



350 Warren Hall, Ithaca NY 14853
1-800-547-3276 nyfarmnet.org

Managing Stress in Unprecedented Times

By Jan Kirshenbaum, MSW, NY FarmNet Consultant and
Kate Downes, NY FarmNet Outreach Director

First, a brief quiz, *True or False*:

- 1) Anxiety is a good feeling.
- 2) Feeling I have no control is fun.

If you answered “false” to both of those statements, you are in the company of most of the world. This is a time with no precedent, no reference points, no ability to remind ourselves “Well, the last time this happened, I _____.” There is no previous time with the novel coronavirus.

Whatever our age, a life-altering event can leave us hoping there is some magical cure that will help us feel less bad: “If only I read the right book/ hear the right sermon/ go to the right workshop, I can learn how to feel less bad.” Unfortunately, no magic exists in this situation. Amplifying our fears is the fact that the ultimate “grown-ups”—the President, governors, hospital administrators—are telling us there will be no quick solutions to this situation, and it may get worse before it gets better. Taking all of that into consideration, there are a few things to keep in mind:

Stress is characterized as inevitable events that occur that are difficult for us to manage or influence: a scary medical diagnosis, milk and commodity prices that are low, weather that impedes crop production, tensions within our family.

Distress is our reaction to these events. Trying to figure out how to deal with the distress—and, hopefully reduce the distress—gives us back some control at a time when we may feel like we have no control.

- First, acknowledge the feelings you are experiencing: fear, anger, disappointment. This is no time to be a hero; it is natural and universal to feel very bad in the midst of a catastrophic event such as this epidemic.
 - Consider sharing some of your feelings with family and friends. Things that frighten and anger us tend to get smaller when exposed to air and light.
 - At the same time, if you find yourself watching endless coverage of this pandemic on television, ask yourself if that is helping you or making you feel worse.
- Reach out to friends and family members on the phone or online to check in with them to see how they’re doing. Maintaining points of contact during uncertain times can help everyone.
- Many adults have learned some ways to try to lessen uncomfortable feelings when feeling distressed: go for a run, watch a funny movie, read to a child, walk outside, breathe. Engage in any of these coping strategies that you find works best for you.
- There are behaviors we turn to that have often caused us greater distress: drinking or eating too much, sleeping too little, lashing out at the people we care about because we are so worried. To the degree possible, try not to increase these behaviors during this difficult time. If you feel you need assistance to manage any of these behaviors, there are trained professionals available who know techniques to address these issues. Resources may include your pastor, the county mental health clinic, or NY FarmNet, or a trusted family member or friend.

Sometimes taking healthy steps on your own to lower stress is not enough, and that is ok. Recognize when you need more help. If problems continue, or you are thinking about suicide, talk to a doctor, social worker, or professional counselor.

NY FarmNet

1-800-547-3276, www.nyfarmnet.org

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-8255 (TALK), www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Crisis Text Line Text “GOT 5” to 741-741, www.crisistextline.org