

COVID-19 Mental Health & Coping Resources

F O R E V E R Y O N E

BUILDING RESILIENCE SERIES

For many of us, facing the COVID-19 situation has brought up difficult feelings. Whether we are angry toward the virus, frustrated about our compromised routines, worried about our health and the safety of elderly relatives, nervous about patient cases, or anxious about our kids, we may be experiencing a lot of overwhelming and uncomfortable emotions. How do we build resilience and conserve our psychological energy? Part 2 of the "Building Resilience Series" is on setting boundaries around news.

Setting boundaries on your news intake

Our phones are repositories of our anxieties and fears, especially with constant news updates about COVID-19. Our minds make split-second interpretations about the danger we're in, and our fight-or-flight response takes over. If you are constantly exposing yourself to a barrage of updates, this stress response can become chronic,

To prevent information overload, you may find there is a benefit to assessing whether your relationship to the news is helping or hurting you. While being informed can help us feel more prepared amid a public health crisis, setting healthy boundaries to our media consumption can help limit our threat responses.

This may be particularly helpful to people who are already predisposed to general anxiety. Catherine Belling, Ph.D., an Associate Professor of Medical Education at Northwestern University, says it's important to find a single source of reliable information that is not falsely reassuring but not catastrophic. The frequency of your intake is also important. A recent study showed that 24 hours without notifications from news apps decreased stress levels.

Developing a healthy news intake habit now can set you up for a more resilient experience in the future. Here are 3 simple steps to help you gain a sense of control over your news intake plan.

1. Assess your news hygiene. You might not be aware of how often you feel compelled to check your phone or turn on the TV. Keep track of the number of times you turn to your phone for updates - is it 5 or 25 times? Is the TV always on news channels? Then ask yourself, why am I looking? Is it out of habit and fear?

2. Control your news agenda. Choose one reliable news source. To prevent from being yanked around by the news cycle, decide how you want to access it. If constant push notifications overwhelm you, delete the apps or disable alerts. You can always opt back in when you feel ready, so there's no risk in pausing as needed.

3. Set a structure.

- Times of day: Set specific times to check in - first thing in the morning and before bed. Or limit to one intake per day.
- Time spent exposed to news: Put limits on how long you spend perusing new information. 5 or 10 minutes to absorb what's relevant saves time and mental energy. Before you get into bed, escort your devices out of your bedroom.

