

Mental Health Resiliency Guide

Thank you for your interest in these topics. These materials were developed in coordination with the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services' Division of Behavioral Health to be a resource to Alaskans during the COVID-19 pandemic but can be used anytime you'd like to educate and encourage healthy practices for mental well-being. DHSS encourages the use of these materials in hospitals, clinics, businesses, communities, support groups and any other organizations that wish to communicate with their members about mental health and overall well-being.



Suggested ways to help us spread the word: Send a weekly email to your employees, customize the messages for your community, share the images and resources on your social media accounts, post the flier in your workplace, and link to resources specific to your community. The more we talk about the importance of all the aspects of well-being, the more healthy and happy Alaskans will be.

Graphics can be downloaded at: dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/id/Pages/COVID-19/mentalwellbeing.aspx

Key messages and resources

Introduction: Our overall well-being is dependent on both our mental and physical health. The tips in this guide can help you learn more about ways to improve your well-being and connect with activities you can do by yourself, with your family or community. Also, remember that if you ever find yourself struggling and need more support, it's ok to ask for help!

Smile

"Laugh and the world laughs with you, weep, and you weep alone." That line from Ella Wheeler's poem *Solitude* holds more truth than we think. Sometimes it's hard to find our smile, but research proves that the very act of smiling can change our mood, relieve stress and lower blood pressure. Smiling and laughing are even contagious – in a good way! It connects us to others through feeling good. And even when you're wearing a mask, the benefits of smiling still happen.

Check out these Alaskans showing their smiles with their masks on – bet you can't keep from cracking a smile as you watch it:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=1w2T16VuQQ8

Read: [How smiling benefits us](#)



Healthy Habits

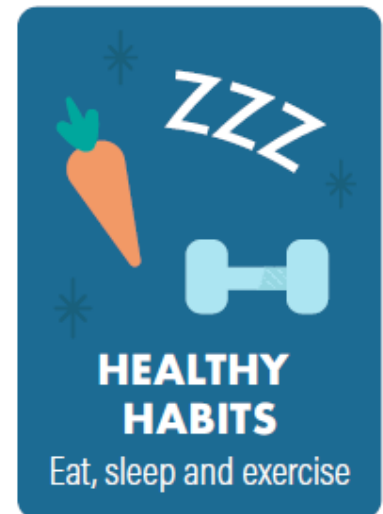
Having a daily routine helps provide certainty during uncertain times like those we're in now. Routines give us a sense of control over our daily lives. They anchor us to structure and a sense of normalcy.

Getting good sleep, eating healthy, exercising regularly and doing things we find fun benefit us by reducing stress, making us more productive, and improving our overall health. If you're feeling unfocused and stressed, add some control back to your life by setting routines for daily tasks. Give it a try!

Read: [Maintaining Structure and Routine](#)

Read: [Importance of Maintaining Routines](#)

Improve sleep: [Insomnia coach app](#)



Care Kit

Much like we carry a first aid kit for those “just-in-case” situations when hiking or boating, it's a great idea to make a care kit with a variety of resources to aid you when you're experiencing a stressful time.

Check out the links below to connect with resources that can assist you in overcoming whatever hurdles you may be facing, as well as things to think about for your emotional survival kit.

Visit: [Coronavirus Hardship Resources](#)

Watch: [Your Emotional Survival Kit - 5 strategies for returning to life after COVID](#)



Stress Busters

Stress is a normal occurrence we all experience that triggers our body to take actions that are meant to prepare us to face an immediate threat or flee to safety. However, when we encounter long-term stress – like we’ve been facing during the COVID-19 pandemic – our bodies never get a break from that response and that can cause a variety of mental and physical problems.

We can manage stress by using coping strategies that improve our overall well-being. Strategies like exercising, practicing relaxation exercises, avoiding caffeine and alcohol, seeking support, finding humor, exploring your spirituality, connecting with friends or doing something fun can all help you cope during stressful times.

Share a picture with us of your favorite stress buster!

Learn: [Emotion-focused & problem-focused skills](#)

Read: [Stress: Coping with Life's Stressors](#)

Watch: [Taking the fear out of coronavirus](#)

Change habits: [Step Away](#) – app developed by a UAA professor, helps change drinking habits privately and effectively



Go with the Flow

Finding balance in life, especially during stressful times, can be challenging. It’s easier to know when our life is out of balance—everything seems to be competing for our time and attention.

Think about rowing in a boat going against a river’s current, it takes more energy to go upstream. When we choose to go with the flow, we realize that there are some things beyond our control. We let go of the uncontrollable things and choose to focus on what we can control.

Does it feel like your life is out of balance? What are things you do to get it back into balance?

Read: [Insights into how to find balance in your life](#)

Worksheet: [Assess how balanced your life is](#)



Togetherness

It's easy to focus on how COVID has impacted our own life, but we are all living through this time together. Just about everyone is impacted by COVID-19 in one way or another.

