

Addressing the mental health effects of COVID-19 in the workplace

A guide for workers

It's normal to feel worried, distressed, or overwhelmed as we all process the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It takes time to adjust and find ways to cope with all the changes happening around us. The outbreak of COVID-19 affects most people at both work and home, which can take a toll on our mental health. As humans, we're naturally built to experience an array of emotions in times of uncertainty. Some common reactions include feeling helpless, sad, stressed, lonely, or afraid for your health or the health of loved ones.

If you're a front-line worker in health care, food services, transportation services, or other essential services, you may face unique challenges so take extra care to balance the demands of work with the health and well-being of you and your families.

This guide suggests healthy ways to manage stress and anxiety so you can better take care of yourself, support others, and maintain productivity at work. Note that this resource focuses primarily on your mental health. For information about protecting your physical health and safety at work and accessing WorkSafeBC services during this time, visit worksafebc.com.

Fight fears with facts

The first line of defence against fear and anxiety is knowledge. Given the amount of misinformation that exists on the web about COVID-19, you can reduce stress by educating yourself on the facts. Trusted sources you can refer to include [HealthLinkBC](https://healthlinkbc.ca), the [BC Centre for Disease Control](https://www2.gov.bc.ca),

the [Public Health Agency of Canada](https://www.canada.ca), and the [World Health Organization](https://www.who.int).

As many people's work environments are changing due to COVID-19, it's more important than ever for workers and employers to cooperate on making sure the workplace is healthy and safe. Whether you're in your regular workplace or you're working from home, you and your employer have **responsibilities to ensure your health and safety**, including your mental health. For more information about your rights and responsibilities, see [WorkSafeBC's COVID-19 updates page](#) or talk to your manager or supervisor.

Finances can also be a huge source of stress for people in this ever-changing employment landscape. Having reliable information about what government assistance is available may not entirely eliminate financial concerns, but it can help you feel less anxious about how you'll make things work. Both the [Government of B.C.](https://www2.gov.bc.ca) and the [Government of Canada](https://www.canada.ca) provide benefits relating to a range of services, including employment, finance, and housing. These benefits continue to be updated, so be sure to check their websites regularly for the latest information.

Take care of your mental health

Self-care strategies can help you regain a sense of control during times of stress. This allows you to function better at home and at work. Here are some ideas:

- Set limits on accessing the news, and try to focus on information from reliable sources that is relevant to you and your situation right now.

Spending too much time reading about what's going on in other parts of the world can skew your perspective and make you feel even more anxious.

- Maintain a routine: set a schedule that can provide you with structure and keep you on track in your day-to-day. Getting dressed, eating breakfast, having regular work hours with scheduled breaks, and having time for exercise and self-care can all help in managing work-life balance and stress.
- If you have a pre-existing health condition, times of stress can make symptoms worse. Monitor your health and address any additional symptoms appropriately.
- Take care of your physical health: exercise regularly and eat a balanced diet, and try to avoid sleeping too much or too little.
- Practise stress-reduction techniques, such as yoga, mindfulness practices, and deep breathing.
- Use healthy coping strategies, including being mindful of sleep routines, exercise, eating a healthy diet, and maintaining social contact can help you avoid falling into problematic patterns, such as turning to alcohol, cannabis, gambling, or other unhealthy ways of coping with stress.
- Pay attention to your moods and how you're feeling. Recognize these can change frequently and that is normal.
- Set boundaries to maintain healthy relationships. If you're working at home with a full house, try to find a quiet and private space. Make sure you get what you need, so that you can be your best for the people who depend on you.
- Reach out by phone or online to other informal supports in your life, such as family, friends, your faith community, or other groups you're a part of.
- Look for opportunities to help others, especially those who are vulnerable or may have to stay

home. Finding meaningful ways to be of service to others or contributing to the community can be beneficial for you and everyone involved.

During this time, it can also help to reflect on the ways you've dealt with and overcome hardships in the past. Remember, you're not alone and help is available if you need it (see the list of resources at the end of this guide).

Staying connected in the workplace

Whether you're in your usual workplace or at home, staying connected with your co-workers and your employer during this time can reduce anxiety and feelings of isolation. Think of creative ways you can reach out to co-workers while continuing to practise physical distancing. Also, touch base with your manager or supervisor regularly so that you're up to date on organizational changes and how they may affect your work duties or expectations.

Supporting your co-workers

Notice a co-worker is feeling overwhelmed and you want to support them? It can be hard to know how to talk about what's going on. Below are some simple conversation starters you can use whether you're talking to co-workers in person at your workplace or remotely from home:

- How are you doing today?
- I know there is a lot changing around us, how are you managing?
- You seem a bit unsettled. Want to talk about what's happening?
- I've been feeling [share appropriate personal experience]. How are you feeling?
- What can I do to support you?

Not sure what to say? Be honest about that. We don't always have all the answers or know the "right" thing to say and that's okay. Here are some responses when you don't know what to say:

- It sounds like you're going through a lot. I'm not sure what to say, but I can listen.
- I haven't been through what you're experiencing, but I'm here to support you.
- I don't have the answers, but let's look for resources together.
- I can only imagine what that might be like. Tell me more so I can try to understand.

Mental health resources

Workplace resources

Your organization may have resources and programs that you and your family can access. Talk to your supervisor or employer to see what's available. These may include:

- Employee and Family Assistance Program
- Organization peer support team
- Occupational health nurse
- Extended health benefits provider (for mental health benefits)

Community resources

There are many community and government resources that you may find helpful, including:

- **Managing COVID-19 Stress, Anxiety & Depression** — Tips and resources from B.C.'s Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions | [webpage](#)

- **BC COVID-19 Symptom Self-Assessment Tool** — Developed with the B.C. Ministry of Health, this tool helps determine whether you need further assessment or testing for COVID-19 | covid19.thrive.health
- **The Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention Centre of BC** — This crisis line provides 24/7 support if you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide | crisiscentre.bc.ca; 1.800.SUICIDE (1.800.784.2433)
- **310Mental Health Support** — Emotional support, information, and resources specific to mental health | crisislines.bc.ca; 310.6789 (no need to dial area code)
- **Red Book Online** — Provides information and referrals to community, government, and social services in B.C. | redbookonline.bc211.ca; 2-1-1
- **Mental health tips for working at home** | [Government of Canada](#)

Self-care resources

These online tools and resources can help support your positive mental health:

- **heretohelp** — Strategies to help you take care of your mental health and learn how to support a loved one | heretohelp.bc.ca
- **MindShift CBT app** — This free app, provided by Anxiety Canada, helps you learn ways to relax, be more mindful, develop more effective ways of thinking, and better manage anxiety. | anxietycanada.com
- **MoodFX** — This tool includes online and self-guided resources to help people manage anxiety and mood difficulties | moodfx.ca
- **Bounce Back Online** — Online learning modules and resources to help manage depression and anxiety | online.bouncebackonline.ca