

Parental anxiety and mental distress during Corona: Take care of yourself

The fight against the coronavirus brings many challenges such as health anxiety, the concern for older family members, coping with isolation and social distancing, intensive coping with children and anxiety about the economic future. It is important to take care of yourself properly so you can deal with the anxieties and tensions, and provide your children with the anchor they need.



Dealing with crisis situations

It is natural to feel anxious and concern in light of the coronavirus crisis. Alongside the practical requirements of child care and adherence to the Ministry of Health guidelines, you face emotional challenges and tensions that arise from uncertainty in both health and finances. Social isolation does not allow you to rely on the resources and support you are used to. Your daily routine and that of your children are completely disrupted, and you are required to perform exceptionally well when you are stressed and anxious. You may feel overwhelmed, and experience some of the common symptoms of anxiety that interfere with your daily life. These symptoms may include relentless worry, restlessness, difficulty falling asleep or disturbed sleep, difficulty concentrating, or accelerated pulse.

In order to help your children feel safe, and maintain a healthy routine even during the crisis, you need to take care of your physical and emotional well-being. It is important to make sure that you meet your needs.

Here are some steps that can help you relax and deal with this difficult time successfully:

Do not go through it alone

Talk about your feelings with someone - spouse, relative or close friends. Keep your social connections active. Use video calls or social networks to foster relationships and feel part of a community. Join online groups dealing with the crisis and share experiences with other parents who are facing similar challenges.

Maintain and nurture your relationship with your spouse

Intensive coping with the extended stay at home and with the children may increase tensions in parenting and between couples. Try to set regular times for conversation about frustrations and disagreements and think of solutions together.

Look for ways to support each other and set realistic expectations. Take time to have some fun together - listen to music you both love, play games together or watch a movie when the kids are sleeping. Demonstrating understanding and forgiveness, along with open and positive communication, will help you cope with the changes and maintain your relationship, thus increasing your family's resilience.

Physical Activity

Movement and exercise can help you maintain your physical and mental health. Try to incorporate 30 minutes of activity you love into your day. You can also encourage your children to join you, and make physical activity family quality time. Use online videos or exercises to get fun exercise ideas that you can do at home.

Positive attitude

It is easy to sink into negative thinking that increases stress and worry. Positive thinking can help you cope with the ups and downs of this difficult time. Don't get caught up on little things and save energy for the bigger and more important things. Give yourself reinforcement for small successes during the day, for example, "I'm glad I taught the children how to take part in setting the table". Try this exercise: Throughout the evening take a few moments and write down three things that have been successful for you today. Next to each one, write down what you did to make it successful. Check your list at the end of each week, you might surprise yourself ...

Breathing exercises

When you feel the anxiety rising and your pulse increasing, try the following relaxation technique to relax. You can do the exercise by lying down, sitting or standing. The most important thing is to be comfortable.

- Close your eyes.
- Inhale through the nose and count to 4.
- Try holding your breath for 7 seconds.
- Slowly empty the air through your mouth for 8 seconds.
- Repeat the breathing cycle (4-7-8) three more times.

Another option is to close your eyes and focus on locating areas of tension and discomfort in your body. When you inhale air slowly, try to direct the air to the tense area, inject oxygen into it and stimulate movement and vitality.

Muscle relaxation

Try to make uninterrupted time for yourself, in which you can spend 20 minutes on the following exercise: Find a quiet and secluded place at home, take off your shoes and sit back or lie down comfortably. During the exercise, try to pay attention to the different areas of your body and focus your attention on the physical sensations. Start from the bottom up, and squeeze each body part for 5 seconds, then release for 10 seconds. Inhale slowly as you contract, exhaling at release.

- Squeeze your feet firmly and relax.
- Turn your feet down and squeeze your calves as far as possible and relax.
- Squeeze your thigh muscles firmly and relax.
- Squeeze your buttocks muscles and relax.
- Squeeze palms and relax.
- Cross your arms tight to your body so that you squeeze the upper part, and relax.
- Lift your shoulders as high as you can and relax.
- Open your mouth firmly and relax.
- Stick your tongue out as far as possible and relax.
- Close your mouth tightly so that the jaw muscles and cheeks squeeze, and relax.
- Close your eyes as tightly as possible and relax.
- Raise your eyebrows as high as you can and relax.
- Breathe deeply: Inhale until the lungs fill, hold the air for 5 seconds and slowly release it.

You can use video clips that accompany the exercises with guided imagery and instructions. You can do this exercise before bed, especially if you have trouble falling asleep.

When to seek help?

If you do not feel relief, and anxiety considerably disturbs your daily functioning and prevents you from being the parent you want to be, it is very important to seek professional help. You can contact the Health Ministry hotline (* 5400) or call centers opened at the health funds (HMO) and mental health centers to provide assistance during the coronavirus crisis.