

# HOT TOPIC #5: March 23rd

## Coping with Anxiety and Stress

*COVID-19 updates from San Juan County around subjects on the minds of islanders.*

Our community has a strong history of neighbors helping neighbors – a quick scroll through our online news and local Facebook pages exemplifies that spirit with posts centered around getting supplies to those in need; supporting local businesses; caring for our most vulnerable islanders. Yes, community spirit will carry us through. Unfortunately, it is going to be more of a milk-run vs. direct ferry in terms of duration. It will be important to keep ourselves physically and mentally healthy during these times of heightened stress and anxiety. Practice “putting the oxygen mask on yourself first before helping the person next to you.” It is paramount we tend to our own physical and emotional needs in order to support others. With that self-care in mind, today’s hot topic offers some suggestions to help you don that proverbial oxygen mask.

### **Anxiety and Stress**

- You may be experiencing fear and worry, it can manifest in many ways. There might be changes in your sleep or eating habits and/or increased use of alcohol.

### **Focus on supporting yourself and your loved ones.**

- Limit your time on social media or the news. Pay attention to trusted websites to stay informed.
- There might be some BIG feelings, these too shall pass. What works best for you? Whether it is taking deep breaths, yoga, or aerobic exercise, understand what calms you and supports relaxation.
- Take care of your body, eat healthy, get plenty of sleep. We are fortunate enough to live in a place where we can get outside and take in fresh air while keeping our distance from others.
- Set aside time to relax, do activities you enjoy, get your hands in the dirt or get creative with art or crafts, create opportunities for joy.
- If at home, make a schedule and keep yourself busy.
- Connect with others, talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling. Have you downloaded Zoom yet? It is a good way to connect virtually with friends that you can’t visit right now.

### **Supporting your children**

- Stress can be contagious, remain calm and reassuring to your children. Take time to talk with your child and share age appropriate facts. Provide reassurance and messages of safety, share ideas and activities that are stress relieving.

- Maintain some predictability and daily routines, a sense of order can be soothing and help children feel safe. Routines can have some flexibility built in.
- If your child shares something that is bothering them, listen. Don't dismiss it, let them know it is okay to experience a range of emotions and that we all might express them differently. You don't have to fix it, just listen and be present, this will be comforting for them and help them feel calm.
- Your kids do not need to hear the news. When sharing information about COVID-19, keep it honest, age appropriate and brief. Encourage them to ask questions and answer as best you can. You don't have to get it perfect. Share all the things you are doing as a family to be safe, staying home, washing hands, avoiding touching your face.
- Help your child learn the signs of stress in their own body. Talk about strategies to help them calm down – deep belly breaths, stretching, rocking, swinging – let them tell you what calms them down.
- Have fun and plan activities everyone can enjoy. Take a nature walk, sit around a camp fire, plant seeds. When sharing meals together talk about the highlight of your day or something you want to do tomorrow. What is it your child finds joyful? Create moments for connection. Model for your children how to manage stress, have fun, take time to laugh and lighten things up with humor and playfulness.

If you need help, reach out to a friend or neighbor. We're all experiencing the same physical and emotional issues, and one of the things that can help us the most is the feeling that comes from our community. Our islands will weather this storm as we have many times in the past: *together*.