

UNDERGRADUATES

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed and impacted the lives and routines of the Princeton community as well as the rest of the world. Transitioning to an all virtual semester has been destabilizing, upsetting, and anxiety provoking for many students. Even with the knowledge that the transition to an all virtual semester was necessary to protect the health and safety of the entire university community, it is completely normal to be upset in response. Reactions to a crisis can appear very different from person to person and can occur at any time. Please consider the following recommendations for taking care of yourself during this time.

Acknowledge and accept the full range of emotional responses you may be feeling. Some of you may be feeling scared for yourself or your families, or may feel anxious about living in an environment that may not be comfortable for you. Some of you may feel angry that your precious time at Princeton has been cut short, or feel sad at the prospect of not seeing your friends for several months. Some of you may be happy about living at home and being close to your family. And some of you may be feeling a combination of all these things. All of your feelings are normal reactions to an unprecedented situation. Try to accept your feelings as they come. Allowing yourself to process your feelings is an important step toward working through them.

Allow yourself to mourn. Allow yourselves to mourn and grieve the lost experiences that come with not returning to campus. It is a loss, and you can acknowledge it as such. You will see your friends again, and you will have the opportunity to celebrate with them

Use reliable sources to stay informed. Obtain the latest information during an infectious disease outbreak from credible and reliable sources of information. Up-to-date, accurate recommendations regarding disease prevention, self and family care, and travel guidance can be found at the following websites:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): www.cdc.gov
- Princeton University: <https://uhs.princeton.edu/health-resources/coronavirus-covid-19>
- Your state and local health departments' websites

Limit media exposure. Turn off the television and/or alert notifications on your phone if it is increasing your distress. Exposure to media can be healthy or unhealthy: for some individuals keeping abreast of all breaking news can help in feeling a sense of control over the situation while for others it may reinforce anxiety and fear. Research has shown that excess media exposure to coverage of stressful events can result in negative outcomes. Use trusted resources to gather the information you need and then turn it off when you need to.

Anticipate stress reactions and recognize signs of distress. Emotional distress is common and normal in the context of uncertainty and potentially life-threatening situations. Stress can present itself in different ways including physical, emotional, or cognitive ways. Some common physical responses can be stomach problems, aches and pains, and appetite changes. Some common feelings may be sadness, guilt, anger, fear, and anxiety.

Up-to-date University guidance and information about COVID-19 can be found at: <http://coronavirus.princeton.edu>

Some common cognitive responses can be memory issues, confusion, indecisiveness and decreased concentration. All reactions can be normal. The important thing is to pay attention to how you are feeling, and if your symptoms become too severe, reach out for help.

Try different strategies to reduce distress. There is no right or wrong way to deal with this stress. The strategies that will work for you may not work for others. It is important to try different things to see what is most helpful for you. Some strategies can include:

- Being prepared (e.g., developing a personal/ family plan for the outbreak).
- Educating yourself about preventive measures such as hand-washing technique, cough etiquette, social distancing
- Talking to loved ones about worries and concerns. Know that your feelings are normal and others may be experiencing them too. Connect with friends and family through Skype or FaceTime, or try a shared online game if you're isolated.
- Scheduling positive activities. Look at the virtual engagement activities being planned by the University at <https://winter.princeton.edu/virtual>. Do things that you usually find enjoyable, even if right now it can feel a little harder to feel motivated. Some examples might be listening to music, exercising, practicing breathing routines, spending time in nature or with animals, journaling, or reading inspirational texts.
- Taking time to renew your spirit through prayer, meditation or helping others. See if there are opportunities for community engagement that don't require in-person activities, like pulling together a resource guide for people in your local community or raising money for important causes through your social media connections.
- Making sure to eat regularly, and notice your body's hunger cues. Pay attention to how what you're eating makes you feel. Food can serve both as fuel to keep us going but also a means of pleasure and connection with others.
- Getting enough sleep every night, and trying to keep a regular sleep schedule as much as you can. We know sleep is restorative and reduces anxiety, helps learning, helps problem solving, and allows the brain to rest. Even short periods of sleep deprivation can impact mood.
- Considering what physical activities and movement you can engage in for stress reduction. That could be anything from dancing in your room to going for runs to making sure you stretch out your arms and legs and hands regularly. We can often feel distress in our bodies, so pay attention to what your body is saying it needs.
- If you are stuck at home, create a routine for yourself. Get up out of bed, take a shower, and do some work. Engage in your online classes. Plan time for studying. Plan time for having fun and relaxing.

For more resources including self-care apps and exercises, visit:

<https://uhs.princeton.edu/mindbody>

<https://umatter.princeton.edu/connecting-matters/tools/caring-yourself>

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For most people stress reactions will lessen over the first few weeks. However, when symptoms are significantly impacting functioning, becoming harder to manage, or are increasing in severity then we encourage you to reach out to CPS. Please call us at 609-258-3141, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.