

Controlling Anxious Thoughts in Difficult Times

During this difficult time, it's no surprise that the number of employees accessing their employee assistance program is on the rise. Workplace Options (WPO) experienced a 27 percent increase in calls over a two-week period from employees seeking emotional support. According to WPO counselors, callers are reporting feelings of fear and anxiety. The uncertainty surrounding the coronavirus seems to be a common concern.

The coronavirus pandemic is a global crisis, and feelings of stress, sadness, anger, and confusion are normal reactions. It takes time to adapt to a crisis and to create new ways to respond to it. While many often focus on the negatives, a crisis can also be an opportunity for positive change.

In addition to providing callers immediate mental health support by telephone, WPO counselors are also providing suggestions on ongoing ways they can manage distress. The suggestions offered often vary based on the individual's specific situation. For example, some employees are working from home, while others are in professions that put them on the front line. Many are working parents dealing with multiple tasks at the same time. In other cases, employees are temporarily not working or afraid of losing their job. Each case is different.

There are also some general principles for managing distress that can be shared, including the following:

- Keep your attention in the present. If it is possible for you, practice breathing exercises or [mindfulness](#), especially at the onset of anxious thoughts.

- Even if the internet is your way to keep informed, it is recommended that you avoid overexposure to media. A constant stream of information can be difficult to manage.
- Focus attention on hobbies and personal interests. Create some "you time."
- Keep in touch with your loved ones by phone or video calls.
- Exercise can be a helpful coping strategy. Participate in some physical activity, especially if you can do it easily at home.
- Realize that it's normal to feel some emotions: sadness, anger, fear. Take some time to name what you are feeling.
- Try to identify the things you can have control over and focus on them. Strive to let go of those things that you can't control.
- Develop self-compassion. Multi-tasking, especially when you have young children at home, can be a real challenge.
- If possible, find ways to help others. Can you sew masks? Are you able to pick up groceries for an elderly neighbor?
- Consider creating a new schedule according to your needs.

Counselors are also reminding employees that support is always available to them through their employee assistance program, and they should not hesitate to call back in the days or weeks to come.