWHUAUX3VTxNWjOeRz9qAqNZcQFvzhtb2chPY>

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