

## FIREFIGHTING COVID-19

The world is going through a sh\*t storm and, as usual, the fire service is right in the middle of it. Below are some quick ways to cope with the overwhelming stress. It's unlikely that these exercises will solve all your problems but they might help you deal with the problems more effectively.

### **F**ocus on being here now

The mind races, you get lost in thought, and you stop acting in effective ways. Here's how to stay grounded:

- Push your feet into the floor, squeeze your hands together, or stretch your shoulders and bring your full attention to just that sensation.
- Name 5 things in your visual field you didn't notice before.
- Notice what noises are around you right now. Spend two minutes just listening to whatever noises show up.
- Pay attention to your breath. You can breathe deeply if you want but there's really no need. Just simply tune in to the fact that you are here, now, breathing.



### **U**nhook from worry

It's normal to worry about whether you're going to bring COVID home. Unfortunately, it's really hard to simply stop worrying. But here's how to unhook from it:

- Simply acknowledge the worry. Say silently to yourself, "Here's worry, again" or "Hello Worry, my old friend."
- Thank your mind (sarcastically): "Thanks for the worry. I'll get right on that."
- Personify the worry – Picture a TV character or someone you know that is always worrying and watch this character worry for you.
- Say (aloud or silently) the worry thought in the voice of your favorite comedian.
- Take your mind for a walk. You can't stop your mind from talking but you don't have to just sit there and listen. Carry your mind with you and go do something meaningful.

## Change only what you can



As a firefighter, you're used to controlling and fixing the situation, no matter how chaotic. Unfortunately, there are a lot of things that are hard to control or fix, including thoughts, feelings, circumstances at work, and the spread of COVID. Rather than getting caught in the uncontrollable, work on conquering the tangible things right in front of you that you can control.

## Involve family

Be open with family (immediate and fire) about how the stress of responding to COVID-19 is impacting you and your crew. Reach out to the Peer Support Team. There's no reason to hide this stuff. You're not going to say anything your family isn't likely already thinking. Involving family just brings you closer, whereas not talking keeps you further apart.



## Take action

Do the activities that matter to you, including spending time with family, connecting with friends over FaceTime or Skype, exercising at home, going for walks, reading, cooking, creating, building, constructing, or any other activity that gives you a sense of accomplishment and purpose. Limit mindless activities, such as binge-watching TV, scrolling social media, excessive drinking, or isolating in your room by yourself.

For more free coping strategies and exercises, you can visit my website at <https://www.harborpsychology.com/fire-service>

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