

Checking in on YOU

Self-care suggestions

No one alive today has lived through a time like this Covid19 pandemic. **Everyone** is affected in some way, and everyone is subject to stresses in a time like this. They can come from anywhere. From: Overwork; having no work; isolation; having too much family time with no breathing room; feeling anxious about having to deal with the public; health concerns; money concerns; loss of hope for the future. Everyone is different but no one is immune-- Even the people who cheerfully say, "I'm fine," have been affected.

During this time, it helps to remember two things. First, the justice system will survive and come through this pandemic, hopefully as a stronger and more effective institution. Second, your role in making that happen is critical; the work you do matters. It helps us preserve a system of justice that everyone counts on, whether they use it or not. Thank you for doing this work.

Whatever your personal situation, you should be engaging in some self-care. There are many aspects of this situation that cannot be controlled. Practicing self-care is not one of them.

During this pandemic, it is critical that you recognize what stress looks like, take steps to build your resilience and manage job stress, and know where to go if you need additional help. In addition to increased stress, anxiety, fear, sadness and loneliness are common. And mental health disorders, including anxiety and depression, can develop or worsen.

This document provides some strategies to help promote resiliency and wellness. The material is based on documents prepared by the Mayo Clinic and the Centers for Disease Control. Links to materials from both sources, as well as other helpful resources, are included.

Common signs of stress:

- Feeling irritation, anger, or being in denial
- Feeling uncertain, nervous, or anxious
- Lacking motivation
- Feeling tired, overwhelmed, or burned out
- Feeling sad or depressed
- Having trouble sleeping
- Having trouble concentrating

Work-related stress factors:

- Concern about the risk of being exposed to COVID-19 at work
- Need to take care of new personal and family needs while working
- Managing new duties
- Lack of access to the safety equipment

- Feeling that you are not doing your part or guilt because others have to be on the frontlines
- Having to learn new technologies
- Adapting to a different workspace and/or work schedule

Suggestions for self-care

Take care of your body

- **Get enough sleep.** Go to bed and get up at the same times each day. Stick close to your typical schedule, even if you're staying at home.
- **Participate in regular physical activity.** Regular physical activity and exercise can help reduce anxiety and improve mood. Find an activity that includes movement, such as dance or exercise apps. Get outside in an area that makes it easy to maintain social and physical distancing. It can be as simple as walking.
- **Eat healthy.** Choose a well-balanced diet. Avoid loading up on junk food and refined sugar. Limit caffeine as it can aggravate stress and anxiety.
- **Avoid tobacco, alcohol and drugs.** Because COVID-19 affects the lungs, the risk to smokers and vapers is increased. Using alcohol to try to cope can make matters worse and reduce your coping skills. Avoid taking drugs to cope, unless your doctor prescribed medications for you.
- **Limit screen time.** Turn off electronic devices for some time each day, including 30 minutes before bedtime. Make a conscious effort to spend less time in front of a screen — television, tablet, computer and phone.
- **Relax and recharge.** Set aside time for yourself. Even a few minutes of quiet time can be refreshing and help to quiet your mind and reduce anxiety. Many people benefit from practices such as deep breathing, tai chi, yoga or meditation. Soak in a bubble bath, listen to music, or read or listen to a book — whatever helps you relax. Select a technique that works for you and practice it regularly. There are many sources online for meditation to assist you in starting some of these practices.

Take care of your mind

- **Remember the reasons you work in the justice system.** The work you do is vital to the functioning of our state. Without a justice system, a democracy cannot function. The importance of your work hasn't changed. And this crisis will end. What you do matters, no matter how stressful it is right now; it is helpful to remind yourself of that.
- **Keep your regular routine.** Maintaining a regular schedule is important to your mental health. In addition to sticking to a regular bedtime routine, keep consistent times for meals, bathing and getting dressed, work or study schedules, and exercise. Set aside time for activities you enjoy. Predictability can make you feel more in control.
- **Limit exposure to news media.** Constant news about COVID-19 from all types of media can heighten fears about the disease. Limit social media that may expose you to rumors and false information. Limit reading, hearing or watching other news, but keep up to date on national and local recommendations. Look for reliable sources such as the NC DHHS or the CDC.
- **Stay busy.** A distraction can get you away from the cycle of negative thoughts that feed anxiety and depression. Enjoy hobbies that you can do at home, identify a new project or clean out that infamous closet or drawer.

