

# FEAR IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Sometimes it seems like the world is becoming an increasingly uneasy place. We hear about political unrest across the world and feel uncertainty about the impact these developments may have at home. It may bring up a sense of vulnerability and unease about the future. Our fears may be renewed with each news report.

As a result, many of us feel increased anxiety and fear as we go about our daily lives. If this sense of fear is ongoing, we may find ourselves constantly reacting to a high level of stress. This may impact our quality of life, both at work and at home.

This handout offers some coping strategies if you are feeling increased fear as a result of recent events being discussed in the media or happening in your community. The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can help those who experience strong reactions and want to seek more support.

## Coping with fear and difficult emotions

- › **Get reliable information.** One of the best ways to manage fear is to educate yourself on the event. Make sure that you are getting your information from a reputable source. Keep up to date with developments and follow recommendations of federal, state and local authorities.
- › **Be aware, but not frightened.** Fear may not be helpful if it keeps you on constant alert. Fear is a focus on what *could* happen, which can leave you less aware of what *is* happening. As you process incoming news reports, it's common to let fear carry you into thinking, "what if?" It's important to stay in the present. Be aware of your surroundings and report suspicious activity to authorities. If you see something, say something.
- › **Focus on what you can control.** The images we see, the stories we hear, and our own thoughts about recent events can increase anxiety, especially when there is uncertainty. While we can't control the bigger picture, we can control things in our own lives. The Department of Homeland Security recommends developing a safety plan in the event of an incident in your community.
- › **Balance your thoughts.** When feeling overwhelmed by recent events, recall times in history when change has happened for the better. Finding this balance can broaden how you see the world, especially when you are feeling powerless. This can be empowering and give you courage during a difficult time.
- › **Minimize your exposure to news media.** While it's important to stay informed, constant exposure may add to feelings of distress. Try to give yourself breaks from the news. One example is to take a digital break by checking news coverage for a short block of time twice a day instead of throughout the day.
- › **Allow your feelings.** If you notice that you are having strong feelings, acknowledge them. Don't try to ignore or deny them. It may be helpful to talk about your fears or concerns with people who support you. We get emotional support by giving voice to and sharing our concerns.

- › **Feeling physically strong can help you feel emotionally strong.** Make sure you get enough rest. Eat a healthy diet. Exercise and physical activity can reduce stress. Avoid alcohol and drugs.
- › **Try relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or meditation.** These can help you manage the physical symptoms of anxiety.
- › **Find meaningful ways to contribute to your community.** When things feel uncertain in the world, we may feel we have little to contribute. Becoming involved with an issue or cause important to you is one way to reduce stress. Seek out resources in your community and ask how you can become involved.

## Helping young adults and children cope with fears

Young adults and children are particularly vulnerable to fears of the unknown. They have a more difficult time understanding what is happening in the present and putting it into perspective. It's important to pay special attention to their needs.

- › **Encourage them to talk** to you about what they're imagining when they hear the news to better understand their thoughts and feelings related to current events.
- › **Give them honest information** at a level they can understand. Ask questions to determine their level of understanding about the information you have provided.
- › **Reassure them of the future.** Young adults may have some concerns regarding the direct impact of events on their lives. They may feel they need to plan for events that are not happening, such as a military draft. Try to ground them in reality and keep them in the present with accurate information.
- › **Maintain family routines**, particularly around meals, bedtimes, and scheduled social and leisure activities. Structure can increase a sense of safety. Make time for activities that are positive and relaxed, such as going to a movie or a museum.

## Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is here to help

For many people, the strategies mentioned above may be enough to cope. However, at times an individual may have difficulty managing intense reactions. If this is the case, you can call and ask for an EAP telephonic consult and speak with a professional counselor. You can discuss a plan for moving forward, learn new coping skills, and access additional resources, if needed. It's important to reach out and get help if you feel fear is interfering with your daily life.

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