In a blanket toss, we all hold the blanket's edge to toss one person into the air. We share the experience, and through sharing the experience, we are brought together. Being together helps us feel connected and not alone. We are here for each other. When we see others struggling, we lend a hand. When we see others experience happiness, we are happy with them.

How are you dealing with the impacts of COVID-19?

Read or listen: [Miracle of Morning, poem by Amanda Gorman](#)



Belonging

Humans beings are social and being socially connected provides a sense of belonging. The Mayo Clinic says, "The social ties that accompany a sense of belonging are a protective factor helping manage stress. When we feel we have support and are not alone, we often cope more effectively with difficult times in our lives."

Our social group is like a fishing net. We want to catch people who can support us. When we reach out to family and friends, colleagues and community groups through phone calls, texts, video chats and other ways, we strengthen that sense of belonging for ourselves and those who we care about.

What are you doing to stay connected with the people in your community?

Read: [The Importance of Community and Mental Health](#)



Body & Mind

There's a strong link between mental wellness and physical health – and it works in both directions. During stressful times, we sometimes neglect our bodies and/or our minds. By managing stress in more healthy ways, we strengthen our mental wellness.

Taking even just 15-minutes to move our bodies each day can benefit us both physically and mentally. The exercise is good for our body, but it can also improve our mood by reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression. Next time you go outdoors, take an “awe walk” and look for things that spark your sense of wonder. You may find it increases your feelings of compassion and gratitude.

Are there exercise apps you like to use that help get you moving?

Here & Now

Juggling priorities, family activities and working, all while trying to stay safe and healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic can be challenging to say the least. Some of the benefits of staying in the here and now include better health, reduced stress, and a greater sense of self control.

Staying in the present takes practice though, so take a look at some of these resources to help you get started.

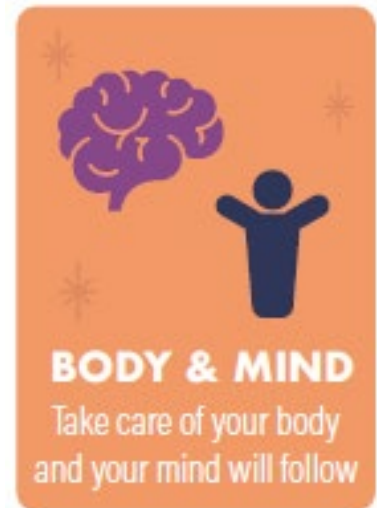
Watch: [It is Always Now | How to Stay in the Present Moment](#)

Listen: [Mindfulness meditations](#)

Quiz: [Mindfulness Quiz](#)

Read: [Mindfulness: How It Can Help Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

Learn: [HowRightNow.org](#)



Breathe

Deep breathing is one of the best ways to lower stress in the body because when you breathe deeply, it sends a message to the brain to calm down and relax. Breathing exercises are easy to learn. You can do them whenever you want, and you don't need any special tools or equipment to do them.

Read: [Breathing Techniques](#)

Practice: [Breathing Exercises for Relaxation](#)

Meditate: [Calm](#) | [Headspace](#) | [Ten Percent Happier](#)

Watch: [Paced breathing](#)



Play

Play is important for all aspects of our lives, including creativity and relationship, and not just for children. Adults should give themselves permission to play every day. Creative, fun activities can add joy to life, relieve stress, supercharge learning, and connect you to others and the world around you. There's no limit to the types of things you can do – build a puzzle, paint a picture, learn a language, play a game, learn to play an instrument or create your own dance.

Staying active with your family: [Play Every Day Blog](#)

Art workshops for young people: [Amplify Youth Voices Project](#)



Compassion

Practice compassion. We all have our individual ways of responding to stressful situations. Remember that others may respond differently than we do to the stresses from COVID-19.

And don't forget to be kind to yourself. Whether you're frustrated with something you did, trying something new or trying to break an unhealthy habit – be patient yourself! Practicing self-compassion can even make us feel more connected to others.

We're all in this together but if you ever feel like you need more support, please ask for help.

Read: [Myths about self-compassion](#)

Seek help: [Therapists in Alaska](#) | [Find Treatment](#)

Call: Careline Alaska 1-877-266-4357

Medical workers on the frontlines of COVID-19 and their families can call the [Alaska Responders Relief Line](#) for free, confidential emotional support: 1-844-985-8275



TAKE CARE, ALASKA

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And the world smiles with you



HEALTHY HABITS

Eat, sleep and exercise



CARE KIT

Find help



STRESS BUSTERS

Find ways to relieve stress



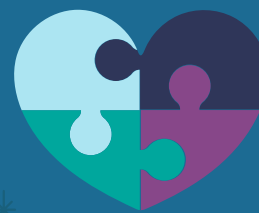
GO WITH THE FLOW

Find balance in life



TOGETHERNESS

We're all in this together



BELONGING

Supports and connections



BODY & MIND

Take care of your body and your mind will follow



HERE & NOW

Stay in the present



BREATHE

Calm the mind



PLAY

Recharge your batteries



COMPASSION

Be kind to yourself and others