

Coping with Sheltering in Place

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Sheltering in place is staying at home or staying where you reside, work, or go to school for an extended period during a health emergency. One of the recommendations to contain the spread of COVID-19, like social distancing in public, is sheltering in place which is necessary to reduce and slow the spread of infection. Travel outside the home is limited to essential activities.

Expect that sheltering in place requires personal and social adjustment. For many of us, this adjustment may prove challenging. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2014) recognizes that sheltering in place may result in stress at varying degrees. We all respond and react to stress differently, thus SAMHSA (2014) has documented some common reactions to sheltering in place that may occur:

- Create anxiety. Anxiety may ensue as we adjust to losing a sense of control of events and activities happening around us in times of emergencies.
- Heightened fear and worry, especially for the safety and health of others;
- Cause great concern for the health of our elders and young children; this may increase feelings of helplessness in our ability to protect and care for those whom we love.
- Anger, impatience, frustration and/or irritability as a result of routine changes and uncertainty of environmental conditions.

Prolonged sheltering in place experiences, can lead to more intense feelings and reactions (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020):

- Isolation, sadness, loneliness and boredom may be common reactions;
- Feelings of guilt of not sufficiently providing for others (especially among parents/caregivers) or performing regular work duties (especially among workers/employees);

- Feelings of loss (job, control, family connection, income, etc...);
- Sleep disruptions and concentration difficulty; and
- Changes to eating patterns (loss of appetite or increased appetite).

Ways to Cope:

To help reduce stress felt by you or your family, here are some useful tips (CDC, 2019; SAMHSA, 2014; Nelson, 2012):

1. Remain calm, meditate, and/or pray (engage in activities that allow focus on the present moment).
2. Explore a hobby or do something constructive (reading, cooking, gardening, gaming, writing, crafting, etc...) For additional activities to do with your children when you choose to social distance, visit: University of Maine Cooperative Extension Publications at <https://extension.umaine.edu/publications/4103e/>
3. Connect with family and friends over the internet or the telephone; social media offers an opportunity to check in with others.
4. Ease social isolation with communication and teleconference apps. These apps can be used to create virtual “places” to connect with multiple people at a time.
5. Being informed is helpful and necessary, but recognize that excessive consumption of news information may alter feelings and provoke feelings of anxiety so take regular news/info breaks during the day.
6. Eat healthy and exercise to help boost mood and overall feelings of wellness. For more information about nutrition, visit the University of Guam Cooperative Extension & Outreach, Consumer & Family Sciences website at: www.uog.edu/cnep/
7. While still maintaining social distance with others,

explore the space around your home or apartment. Fresh air from time outside can be accomplished with social distancing.

8. Remain positive, optimistic and hopeful that even stressful times come to pass.
9. If you live in a large family, making time alone is as essential as making time to be together; enjoy solitary activities or momentary breaks from others; let others know you need time for yourself.
 - Strategy: Each person designates a space that is solely “their space.” As a family, communicate that each person in that space should be left alone for an agreed amount of time.

If more urgent care is needed:

Stressful situations may provoke more serious, urgent care. Here is what you can do:

- Although mental health services maybe limited during health emergencies and this pandemic outbreak, seek professional help from a counselor or therapist, as some may offer services via Telehealth or remote access.
- If you or your loved one experiences any symptoms that prove troubling, call your physician or dial 911.
- There are emergency helplines. Call the Guam Behavioral Health and Wellness Center CRISIS Hotline at 647-8833; the National Suicide Hotline at 1-800-273-8255; the Teen Suicide Hotline: 1-800-552-8336 and/or Youth Crisis Hotline at 1-800-843-5200.
- For more resources on COVID-19 and additional extension materials, visit Extension Disaster Education Network at extensiondisaster.net.

For further information:

Contact the University of Guam, Cooperative Extension and Outreach at 735-2080 for help or more information. Additional publications can be found on our website at: uog.edu/extension/publications.

References

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