

Coronavirus

Coronavirus Anxiety: Managing Your Fear So You Can Respond in Faith

By Sherri and Mike Meyer-Veen

As Christians, we're called to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic with faith, not fear. But many of us feel deeply anxious. Understanding how anxiety impacts us and taking steps to ease our Coronavirus anxiety can help us respond to COVID-19 in a more faithful way amidst our fear. This article draws from [Faithwalking](#) and [Churches Learning Change](#) community learning on anxiety, [The Leader's Journey](#), and Bowen Family Systems Theory.

Living in a highly anxious time



We are living in a time of heightened anxiety. Anxiety is a natural part of life and human interaction. Anxiety is contagious. It can arise in response to events or relationships, and it is felt in an entire system. Anxiety is currently being transmitted within our communities, our nation, and our world regarding COVID-19, the novel coronavirus, and what may or may not happen.

We all have our own unique anxious responses (because we are human). Some anxiety is healthy; it helps us learn and grow and motivates us. Too much anxiety makes us “stupid,” unable to think or function well. It is important for our own well-being, and for the well-being of the systems of which we are a part, to increase our awareness of our own anxious responses. Our own patterns of how we show up impact the systems of our lives.

The good news

Through increasing our awareness (with a “no shame” focus on learning) and intentional effort with the Holy Spirit, we can decrease anxiety in ourselves, contributing to the decreasing of anxiety in our systems. We can show up differently. We can “be” and make room for others to “be” in times of high anxiety AND we can increase our ability to respond in the more faithful, Christ-like ways to which God calls us.

9 ways anxiety impacts you and others

1. Increased story-telling and meaning-making.

Meaning-making is a natural part of being human, and we are all doing it constantly as a part of ordinary life. When anxiety increases, our meaning-making ability goes into overdrive or may be overwhelmed by the events and circumstances happening around us and within us. We may start to see in ourselves and in others:

- Increased reactivity in conversation in general





- Jumping to conclusions
- Making false assumptions about what is or is not happening everywhere based on what is happening in the places and the people we are experiencing.
- Creating stories
- Entertaining conspiracy theories

2. Increased reactivity in general.

Whether we are prone to move away, toward, or against a stressor, we might distance, conflict, project, or start to over/under function in our reactivity.

Some ways this might show up include:

- Defensiveness
- Blaming/shaming/finger pointing
- Taking things personally
- Shutting down, isolating, ignoring or withdrawing
- Attempting to control, including demanding or bullying
- Distracting ourselves with food, work, entertainment, etc.

3. Decreased ability to listen and seek understanding.

We are too busy reacting, and our ability to actually hear what is being said is greatly diminished. We have a hard time being and remaining present to each other. Our curiosity and ability to hold tension over diverse opinions also decreases. Our patience and compassion become harder to access.

4. Decreased ability to nuance.

As anxiety increases, nuance is often the first thing to go. Everything starts to feel like a dichotomy—an either/or—and often between two extremes.



We get tricked into thinking there are only two options. Polarization is both a symptom and a result of increased anxiety, and we get stuck in linear thinking focused on only a few of the possibilities.

5. Decreased ability to accurately assess threats.

Anxiety increases our fight/flight automatic responses that start to send more “override” messages to our frontal lobe thinking processes, alerting us of perceived danger. As anxiety increases, our ability to process and assess the difference between actual and perceived threat diminishes. This can easily go to two extremes.

At one extreme, we start a denial response where we refuse to engage the threat. At the other extreme, we start behaving and believing as though we are in an acute life-threatening situation in the moment, more so than is real. It becomes more and more difficult to think clearly and more and more difficult to assess the actual threat level. Even when we are aware that this is happening, it is still difficult to assess. Then, when we start listening to each other’s responses, it is even more difficult.

6. Snowballing and compounding anxiety.

Anxiety is a neutral and natural part of life. Anxiety motivates us to learn and grow and keeps us safe and healthy. We each have various life experiences and current situations, as well as differing levels and abilities in managing anxiety. Increased social anxiety does not impact everyone the same. When anxiety starts building from multiple situations all at the same time, it can snowball quickly and overrun our management skills! If you are already dealing with some pretty difficult situations (personal or family health issues, broken or strained relationships, parental stressors, job tensions, grief, etc.), increased social anxiety can feel like an exponential addition.

7. Jump to perceived quick fixes.

We naturally try to lower anxiety, consciously and unconsciously. Sometimes there are simple solutions that require immediate action. However, complex issues usually do not



have quick fixes, yet we are tempted to think they do. Anxiety also pressures us to “do something” and so we jump into action, thinking our action will resolve all of the complexity. Sometimes action does decrease anxiety a little and we think the problem is solved, but then the problem resurfaces. Complex issues take thoughtful reflection and intentional actions over time to resolve.

8. Increased temptation toward unhealthy coping mechanisms.

We all have unhealthy patterns. When stress and/or anxiety increases, our temptation to use those unhealthy patterns to cope is greater.

9. Fatigue and exhaustion.

All of the above “extra” work is mentally, emotionally, and physically draining. It can be overwhelming and exhausting! These are all natural, human parts of dealing with increased anxiety.

How You Can Ease Coronavirus Anxiety

- ✓ Pray and pause to practice your spiritual “workout” if you have one.
- ✓ Check in with yourself regularly and observe your own reactivity level. Just observe; try not to judge or shame—just take notice.
- ✓ Give yourself and others extra compassion. Speak kindly to yourself and others. We are all trying to do the best we can and are all facing different things, seen and unseen.
- ✓ Check in with others and try to stay present in conversation to listen as best you can and be curious.
- ✓ Practice curiosity and wonder. Try to catch yourself in the stories you are telling yourself, and wonder about other possible stories.
- ✓ Work at calming yourself. While we all have varying degrees and levels of need for anxiety management at different times, we all need to work at calming. Our bodies



are trying to calm us naturally, and we can help ourselves through intentional practices.

- ✓ Take care of yourself and monitor your basic needs. I (Sherri) need to remind myself to drink water, eat, and rest when I am anxious. My husband Mike needs to remind himself to eat healthily and exercise when he is anxious.
- ✓ Cut down on unnecessary stressors.

[See more Coronavirus resources](#)

About the author



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