The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged us in ways that we could not have anticipated. The amount of uncertainty that exists right now, as we try to adapt to a new normal, creates a natural response of stress and anxiety. While this stress response can keep us alert and aware, it can also become overwhelming.

Here are five coping skills to help you manage stress and create calm. Focusing on these practices builds resiliency to face present and future difficulties. You can use these skills on your own, with your colleagues, and with your community. You are not alone—we are in this together.

**Empower**

During challenging times, people often feel a lack of control. We can empower ourselves to focus on self-care, instead of avoiding it. Small decisions like limiting media exposure, prioritizing sleep and maintaining healthy nutrition can make a big difference in our sense of control and empowerment when we need it most.

**Connect**

Physical distancing doesn't mean detaching, and community can be a healing balm during a crisis. Now is the time to connect in creative ways—perhaps in ways we haven't tried. Extending feelings of compassion or gratitude, or just reaching out to check in with others, can help reduce stress and fear.

**Move**

Just getting up off your chair and stretching for a few minutes can give you a boost. Getting outside in nature can greatly reduce the intensity of our stress responses. We may need to adapt our usual exercise routines now, but this gives us a chance to experiment with techniques. Dancing in our living rooms, taking a walk, cycling with a friend—these are all ways to feel vital and energized. Continuing to move reminds us that this stress is temporary, and we can move through it.

**Create**

Many people are more mindful of their hands now, frequently washing them and using hand sanitizer. How about using your hands to create something? Maybe you have some art supplies around the house that haven't been used for a while. Why not try a new recipe, or cook your favorite comfort food? Maybe it’s time to pick up an instrument or get to that long-delayed home improvement project. Writing a letter by hand can be a gift to someone you care about. Gardening can give you a tangible way to feel grounded.
Breathe

Observe your breathing patterns throughout the day. When you are walking through the grocery store and there are empty shelves, does your breathing change? There is a breathing technique that can help raise levels of the anxiety-inhibiting hormone oxytocin: Place your hand on your heart while concentrating on caring for yourself. Remember that you can hold yourself through this stressful time, and you will get through it.

_Tanya Lauer_ [1], an employee assistance counselor at Life & Work Connections, specializes in trauma healing, resilience, mindfulness and recovery from co-occurring disorders. She is leading "Boundaries and Bridges" every Tuesday at 10 a.m. as part of the _daily digital 15 for You sessions_ [2] offered by Life & Work Connections.

A _version of this article_ [3] originally appeared on the Life & Work Connections website.

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