



COVID-19 PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLNESS GUIDE:

“I’M DOING THIS WRONG!”

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The COVID-19 pandemic impacts everyone, and has increased intense and distressing emotions (anger, sadness, numbness, exhaustion, and others) amidst countless uncertainties and changes. Uncertainty and change are, in turn, uncomfortable and exhausting. Feeling the impacts of these emotions, uncertainties, and changes have led many people to wonder whether feeling this way means they may be *doing something wrong*. Seeing other people experiencing different things or responding differently can also promote these worries that we are coping “wrong”, or that we shouldn’t be feeling how we’re feeling, or responding how we’re responding.

It is natural to try to adapt to challenging situations by trying to figure out the best way to respond; however, it is important to make sure that the strategy you are using is feasible and helpful. Below we summarize several experiences that many people are having right now, and some tips on coping with these experiences. Helpful resources are also included.

Remember, there is No Roadmap

- Notice that there is no road map for this time
- Validate the desire to ‘figure out how to do this’
- Notice if you are having difficulty having patience with yourself
- Acknowledge that no one is perfect and responding in an ideal way is impossible

Take these Steps if You Say to Yourself, I’m UNPRODUCTIVE!

- Avoid comparing yourself to others - judging yourself based on what others are producing neglects important context
 - Notice if you are looking around at how others are coping and recognize how comparing ourselves (on the *inside*) to how others appear to be doing (on the *outside*) is a recipe for feeling unsuccessful, or as though we are doing something wrong!
 - Remind yourself that we are all doing the best we can in each moment given what we have - other people may have different emotions, different resources and supports than you
- Notice that there is a very real extra burden (extra time and energy) associated with doing many everyday things, in comparison to before COVID-19
 - Be aware, extra uncertainty and worry can sap energy away from important



tasks

- Acknowledge that this pandemic has an energy cost and means extra care is needed to prevent burnout and keep yourself well
- Prioritize balance, cognitively and emotionally, as much as you can
- Check in with yourself: are you overworking? Are you trying to overwork? Are you trying to speed up with an empty gas tank?
 - Ask yourself: are you doing more – or less - because you're spending energy pushing something away? Avoiding emotions can increase your struggle; instead, try to notice difficult experiences that are normal, healthy, and “fit the facts” of this strange time
 - Practice self-care and wellness to “fill up your tank”

Take these Steps if You Say to Yourself, I'm ANGRY/FRUSTRATED!

- Know that anger or frustration with the situation or people around you is a natural response to the stressors caused by the pandemic -- for many people, anger is part of the grieving process for losses caused by the virus, including change in normal routines, loss of connections with friends and family, financial difficulties and/or sickness or death of a loved one
 - Normalize these feelings of anger or frustration
 - Acknowledge any anger or frustration you may be feeling towards others – for example, towards coworkers who may be more or less productive than usual
- Step back and recognize that everyone around you is experiencing different challenges and responding differently
- Give yourself time before responding or reacting
 - Take a few deep breaths and force yourself to take a break even as short as 60 seconds to calm your anger or frustration
- Practice being patient with yourself and others
 - Use a calm tone to prevent a situation from escalating or becoming stressful
- Use calming or mindfulness techniques or other ways to minimize your anger, such as exercising or spending time on a hobby
- Remove yourself from situations physically if you feel you might respond to your anger in a violent way
 - Take a break
- Notice if you want to react out of anger or frustration in a way that wouldn't be helpful to you or others
 - Practice “acting opposite” (i.e., do something nice for someone when you feel frustrated or angry) to reduce these feelings instead of keeping them going (we know this can be challenging!)
- Improve your sleep, diet, exercise, and other health habits to help yourself feel less angry or frustrated



Take these Steps if You Say to Yourself, I'm SAD!

- Recognize when you feel sad
 - Give yourself permission to feel sad
 - Keep in mind that not everyone experiences sadness in the same way and there is no right way to feel and express sadness
- Share your feelings
 - Talk to supportive others about your sadness and pain
 - Write about your feelings
 - Understand the why of your sadness
- Take action - action reduces the downward mood spiral
 - Develop a plan
 - Do the plan
 - Reward yourself for taking action steps
- Do things that you used to find pleasurable or positive
 - Engage in activities that used to be fun
- Reach out to individuals you trust including family, friends, religious figures or your doctor/mental health professional to talk about your feelings and concerns
- Focus on the present moment, which can be done through mindfulness or meditation
- Practice letting go of the things you cannot control
- Help other people
- Move – regular exercise boosts positive mood and reduces stress
- Be patient with yourself if you fall backward in your healing process - it takes time and is often not a perfectly straight path.

Take these Steps if You Say to Yourself, I'm EXHAUSTED!

- Know that chronic stress and worrying can leave us feeling depleted in terms of energy
- Notice if you are feeling exhausted from your current activities, or feeling defeated by comparisons with others – you may notice judgments about your own energy levels and bandwidth, especially when observing friends remodeling their homes or writing the Great American Novel
 - Remind yourself that context is key and practice being non-judgmental about your own capacities and needs right now
- Validate yourself
 - Remember, change is exhausting
 - Remember, trauma and fear are exhausting and/or numbing
- Remind yourself that comparison often makes things worse



Take these Steps if You Say to Yourself, I'm IN A FOG!

- Notice if you are feeling confused or disorganized, finding it difficult to focus or articulate your thoughts, or generally feeling as though your brain is in a fog
 - Know that these changes in your thinking can be due to changes in routine, increased stress, or feeling unstimulated or overwhelmed
- Attend to your health
 - Try to get the right amount of sleep for your body – too much or too little sleep can contribute to brain fog
 - Eat as healthy as you can with what you have access to
 - Stand up and take breaks to walk around and stretch
- Recognize if difficult emotions are underlying the fog and name them
- Make time and space for these emotions and be gentle with yourself as you navigate your new normal

Take these Steps if You Say to Yourself, I'm USING SUBSTANCES

- Know that the disruption to everyday routine and structure can be particularly difficult for people with or in recovery from a substance use disorder
- Visit the [Managing Substance Use Disorders and Substance Misuse Guide](#) for resources and recommendations

Helpful Resources

- Center for Disease Control (CDC): <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>
- University of California at San Francisco's Psychiatry Department: <https://psychiatry.ucsf.edu/coronavirus/coping>
- Resources on Managing Anger:
 - Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/joyful-parenting/202004/when-anger-coronavirus-is-displaced>
 - Department of Veterans Affairs' Center for Integrated Healthcare: https://www.mirecc.va.gov/cih-visn2/Documents/Patient_Education_Handouts/Anger_Management_Patient_Information_Version_3.pdf
 - Patient Info: <https://patient.info/mental-health/anger-management>
 - Psychology Tools: <https://www.psychologytools.com/professional/problems/anger/>
- Resources on Managing Sadness:
 - "That Discomfort You're Feeling is Grief": <https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discom->



- [fort-youre-feeling-is-grief](#)
- Help Guide: <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief/coping-with-grief-and-loss.htm>
- Grief Counselor: <https://griefcounselor.org/resources/helpful-websites/>
- Victoria State Government's Better Health: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/its-okay-to-feel-sad>
- Resources on Managing Brain Fog:
 - WBUR: <https://www.wbur.org/cognoscenti/2020/04/22/cognitive-change-stress-coronavirus-molly-colvin>
 - Bustle: <https://www.bustle.com/p/why-you-have-brain-fog-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic-according-to-mental-health-experts-22817207>