



Presbyterian Mental Health Network

Mental Well-Being during a Pandemic

For many of us these are unprecedented times. We're being asked to do new things, relate in new ways, and care for one another in different uncomfortable ways. For many, this is a time of great fear, stress, and anxiety. The [Presbyterian Mental Health Network](#) has put together the following resource for congregations, clergy, and communities.

Stress, Fear, and Panic

- Fear is a normal response to real and potential threats. It's okay to be afraid. However, fear is designed to be a brief emotional state.
- Persistent fear and panic are detrimental to our physical, mental, and emotional health. The stress of persistent fear and panic stresses our immune systems and hinders our ability to respond and plan accordingly.
- **Honor the importance of being afraid without giving permission to live in that emotional state constantly.**
 - Listen to people who are afraid without dismissing their fears.
 - Limit your exposure to news and especially commentary on the pandemic. Be informed, not an expert.
 - Learn to listen to your integrated self:
 - If you are physically tense, get up and walk around.
 - If you are emotionally spent, rest, relax, meditate, initiate important spiritual practices.
 - If you run into a mental wall, step back, turn off things that are stimulating the stress, reach out to others.

Mental Well-Being

- Maintain positive thoughts. It is too easy for our thoughts to cascade into catastrophe. Thought this crisis will bring about changes, not everything is permanent, pervasive, or personal. **Balance the reality of the situation with gratitude.**
- Be imaginative and creative. Imagination can be both a terrible and terrific human feature. It can convince the worst is upon us, it can also save us from depression and anxiety. **When you feel overwhelmed, use your imagination to draw upon meaningful, peaceful, safe, carefree, experiences.**
- **As you are able, when stressed, change your physical surroundings.** Our minds often try and predict what is coming next. Physical spaces can become associated with emotional states. **When stress or panic hits, change your physical space, what you view or see, or who is in front of you.**
- We are in uncharted territory, and that can feel tenuous. Predictability is difficult. Therefore, make a routine that honors this new normal. **Create a daily schedule: bathing, eating, sleeping, working, relating, exercise, social interaction.**
- **Relate, relate, relate.** Reach out to friends, family, and members of your church and other communities. Create creative social interactions. **Social distancing is not equal to social isolation.** We can teach and embody and embolden the people around us to create and be community.
- **Seek professional help.** When you need it, access professional help and share that you are with others. Break down the stigma of counseling and coaching. Most mental health professionals can do virtual therapy and coaching sessions.

Spiritual Well-Being

- This is not just a physical and mental crisis. **It is also a spiritual crisis for many people.** As spiritual leaders, we have a distinct perspective and interpretation to offer others.
- Provide a spiritual frame that serves your church communities with energy and imagination. Help people think theologically about the changes they experience.
 - Think about social distancing as a spiritual practice of care of neighbor.
 - Reframe fears with empathy. Help people worried about their survival expand this to the community's survival.
 - Access your spiritual practices and create new ones that frame this new reality we are called into.