

Tips for Military Families to Manage Mental Health and Wellness during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Military families are unique in that they are accustomed to the challenges and uncertainties of life transitions, all while being away from their families and support systems. During the past month, military families have been faced with a new set of challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools have closed, many commands have implemented teleworking options and reduced physical presence in offices, the practice of social distancing has become the norm, stores and restaurants have closed, activities have been cancelled, and life has become even more isolated than ever before. With these challenges, our mental health and wellness may be affected.

It is important to have a toolkit of stress reduction techniques, as well as a plan for our mental health and wellness during our lives as military families. Following are some tips for managing stress reactions during this challenging time:

- Determine what you can control. While there is a lot we cannot control, there are things we can control. We can control our actions (washing our hands, wiping down surfaces, social distancing), our attitude (being an alarmist or the voice of calm), and our response to the situation.
- Stay connected (virtually) with positive people. During this time of social distancing, it may be a challenge to stay connected. Make an effort to connect via phone, email, or social media with friends and loved ones. Try to not to focus on talking about the coronavirus.
- When experiencing anxiety, practice mindfulness and meditation. If you are feeling anxious, overwhelmed, or jittery, take a few minutes and go to a quiet room. Engage in deep belly breathing, or use an app like “Calm” or “Headspace” to guide your meditation. Mindfulness can also reduce stress and anxiety. To practice mindfulness, find a quiet place, take a seat, and set a timer for 15 minutes. First, notice how your body feels. Second, notice your breathing – breath in and out and let your mind wander. Allow your mind to wander until the timer goes off.
- Stay active. If you are not showing any symptoms, go outside and take a walk. Sunlight provides immune boosting vitamin D and a change of scenery, away from the news, may improve mood and your overall sense of wellbeing.
- Get a lot of sleep. While sleep is good for our physical health, it is also essential for your mental health. Being well rested has been shown to reduce anxiety and increase our ability to manage stressors.
- Practice self-care by limiting exposure to the news. Watch the news one time per day and sign up for SMS text messages for your local updates. Stressing over the coronavirus is more likely to weaken your immune system and overall mental health and wellness.

If you, or your military dependent family member, is feeling overwhelmed and need to talk to a counselor, there are many options available. You may contact the Community Counseling Center at Quantico at (703) 784-2570, MilitaryOneSource at 800-342-9647, the DISTRESSLINE.COM at 877-476-7734, or Behavioral Health at the Naval Health Clinic on Quantico at 703-634-2663.