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Coping and Mental Health during the Pandemic: Acceptance & Self-Compassion

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Recognizing and acknowledging the impact of the pandemic on our psychological self is essential to coping with stress and maintaining calm in our relationships. Coping with the ongoing stress and uncertainty of today can lead to a number of symptoms that can impact our daily functioning and relationships. It is important to *recognize* and *acknowledge* such symptoms and work to take an accepting approach to ourselves and our loved ones. We are all going to be at least “a little off.”

Common reactions you might experience to varying degrees include:

- Difficulty making decisions or concentrating
- Feeling numb or emotionally detached
- Reoccurring thoughts about the pandemic
- Intrusive thoughts involving worst-case scenarios
- Derealization or a sense that you are living a dream or movie
- Irritability or anger
- Grief about what is being missed or lost
- Loss of control and disconnection
- Feelings of powerlessness or helplessness
- Sudden or unexpected waves of emotion
- Sadness or depressed mood
- Difficulty sleeping or falling asleep
- Increased alcohol or drug use

It is helpful to recognize if you are experiencing these reactions and realize that you are not alone. It is likely that most people are experiencing at least some of these reactions to varying degrees. In addition to acknowledging and accepting your reactions, there are some things you can do that can be helpful:

- Ask for support and talk about how you are feeling
- Find others who can provide empathy, rather than problem-solving or giving advice
- Practice self-compassion and give yourself time to adjust to the many changes that continue to occur daily
- Focus on the present moment and practice mindfulness throughout the day
- Take it one-day-at-a-time or one-hour-at-a-time
- Do things to take care of yourself and find time to exercise or get outside
- Look into a new interest or take time to do things you enjoy
- Engage in the arts by creating art and playing or listening to music

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- Incorporate elements of your previous routine when possible; such as taking a morning shower, getting dressed for work, eating a particular weekday breakfast, or exercising at a certain time of day
- Take time to imagine what life will be like when we are able to spend time together again; imagine yourself going to a movie, eating out with friends, or shopping in your favorite stores
- Seek professional support through online counseling. Many therapists and psychologists have moved online. Some may even offer reduced fee sessions or pro-bono counseling services for first-line medical professionals and busy workers in life-sustaining industries.

Social support is key. We are social creatures and our mental health is largely connected to a sense of social connection and social interest. Be creative with technology and use online video chats to connect:

- Start a support group amongst your friends
- Screen-share a movie together with family or friends
- Begin an online chat or group text message with your close friends
- Have an online social hour and share a glass of wine together
- Share jokes via text
- Think about what skills you can share with others online

In review, it will be helpful to acknowledge your reactions, practice acceptance and patience, and creatively engage in self-care and social connection. There is a lot happening in our world today and nobody can be expected to handle it perfectly. Show yourself the same compassion you would show your best friend, your grandmother, or your own small child.