

Mental Well-Being during a Pandemic

For many of us these are unprecedented times. We're being asked to do new things, relate in new ways, and care for one another in different and sometimes uncomfortable ways. For many, this is a time of great fear, stress, and anxiety. The [Presbyterian Mental Health Network](#) offers the following resource for congregations, clergy, and communities.

Stress, Fear, and Panic

- Fear is a normal response to real and potential threats. It's okay to be afraid. However, fear is designed to be a brief emotional state.
- Persistent fear and panic are detrimental to our physical, mental, and emotional health. Persistent fear and panic stresses our immune systems and hinders our ability to respond and plan accordingly.
- [Caregivers can honor the importance of being afraid without giving permission to live in fear.](#)
 - Listen to people who are afraid without dismissing their fears.
 - Limit your exposure to news and especially commentary on the pandemic. Be informed, not an expert.
- Learn to listen to your integrated self:
 - If you are physically tense, get up and walk around.
 - If you are emotionally spent, rest, relax, meditate, initiate important spiritual practices.
 - If you run into a mental wall, step back, turn off things that are stimulating the stress, reach out to others.

Mental Well-Being

- Maintain positive thoughts. It is too easy for our thoughts to cascade into catastrophe. Though this crisis will bring about changes, not everything is permanent, pervasive, or personal. [Balance the reality of the situation with gratitude.](#)
- Be imaginative and creative. Imagination can be both a terrible and terrific human feature. It can convince the worst is upon us, it can also save us from depression and anxiety. [When you feel overwhelmed, use your imagination to draw upon meaningful, peaceful, safe, carefree, experiences.](#)
- [As you are able, when stressed, change your physical surroundings.](#) Our minds often try and predict what is coming next. Physical spaces can become associated with emotional states. [When stress or panic hits, change your physical space, what you view or see, or who is in front of you.](#)
- We are in uncharted territory, and that can feel tenuous. Predictability is difficult. Therefore, make a routine that honors this new normal. [Create a daily schedule: bathing, eating, sleeping, working, relating, exercise, social interaction.](#)
- [Relate, relate, relate.](#) Reach out to friends, family, and members of your church and other communities. Invent creative social interactions. [Physical distance does not have to equate to social isolation.](#) We can teach and embody and embolden the people around us to create and be community.
- [Seek professional help.](#) When you need it, access professional help. Share with your community that you are seeking help. Break down the stigma of seeking counseling and coaching. Virtual counseling and coaching is normal now.

Spiritual Well-Being

- This is not just a physical and mental crisis. [It is also a spiritual crisis for many people.](#) As spiritual leaders - clergy, youth leaders, sessions, deacons - we have a distinct perspective and interpretation to offer others.
- Provide a spiritual frame that serves your church communities with energy and imagination. Spend time in community thinking, reflecting, and learning about how we theologically understand what is happening.
- Think about social distancing as a spiritual practice of care of neighbor.
- Reframe fears with empathy. Help people worried about their survival expand this to the community's survival.
- Access your spiritual practices and create new ones that frame this new reality of life and community.