

COVID: How to Know What's "Normal" vs. When You Might Need Help *(adapted from the state Department of Health's [Public Health Connection blog](#))*

Dealing with COVID-19 has been difficult for everyone, and as we head into winter and month nine of the pandemic we have the added stress of the holidays and the recent COVID surge. If you're feeling stressed or overwhelmed, know that it's *not* just you. The things you're feeling and experiencing are normal during a disaster, and there are things you can do to cope.

Pandemics are natural disasters, so a lot is known about how they impact our wellbeing. Our brains are good at responding to stress in short bursts, using "fight or flight" mode. But we're not used to being in this state for a long time, and the brain gets tired from responding to long periods of stress. As a result, we become more emotional and can't think as logically. Your brain's response to disasters like COVID-19 can show up in different ways. Many people will experience these symptoms of stress during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- A wide range of emotions, or moods that change quickly in a short time.
- Having trouble thinking, getting distracted easily, feeling like you can't focus, or having a hard time remembering details.
- Stomachaches, headaches, trouble sleeping, fatigue, or other physical symptoms.
- Having a short temper, worrying more or feeling unmotivated.
- For children: behaving immaturely, for example, baby talk, temper tantrums or clinginess.

To cope with the stress of a pandemic: 1) Take a deep breath when you get upset – try [Quick Calm deep breathing](#) and [Box Breathing](#); 2) Keep a routine to maintain a sense of stability in your day-to-day life; 3) Build the [four keys of resilience](#); 4) Talk with your kids so you can understand their concerns, using the state Department of Health's [Behavioral Health Toolbox for Families](#) to explain COVID-19 in an age-appropriate way; and 5) Model these coping strategies for your family.

While it's normal to feel anxious, sad, or overwhelmed during a pandemic, it's also important to watch for signs that you or your kids need more support. Unusual mood swings, not having interest in things you love, withdrawing from normal activities, and declining schoolwork are all signs that something might be wrong. If you need help, you can reach out to your family doctor or to the [EAP](#), visit the [Washington State wellbeing webpage](#), or call the [WA Listens support line](#) to chat with someone about COVID-19 stress.

Help for Parents During this Holiday Season

Here are some resources to help support you and your family through this challenging holiday season. First, to [help your family make this holiday season special](#), the National Child Trauma Support Network offers these strategies and ideas:

- Start a family conversation - talk with your children about your family values and holiday traditions (the way you celebrate may change, but the meaning behind the holiday does not).
- Find ways to make connections - arrange Zoom calls to light candles, sing holiday songs, or simply laugh and share stories; or make and send a special card to someone you know who may need cheering up.
- Remember that small moments matter – together, discuss and start a new tradition to mark this year that can be continued in future holiday seasons, such as making homemade decorations or cooking a favorite dish.
- Notice the good things – with 2021 just around the corner, talk together about what you are proud of accomplishing during this remarkable, challenging year.

Second, since COVID began, have you been yelling more often, or throwing the adult version of tantrums, or behaving in other ways that are unusual for you? If so, you're not alone: many parents have been struggling, and the Child Mind Institute offers some [guidance to help you manage your anger and frustration](#) when these and other common situations arise.

For additional guidance and resources, check out our state Department of Health's comprehensive [Behavioral Health Toolbox for Families](#). "If you or your children are struggling and you need some additional support, contact the EAP at 1-877-313-4455 or [online](#)."

Upcoming Live Support EAP Webinars:

Leading the Human Side of Change

We are currently experiencing a rapid transformation of the workplace. As a leader, you may find yourself struggling with how to navigate and lead your team through the challenges that can come with change. In this webinar you'll learn about the human side of change, how change impacts you as a leader and your work group, strategies to support your team through change, and what resources are available to support both you and your employees

- Wednesday, December 2, 2020 2:00pm-3:30pm [Register](#)
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This webinar is intended for those who are supporting others in crisis e.g. customers, clients, students, employees/staff. During this webinar you will learn how your mind and body responds to stress, possible impacts on your emotional and physical well-being, strategies to build resilience, and supports and resources available to you.

- Monday, December 7, 2020 2:00pm-3:30pm [Register](#)

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