

What doctors want patients to know about coping with pandemic anger

FEB 26, 2021



Sara Berg, MS

News Editor

For people who have not seen their families and friends in the flesh for months or skipped traveling to stay safe during the pandemic, it's easy to get angry when others don't seem to do their part to limit the spread of COVID-19. To describe this feeling of "pandemic angry," people have coined the portmanteau "pangry."

"It could be anger about the fact that we're in a pandemic that is persisting longer than we imagined," said AMA member [Frank Clark, MD](#), a psychiatrist in Greenville, South Carolina. "Furthermore, some may share the following sentiments as it relates to being pangry: I'm doing everything I can to keep myself safe, to keep my family safe. ... I can't believe that people would walk into a store and not wear a mask."

Here is what Dr. Clark had to say about pandemic anger and how to overcome this feeling when others defy public health recommendations.

Acknowledge the anger

It is important for people to first acknowledge that they are experiencing anger, explained Dr. Clark. "It's OK to be angry and to be mindful of your feelings."

However, "the more important thing after you acknowledge the feeling, or the emotion, is what do you do with it?" he said. "If I'm angry because I see people congregating in an establishment and they're not wearing a mask, yes, I have every right to be angry, but how am I going to respond?"

“I can choose to leave the establishment and that would be a healthy way of coping,” Dr. Clark said. Choosing to unleash one’s anger in a confrontational manner likely would lead to a bad outcome and make you feel worse.

“There’s this concept called radical acceptance,” Dr. Clark said. “You don’t have to like what happens, but it is what it is.”

Discover [what doctors want patients to know about pandemic fatigue](#).

Take a step back

In a situation where you feel pandemic-fueled anger, “take a step back,” said Dr. Clark, adding that “we’re quick to judge, but we don’t know what other people are dealing with.”

“If we are to clothe ourselves with compassion, mercy and grace, why wouldn’t we extend that same compassion, mercy and grace to our neighbors regardless of how they conduct their lives in a pandemic?” said Dr. Clark.

Read about [seven ways to cope with moral distress during COVID-19](#).

Be curious and ask why

While “I may not agree with a decision someone makes, I can be curious and ask that family member, friend or stranger, ‘Can you help me understand how you arrived at that decision?’” Dr. Clark said.

“People are more likely to engage in a healthy discourse when we approach them in a non-judgmental matter,” he said. “It’s about validating and acknowledging that a person’s perspective may be different from our own.”

Discover [eight coronavirus tips that doctors want patients to follow](#).

Have a moment to yourself

“I’m a big proponent of mindfulness as a way to allow yourself to be thankful during this pandemic—even prior to the pandemic,” said Dr. Clark. “We have these different apps that are available.”

“Some people may not want to utilize mindfulness apps—It’s not a one size fits all,” he said. “However, it is vital to discover what fills your love bank and allows you to achieve tranquility and rejuvenation.”

“Anger is not a bad thing, but if you allow it to consume you, the only person that you’re hurting is yourself,” Dr. Clark said.

Read about? [four habits of gratitude physicians can follow to enhance well-being.](#)