

City of Milwaukee Employee Assistance Program

Face Mask/Covering Anxiety

Wearing a face mask may be anxiety provoking when a person is not accustomed. People with a history of anxiety, PTSD, panic attacks and breathing conditions may find long periods of mask wearing very distressing. Anxiety can arise when others don't wear masks and you feel they should. While others feel anxiety because they can't see one another's faces, which is an important part of interpreting peoples' moods or reactions.

Anxiety, PTSD, or Another Mental Illness.

People who live with a mental illness like anxiety or PTSD experience their environment differently than those who do not have a mental illness. Those with panic disorders may feel as if they are being suffocated and their body can go into a fight or flight response. Those who have been through traumatic experiences that involved masks may feel those memories flooding back.

There are ways to reduce anxious feelings.

- Be aware of your body. Close your eyes and try to become aware that you are having a panic/anxiety attack. This alone can help calm you down.

- **Use relaxation techniques in public.** Take slow, deep breaths. Tell yourself that you can breathe and your body is misinterpreting danger. Squeeze and release your muscles (progressive muscle relaxation).
- **Use a buddy system.** Have a friend or family member go with you when you must be in public. If you feel overwhelmed, let them know, so they can help.
- **Take breaks.** If you must be in public for a long period of time, go somewhere secluded to take off your mask.
- **Remember why you are wearing a mask.** When you are feeling stressed out by wearing a mask, it might make you feel better knowing that you are helping your fellow community members.
- **Focus on the present.** Anxious thoughts might cause you to worry and think about the "what ifs" of wearing a mask in public.
- **Get comfortable with your mask.** Practice wearing it at home for short periods of time and taking breaks if you feel anxious. Try building up to longer periods of time (exposure therapy & habituation). Find a mask that's the right style and fit for you.

Employee Assistance Program



City of Milwaukee EAP

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Working From Home

Working from home for extended periods of time has challenges. You may find it difficult to maintain focus and be as productive as you'd like, especially when the physical structure and routine of work isn't available. Below are strategies that may help you keep motivated and stay on top of tasks.

- **Build permanent work space.** Create a space in your home that is comfortable and conducive to work. Setting up your laptop on the couch by an open window near noisy neighbors may not be the best choice of space.
- **Set real work hours.** Create a consistent routine for when you begin and stop work.
- **Update your productivity tools** every morning (e.g. do lists, action plans). Begin each work day reviewing your tasks and assigning priorities to them.
- **Don't work in your PJ's.** While this may sound tempting, tap into the ritual of getting dressed for work. This habit will help you get in a work mindset.
- **Get up, stretch and walk around regularly.** Build in time to physically move.
- **Take short breaks.** Use short breaks to mentally detach from work.
- **Eat healthy snacks.** With your full suite of snacks within easy reach, it may be tempting to overindulge in unhealthy foods. Stock up on healthy alternatives for snacks when needed.
- **Limit social media.** Limit social media to breaks and non-work hours.
- **Stay connected with virtual platforms.** Take advantage of virtual platforms to hold/participate in work group meets.
- **Declare your work from home (WFH) availability.** Advise family, friends and work team of your work hours. This is important in creating expectations/limit setting for when you will respond and be available to both personal and business requests.
- **Use lunch breaks to complete small errands/home tasks.** Build in appropriate time to address personal tasks.
- **Alcohol in moderation.** Alcohol and drug misuse increases during and following incidents of mass crisis and disasters. Be mindful of your consumption and consult an alcohol/drug abuse counselor if you are misusing.
- **Step outside.** Don't forget to get some sunshine and step away from the computer screen.
- **Invest in a quality pair of headphones** (noise cancelling). A good pair of microphone headphones blocks background noise (barking dog, passing fire truck etc.) from being heard by others. This is especially useful when participating in virtual meetings.
- **Assume positive intent.** With fewer in person interactions, more communication is written with emails and texts. Subsequently, without non-verbal cues, there is a greater chance of misinterpreting tone and intent. Emails may unintentionally come off as curt, critical or rude. Remember to be courteous in your written communication by including "please" and "thank you."
- **Practice patience.** Whether frustrated with your home internet connection, upset with a customer, co-worker or supervisor, take a moment to practice patience. Chances are everyone else is also feeling stressed and doing the best they can.
- **Create a reward system.** It may be challenging to plow through work when isolated from a work team. Create ways to reward yourself for accomplishing tasks.
- **Check-in with co-workers.** Take the time to call and touch base with your work team. This is helpful in maintaining positive working relationships and team work.

