

Worrying from afar: When loved ones are in a COVID-19 hot spot



Over a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, we've all been through a lot. While infection rates go down in one area, they may rise in another. Local guidelines continue to evolve. And even if we're living in a place that feels safe, we may be worried about family and friends in places where COVID-19 rates are increasing.

If you have loved ones in India or another place that's dealing with a surge in the pandemic, you may feel anxious, worried and frustrated. Those feelings are valid, and there are ways you can take care of yourself and manage the stress you're experiencing.

Understand what you can do. If your loved one is affected by COVID-19, seek ways to support them. For example, you may have an ageing parent who doesn't easily understand medical information. If so, see if you can call in to talk with their doctor. Even from afar, you may be able to help.

Remember to care for yourself. To be able to support those you care about, you must also take care of your own physical and mental health. Take time to exercise, eat nutritious meals and do activities you enjoy. Stay informed with reputable news sources. But if you find the news is making you stressed, limit your exposure.

Consider donating. If you can afford to do so, you might consider donating to a trusted organisation that's helping in India. Just be sure to research any organisation before donating. During natural disasters and other tough times, fake charities may try to take advantage of people.

Be kind to yourself. If you live in a place where COVID-19 rates are low, you were able to easily get a vaccine or you can easily avoid exposure, you might feel some guilt. You may be wondering why you've had advantages that others haven't had. Acknowledge these feelings, but be kind to yourself. You've done nothing wrong.

Be open about what you're feeling. If worrying is affecting your everyday life including your job, talk to your manager. It may help to have them understand what you're experiencing, and they may be able to connect you with support. Your employee assistance programme (EAP) can offer support too as you're dealing with these feelings. They may also connect you with resources and help you find ways to support family from afar.

Support your team. If you're a manager, try to make sure your team feel comfortable coming to you if they're having a tough time — with this or any other topic. Offer flexibility, when possible, and remind employees that they can get support from their EAP anytime.

Employee assistance programme

For help dealing with stress, anxiety or other feelings related to the pandemic, contact your EAP. They can connect you with resources and help you find ways to support your family from afar.

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If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, get help right away. Visit suicide.org for a list of global hotlines or contact your local emergency services.

If you are pregnant, are physically inactive or have a health condition, check with your doctor before starting an exercise programme or increasing your activity level.

This programme should not be used for emergency or urgent care needs. In an emergency, call 911 if you are in the United States, the local emergency services phone number if you are outside the United States, or go to the nearest ambulatory and emergency room facility. This programme is not a substitute for a doctor's or professional's care. Due to the potential for a conflict of interest, legal consultation will not be provided on issues that may involve legal action against Optum or its affiliates, or any entity through which the caller is receiving these services directly or indirectly (e.g., employer or health plan). This programme and all its components, in particular services to family members below the age of 16, may not be available in all locations and is subject to change without prior notice. Experience and/or educational levels of Employee Assistance Programme resources may vary based on contract requirements or country regulatory requirements. Coverage exclusions and limitations may apply.

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