

Managing Stress and Anxiety for Medical Students during COVID-19 Pandemic

Q&A

1. What is the best way to soothe the concerns of our family and friends?

- Realize that it is normal for loved ones to have these concerns, even though it may be frustrating to you
- Clarify concerns, calmly ask for specifics "can you help me understand what exactly are you concerned about?"
- Address concerns calmly using evidence: staying home (indicating you have enough food, medications), virus exposure (state precautions taken, limited exposure)
- Keep communication open, don't let anything be a mystery, check-in to make sure you have addressed their concerns
- Normalize for them and validate (e.g., saying you understand their concerns), flip the concern back on them (are they doing things to reduce their anxiety, keeping up their routine, looking at the facts, etc.)

2. Many activities we were hoping to do have been put on the back burner or shifted in scope dramatically. How do we come to terms with the fact that things have changed?

- Maintain lightness, incorporate laughter
- Adapt to the platforms we have available to continue our learning and goals
- Some of the same themes of what you were hoping to do can be carried out in other ways
- Break large projects up into little chunks to make activities more manageable and reduce anxiety surrounding a big project that has changed from what you expected

3. How do we find motivation when your surroundings haven't changed (ex. still at home from spring break, used to structure of school environment)?

- Give your environment some structure, create a space that is for class/work
- If you can't make a dedicated workspace, order a desk pad from amazon that you set up when you are working (is a cue for the brain that you are at school/work)
- Get dressed like you would for class
- Set a timer to keep you on task
- Be aware of what is going wrong (going off task, working slower than usual, getting distracted, feeling overwhelmed, people interrupting) and take steps to remedy
- If you are aware of being off task, not being productive, etc. don't beat yourself up for it. Notice it and use it as fodder for how to plan differently.

- Complete small tasks and then reward (ex. go through 10 flashcards, send email THEN online shop)
- Give yourself time to do things you enjoy or be social in some way

4. How do we deal with confusion/conflict as first-year medical students? We feel helpless because of limited clinical autonomy but also want to make a difference.

- Start with identifying where you are feeling helpless
- Review the facts, acknowledge that as a first-year med student this is where you are supposed to be
- Evaluate how can you help given your knowledge and skills? Can you help a neighbor, resident, or attending? Donate blood? Volunteer at the foodbank?

5. How do we deal with emotional turmoil ourselves while also being there for friends who are in a similar state and need support? All while starting the first week of virtual med-school?

- In order to contribute to the overall puzzle of society, we need to be a good puzzle piece ourselves ->if you aren't in a good place to help others, you shouldn't offer help. You need to take care of yourself to be able to help others.
- Don't give in to guilt, notice if you feel guilty and look at the facts, you are also going through a range of emotions and need to take care of yourself as well

6. How can I assess if I am in a position to help others?

- Take stock of how you are feeling
- Consider how you feel when someone asks for help -> if you suspect it will be taxing on you, this is a sign you should not offer help
- Monitor your own activities, are you eating, sleeping, exercising? feeling like you are stable ("in the groove")?
- Recognize what the person needs and direct if you are able
- Know that no one is functioning at their peak right now
- Be open and honest in your communication as to why you cannot help. You can even say something like "I am struggling in that area too right now. If you figure out something that helps, please let me know, and I will do the same for you."