

YOUR CARE POLMED

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Supporting your family's emotions during lockdown



While the COVID-19 lockdown was intended to protect people, it has caused many to feel a wave of negative emotions.

The University of Johannesburg's Centre for Social Change and the Developmental, Capable and Ethical State research division of the Human Sciences Research Council examined the mental health effects of the lockdown in South Africa. Out of the 12 312 survey responses, 33% of South Africans admitted to feeling depressed, 46% scared, 60% frequently stressed, 26% sad, 18% angry and 29% lonely since the beginning of lockdown.

Mental health in lockdown

Casey Chambers, operations director of the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG), reported a significant increase in calls, "Incoming calls have more than doubled since the beginning of lockdown, and growing every day." Before lockdown, SADAG averaged around 600 calls daily. Now they're averaging between 1 200 -1 400 calls every day.

Experiencing low moods and heightened anxiety during lockdown is completely normal. However, if these feelings have not improved over time, they need to be addressed.



Who's more at risk?

1. Children and adolescents

Young people want to spend their days at school or with their friends. Even in the age of social media, lockdown is causing young people to experience feelings of loneliness, depression and anxiety. Lockdown has accelerated a dependence on social media, which can also affect mental health.

2. Living alone

Feelings of loneliness can increase the risk of depression, anxiety and stress.

3. At-risk population

At-risk populations include older adults and those already with underlying health conditions that include asthma, TB, HIV, diabetes and heart disease. These individuals may be encouraged to limit social contact due to their risk to get the COVID-19 virus. Unfortunately, this can actually increase the risk for depression and anxiety. It can also cause them to question their self-worth and value to others.

4. Working population

Whether working, on leave, or being laid off, the stress about finances, job security, and planning for the future is trying. These stressors can increase anxiety as well as the risk of depression.

Signs of anxiety and low mood

If you or a family member have been exhibiting these symptoms then you should reach out for help:

- Sudden change in mood
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities
- Lack of motivation
- Struggling to get out of bed
- Either a significant increase or decrease in appetite and weight
- Significant over- or under-sleeping
- Self-loathing, constant self-criticism and guilt
- Anger or irritability
- Thoughts of suicide



Talking about mental health

Your mental outlook is always valid; whether you're feeling low during an epidemic or not. The first step to addressing these sensitive issues is to let someone you trust know that you're battling with your mental health.

If you're unsure where to start, try the following conversation openers:

"I don't know if you've noticed but I haven't been feeling good. I can barely get out of bed. I think I need help."

"I'm sad. I don't know what's wrong but I've been feeling empty for a while; mentally, I'm going through a lot."

Talking to a depressed family member

If you've noticed that a family member is battling with their mental health, there are ways you can speak to them without upsetting or scaring them off:

"How are you? I know that we're all going through a lot and if you ever need to talk, I'm always here and ready to listen."

"Hey. Do you want to cook a meal with me? I've noticed that you've been feeling down and it might make you feel better to do something to ease your mind?"

You may not believe it, but even in a pandemic, your mental health should always be a priority. You should never shy away from talking to someone about your emotions and stressors.



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