Parenting During COVID-19

Children are especially sensitive to changes in their schedules and daily routines. COVID-19 has significantly altered household norms and expectations, leaving children likely to feel frustration, anxiety or anger. The following tips may help you create a new normal for your household.

Create structure. Routines provide children with comfort and security. Aim for a mix of school/non-school related activities and fun. Understand that it doesn't have to be perfect, and what works one week may not work the next. Build in regular sleeping and waking times with daily exercise and outdoor breaks that adhere to physical distancing and public health guidelines.

Balance together and alone time. With everyone spending more time at home, sooner or later toes will be stepped on. Plan solo time when everyone can go to their own room or a quiet space for at least half an hour for an appropriate activity such as playing video games or talking to friends.

Different personalities. Staying home all day can reinforce anxiety for anxious or introverted children, while extroverts may feel lonely.

Encourage introverts to balance their time so they aren't doing only solo activities all day or going without connecting with family and peers. Help extroverted kids find creative ways to use technology to stay in touch with family and friends.

Co-parenting flexibility. Be prepared to adjust visitation plans. Keep your child's best interest in mind when adjusting visitation schedules.

- Is one parent better able to support home schooling than the other? For example, is internet service equally available at both homes?
- Does one parent have a job that involves more contact with the public and therefore more risk for household members?
- Who else lives in the home, and how much contact do they have with the public?
- Is one household higher risk due to members over the age of 60, suffering from underlying medical conditions, or immunocompromised?

- Does one home have more space or better access to safe outdoor spaces where children can play and get exercise while keeping the recommended physical distance?

Co-parenting team work.

- Keep communication open. Answer all forms of communication (phone calls, texts, emails, etc.) with your co-parent in a timely manner.
- Don't keep score. Keep your child's best interest front and center without scoring emotional points against the other co-parent.
- Enter each conversation with finding a solution together as your goal.
- Stay socially connected while physically distanced. Schedule virtual visits between your co-parent and child. Set a time and ensure your child is available.

Make time for self care. Acknowledge that you may need time for yourself. You won't be able to be the parent you want to be if you are running on fumes and overwhelmed.

Eat healthy, exercise and get enough sleep. Find ways to decompress and take breaks. If more than one parent is home, take turns watching the children if possible. Remember to take a breath and build in 3 minutes to be still between tasks.

Prioritize tasks. Not everything will be urgent and important and you may need to place some tasks on the back burner. Get perspective by asking yourself:

- How will I feel about this problem tomorrow?
- Is this situation permanent?
- Can I do anything about this problem right now? If not, put it down and off to the side until you are better able to address it.

EAP Facilitated Self-Help Groups

All too often we struggle with a problem alone or without support from someone who understands, isolated and alone we flounder, unsure of what to do.

Self-help groups are groups of people who gather to share common problems and experiences associated with a particular problem, condition, illness, or personal circumstance.

Self-help groups assist people with problems or challenges to feel less alone and more understood. They empower people to work to solve their own problems.

These groups offer a way to collectively share information and help members stay updated on news pertaining to the group.

Members act as role models for each other. Seeing others who are contending with the same adversity and making progress in their lives is inspiring and encouraging.

They provide a safe place for someone who needs to talk about personal issues, experiences, struggles, and thoughts.

The City of Milwaukee Employee assistance program will be piloting self-groups for parenting, working from home, and care giver burn out. These groups will be facilitated by EAP Coordinator, Cris Zamora. They will meet virtually (GoToMeeting) on a regular basis. Groups discussions are voluntary and confidential. They will be available to City employees and household members.

The launch date of these groups will be announced once interest is gauged. Other details such as meeting time, duration and frequency is yet to be determined.

If interested in participating contact, **Cris Zamora (EAP Coordinator) at 414-286-3145 or email czamora@milwaukee.gov**

EAP Mission Statement

It is the mission of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to assist employees who develop behavioral/emotional problems that may directly affect their work performance, and to provide Key Personnel with policy and procedural guidelines for the management of these problems.

City of Milwaukee Wellness Resources

- **Not feeling well?** Visit the **Workplace Clinic** (Zeidler Municipal Building) 841 N. Broadway, Milwaukee, WI 53202 for **FREE** onsite health care services. Call [414-777-3413](tel:414-777-3413) or go to www.milwaukee.gov/der/wycm for further information.
- For additional current Wellness resources visit: www.milwaukee.gov/der and click on the *Wellness* tab.
- **UnitedHealthCare App** is a UnitedHealthcare (UHC) mobile app that provides instant access to your family's critical health information, anytime/anywhere. Find a physician, check the status of a claim or speak directly with a healthcare professional. Search for UnitedHealthCare in your app store.