

DEALING WITH UNCERTAINTY IN THE FACE OF OMICRON

Counseling Partners of Los Angeles

Parent Newsletter

TIPS ON HOW TO TOLERATE UNCERTAINTY DURING THIS TIME

FROM THE CHILD MIND INSTITUTE

STAY IN THE PRESENT

The best antidote to worrying about the future is to focus on what's right in front of us right now. It's a basic mindfulness skill: try to be in the present, not the past or the future. Instead of spinning out worst-case scenarios or getting frustrated that you can't plan effectively, try to connect with what you can see and hear around you.

COPING BEHAVIORS

Coping Behaviors

things you can do to soothe yourself in a stressful situation or boost your mood

They could be self-care practices like:

- taking a fresh air break
- listening to music
- exercising
- calling a friend
- watching a funny show
- doing activities you enjoy

FOCUS ON COPING THOUGHTS

"Coping Thoughts"

thoughts that make you more comfortable with uncertainty or inspire your most flexible self

For instance: "I've gotten through things like this before, and I'm strong enough to do so again."

PRACTICE DISTRESS TOLERANCE

"One of the toughest things about really intense emotions is the sense that this feeling is going to last forever, that there is no escape," notes Dr. Anderson. "But it's not true. We know that most emotions evolve and change and lessen over time."

Once you realize that, it's easier to acknowledge that you are in pain right now, but you can ride it out, and it will diminish. "It can help to use some of those coping behaviors like reaching out to a friend or soothing sensory experiences," he adds.

ASSESS RISK AND TAKE APPROPRIATE STEPS

One of the most challenging things about uncertainty is making decisions when you don't have enough information. To keep worry and risk assessment from taking over EVERY moment, Dr. Anderson suggests taking an inventory of your family's risks and deciding whether you want to adjust your activities in the near future. Then stick by your decision and move on. You can make more adjustments when the situation changes.

FOCUS ON WHAT'S BETTER THIS TIME

Instead of thinking about how the new variant could take us back to March 2020, remind yourself of the breakthroughs that have made us better equipped to handle the virus. We have not only vaccines that dramatically reduce risk of serious illness and death, but also medicines that can be taken after infection. We have at-home tests that should (especially when they're less expensive) lower the risk of family gatherings.

FOCUS ON WHAT WORKED BEFORE

While it's distressing to be reminded of the worst of what we've been through, it's helpful to think about the things that worked to get us through the toughest moments last time. Was it making scones? Taking walks? A hot bath? Watching funny YouTube videos?

RATION ALARMING NEWS

When the news is awash with disturbing pandemic predictions and possibilities, it may help to limit your exposure to it. One strategy is to look for news and information on the positive side. Another is to put a timer on your news consumption.

SEEK HELP IF YOU NEED IT

For some the lockdowns and disruptions have been challenging but manageable. For many, especially those with small children, it's been intensely stressful. And for those who lost family members — as well as, in many cases, jobs, homes, schooling, financial stability and food security — the pandemic has been traumatic. Mental health suffered, in both adults and children. Learning suffered. And for many, it's not over. Even if you feel you've survived the worst, a new spike could reactivate emotional stress, Dr. Anderson notes. If you're feeling overwhelmed, support from a mental health professional can be crucial for a healthy recovery.

“One of the things we're hearing a lot is fear that we'll go back to the worst of the pandemic.”

“It's reminding people of the worst, most stressful experiences they had. They've been doom-scrolling Omicron, trying to get a handle on it, and it's not working.”

David Anderson, PhD, a clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute.