



How to be a Friend During COVID-19: Stressors, Resources, Strategies for Helping Each Other Faculty Version

The suggestions here are intended to help us all be better friends and colleagues amidst the COVID pandemic and the many impacts it has on our work as faculty and on the university as a whole. Following these tips are some examples of resources people may find helpful and, then, a list of the many stressors and problems we face. This is to help us be sensitive to the problems that our colleagues may be facing. It also may help us better understand our own stress to facilitate being friends to ourselves.

Skills, Tips for How to be a Supportive Friend

General

- Role is to be a friend, not to have all the answers to all the questions – you can even have questions!!
- Asking open ended questions instead of closed questions
- Small gestures can mean a lot – voicemails, “hello” texts, exchange of humorous postings even if they aren’t that funny

COVID-19 Specific

Reach out to healthcare workers, teachers, and other essential workers we know who have different struggles than we do right now.

- Message for oneself and others: Give yourself some slack; you’re trying your best so don’t let it get you down
- Don’t be afraid to ask students and others how they are doing, how their families are doing
- Reduce the stress on yourself and your students by communicating commitment to flexibility in getting through the semester
- Contact friends or colleagues to ask them your questions – the objective is to **connect**
- Don’t be bashful; in these times, err on the side of reaching out rather than holding back
 - People are open to others reaching out to them
 - Take it on yourself to follow up offline if you notice someone appearing distressed or isolated or disengaged
- Don’t be afraid to talk about the obvious
 - Ask how family and friends are; soon, almost everyone is going to know of someone close to themselves or their family who is infected/sick/out-of-work
 - If someone close is sick, ask how they are doing
- Share your own experiences so others feel comfortable sharing theirs
 - Including anxieties and uncertainties – normalize feelings of stress
 - Also feelings of joy and happiness to counteract taboo against these
- Make an extra effort to touch base with grandparents and older people who may not be good with technology and therefore feel more isolated
- Team up
- Think about who you haven’t heard from in a while and reaching out to them
- Make reaching out to others part of your routine, e.g., call, voicemail, text, or email 2 people each day with whom you haven’t been in touch for > 2 weeks

- “Pay it Forward” – Encourage those you reach to reach out to others themselves
- An excellent google doc for potential remote activities such as multiplayer games is at: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vRn2kiF58UB2dli87KJXv7dlAPR8Eje75VXtqeijj84/edit#>
- Writing letters! It's a nice break from being on one screen or another all day
- Reaching out to those in rural areas – consider alternative channels to reach, asynchronous channels

Ideas for connecting:

- Silent FaceTime dates or FaceTime work dates
- Friend group meet daily at a specific time
- Zoom happy hours
- Virtual dinners for friends/family gathering
- Virtual book clubs

Streams

- General Chapel Hill: <https://www.visitchapelhill.org/restaurants/>
- UNC Culture of Health: <https://sph.unc.edu/nciph/culture-of-health/>
- UNC HR Wellness Resources: <https://hr.unc.edu/benefits/work-life/wellness-resources-during-covid-19/>
- Taking a dance/exercise class via Instagram Live (The New York City Dance Alliance is great @NYCDA! If you like tap dance Melinda Sullivan is great too)
- Virtual Yoga/ Pilates sessions are great too to maintain stable physical and mental health: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=yoga+sequence
- Google has digitized some museum exhibits from famous museums
- The Metropolitan Opera streams videos of classic performances every night, available for the following 24 hours

Resources

- UNC Faculty Support Hub [xxxxxxxxxxxx](#)
- North Carolina <https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/>
- UNC-CH COVID-19 Tracking <https://public.tableau.com/profile/oira.dashboards?from=groupmessage&isappinstalled=0#!/vizhome/CarolinaCOVID-19MonitoringDashboard/COVID19MetricsDashboard>

What are some of the problems and stressors created by COVID-19?

General stressors, problems, and concerns

Emotional Responses to the Pandemic

- Fear – for oneself, family, children, parents....
- Anger over racist and economic structuring of burden of COVID
- Anger over national failure to address the crisis
- Uncertainty causing more Fear'
- General loneliness and feelings of isolation
- Run out of things to look forward to
- Life seeming colorless

Features of COVID that Make It Especially Stressful

- For African American, Latinx, Native American, Asian and Pacific Islander groups, and other groups facing racism and social and economic injustice, feeling doubly assaulted by COVID and its disproportionate burden related to racism and inequity
- Many stressors are isolated in place and/or time. It is easy to notice them. Because COVID is always there and always there for everybody, we can lose track of how much it is affecting us. It's important to realize the stress is real and powerful and is affecting us.
- If we don't "cut ourselves some slack," we'll make it worse and get down on ourselves for not meeting unrealistic expectations
- "I don't know about folks who say they're binge watching Netflix. I seem to be working all the time and still not getting as much done as I should."
- Compromised ability to do work – the virus and the threats and stress around it just take the wind out of our sails. NYT columnist David Brooks (4/2/20): "I don't know about you, but I'm mentally exhausted by 5 p.m. every day, and I think part of the cause is the unconscious stress flowing through us."
- Not having compassion for yourself or others because of so many facing far worse
- Compassion fatigue, numbness

Families

- Concerns about family members, loved ones, or oneself being impacted by COVID either directly or financially
- Getting services for children or family members
- Serious illness, deaths in family exacerbated by social isolation
- Children's school – remote or in classroom, still problems
- Family dynamics with social isolation, children at home
- What if I were thrown into a caregiver role for someone with the virus??

"What If's / Getting Help

- Getting medical care
- How would I cope with getting sick?

Adjustments, Coping, Living Remotely

- Stressors of living alone
- Learning to use remote work technology
- Information overload and information channel overload

Stressors for Faculty

Jobs, Positions, Career

- Job security
- For those with children at home, how COVID may impact one's professional reputation with expectations to perform at the same or a higher level at work. Some are working 16 hour days between work and parenting and are afraid of having their commitment to work questioned, appearing unprofessional
- Loss of networking opportunities from cancellation of professional meetings
- Loss of funding for research

Teaching and Faculty Role

- Teaching online
- Teaching in person
- Testing issues
- Having to work on things they had not expected or that they don't want to do
- Increased burdens of teaching amidst COVID taking away time for scholarship
- Feeling a need to be a role model or source of strength, but actually contributing more by showing vulnerability

Being in the University

- The paucity of scientific information to rely upon in making decisions.
- The fear that economic factors will drive higher education/institutional decision-making as opposed to caring, humanistic factors.