- **Focus on positive thoughts.** Choose to focus on the positive things in your life, instead of dwelling on how bad you feel. Consider starting each day by listing things you are thankful for. Ask yourself, “What else is true?” Maintain a sense of hope, work to accept changes as they occur and try to keep problems in perspective.
- **Use your moral compass or spiritual life for support.** If you are part of a faith community or tradition, seek out the sources of comfort and support it provides. If you draw strength from a belief system, let it bring you comfort during difficult times.
- **Set priorities.** Don't become overwhelmed by your to-do list. Set reasonable and achievable goals each day. Give yourself credit for positive steps and recognize that some days will be better than others.

Connect with others

- **Make connections.** If you need to stay at home and distance yourself from others, avoid social isolation. Find time each day to make virtual connections by email, texts, phone, or FaceTime or similar apps. If you're working remotely from home, ask your co-workers how they're doing and share coping tips. Enjoy virtual socializing and talking to those in your home.
- **Do something for others.** Find purpose in helping the people around you. For example, email, text or call to check on your friends, family members and neighbors — especially those who are elderly. If you know someone who can't get out, ask if there's something needed, such as groceries or a prescription picked up, for instance. But be sure to follow guidelines on social distancing and group meetings.
- **Support a family member or friend.** If a family member or friend needs to be isolated for safety reasons or gets sick and needs to be quarantined, come up with ways to stay in contact—electronically, by phone or by mail.

Get help if you need it

Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling helpless, sad, angry, irritable, hopeless, anxious or afraid. You may have trouble concentrating on typical tasks, changes in appetite, body aches and pains, or difficulty sleeping, or you may struggle to face routine chores.

When these signs and symptoms last for several days in a row, make you miserable and cause problems in your daily life so that you find it hard to carry out normal responsibilities, it's time to ask for help.

Hoping mental health problems such as anxiety or depression will go away on their own can lead to worsening symptoms. If you have concerns or if you experience worsening of mental health symptoms, ask for help when you need it, and be upfront about how you're doing. To get help you may want to:

- Contact the Employee Assistance Program provided by the Administrative Office of the Courts through Deer Oaks EAP Services, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Contact information is provided below.
- Call or use social media to contact a close friend or loved one — even though it may be hard to talk about your feelings.
- Contact a minister, spiritual leader or someone in your faith community.
- Call your primary care provider or mental health professional to ask about appointment options to talk about your anxiety or depression and get advice and guidance.
- Contact organizations such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for help and guidance.

If you're feeling suicidal or thinking of hurting yourself, seek help. Contact your primary care provider or a mental health professional. Or call a suicide hotline. In the U.S., call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) or use its webchat at suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat.

Continue your self-care strategies

You can expect your current strong feelings to fade when the pandemic is over. (In fact, many symptoms may not show up until 3-6 months after the crisis is over.) And, stress won't disappear from your life when the health crisis of COVID-19 ends. Self-care is a life-long activity.

Further information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/mental-health-non-healthcare.html>

Mayo Clinic: <https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/self-care-tips-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>

AOC Employee Assistance Program: <https://juno.nccourts.org/human-resources/employee-assistance-program>. Administered by Deer Oaks EAP Services. Logon and password is NCAOC. In addition to website resources, in-person consultation available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for Judicial Department employees.

American Bar Association Lawyer Assistance Program: https://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance/resources/covid-19--mental-health-resources/