

How to deal with uncertainty during coronavirus <https://au.reachout.com/>

Let's be real: so much about coronavirus (COVID-19) is outside of our control. Not just the virus itself, but all the other aspects of life that might be impacted, from work and finances to socialising and travel. At times like this, it can be helpful to remember that there are things you can do to deal with the uncertainty. Give yourself credit as you cope with this tough time and recognise that dealing with this challenge can make you more resilient.

Hold on to your 'stability rocks'

A 'stability rock' is a process or practice that adds something reliable to your life when it feels like things are spinning out of control. 'Stability rocks' are really grounding and help you to remember that there are some things that are within your control. Your own routines and rituals will become really important at this time when some parts of your life are disrupted (e.g. school, uni, work).

Some examples of 'stability rocks' could be:

- waking up at the same time every day
- eating regular meals
- going to bed at the same time
- doing some form of exercise every morning taking an afternoon tea break
- reaching out to a friend each day.

Read our article on how acceptance can help you cope with things out of your control.

Accept that it's normal to be feeling stressed

Feeling stressed is an understandable response to the current coronavirus pandemic. You might be worried about catching the virus, about how your loved ones will cope, about the disruption to your studies and routines, and about whether you'll still have a job and enough money. These stressors, along with the constant media hysteria and dealing with disappointment (travel bans, events being cancelled, etc.), add up to a pretty crappy time.

As hard as things are, it can be comforting to know that you're not alone and that others share your feelings. A LOT of people are feeling stressed and anxious right now, particularly because of the uncertainty surrounding the situation. When you check in with your mates, take note of how they're feeling – it's likely that they're in the same boat as you.

Remember: you are not your thoughts

When you're feeling anxious, tell yourself it's a normal part of being human. It's important to understand that we are not our thoughts. Thoughts may come into your head for a whole bunch of reasons. By accepting that they are not facts, thoughts lose some of their power to upset us.

Try writing down the words that are going through your head, especially when you're in a tough situation. Then read them back as if someone else had written them. This can help you to realise that your thoughts aren't you, and to accept them for what they are: just thoughts. Check out this video that explains this idea more.

Read more tips on how to deal with stress and anxiety.

Practise tolerating uncertainty, or take one day/morning/hour/moment at a time

Predictability helps people to feel they are in control, and reassures them that their lives are settled and nothing bad will happen. On the other hand, having to deal with the unknown can make people anxious. Get a handle on anxiety by practising tolerating uncertainty. You can start by doing small things differently, such as experimenting with cooking a meal without triple-checking the recipe, or picking a random Netflix show to watch without knowing anything about it.

Write down how these behaviours make you feel (before and after doing them). One thing we don't like about uncertainty is that if we allow it into our life, sometimes things can go wrong. To use the example of experimenting with cooking, perhaps the meal tastes pretty bad. Write down the outcome and then write down what you did to cope. For example, did you still eat the meal, or did you make something else? Maybe you sent a picture to a friend with a joke around how you #NailedIt.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Did things turn out okay even though I wasn't 100% certain?
- If things didn't turn out okay, what happened?
- What did I do to cope with the negative outcome?
- Was I able to handle the negative outcome?
- What does this tell me about my ability to cope with negative outcomes in the future?

The idea is to learn that even if things don't go as planned, you can still deal with them.

Draw on skills you've used before

It's very likely you've dealt with uncertainty before, and you can do it again. Reflect on what skills you have used in the past to cope with uncertainty, or ask someone

who knows you well. Write a list so you have a little toolbox to refer to whenever you're getting anxious. Your skills could include:

focusing on what's in your control, and working with that writing down what's troubling you and what you can do to improve the situation practising self-care activities allowing yourself to take a break from what's bothering you practising positive self-talk.

Check out our article on 10 tips for coping with the hard stuff for more ideas.

Play to your strengths

Working out what our strengths are, and then playing to them, can give us more confidence in times of uncertainty. Take this free VIA Character Strengths quiz and then have a think about what you can do to act on those strengths. For example, if you're creative, you could spend 30 minutes each day doing something in that area, such as drawing, playing an instrument or experimenting with a new recipe. If a value is 'humanity', you could practise acting compassionately and do small, unexpected things for others like checking in on a neighbour or sending a friend a song you think they'd like.

Find ways to talk to others

When you're going through a tough time, one of the best and most effective things you can do to feel better is to talk with someone. If an in-person meeting isn't possible, organise a time to call, text, WhatsApp, Skype, Google Hangout, Slack Video or Zoom. When you talk to a trusted friend, family member or health professional, tell them what's stressing you out and why. They may not have all the answers, but just sharing what you're going through can help get it out of your head and make it feel less scary.

Watch our video on why talking helps and find out 5 steps to talking to someone you trust.

Stay up to date with the facts

Keeping up to date with factual resources can provide some more certainty about what's happening. Choosing media sources wisely means that you're less likely to get overwhelmed with the constant coverage and it will be easier to stay grounded.

It's a good idea to limit your media intake to a few times a day so you don't become overwhelmed.

If you feel overwhelmed, seek support