



# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



**FAMILY**

OLDER ADULTS

## Our Family Will Get Through This! Making Meaning of Adversity

The pandemic thrust everyone into uncharted territory. Older adults who are at higher risk for illness may especially experience stress and anxiety during the pandemic. We can help the older adults in our lives to build resilience by acknowledging their feelings and helping them to put their feelings into perspective. With careful thought, meaning can be found during uncertainty.

Finding meaning during difficult times can help us:

- Have a better ability to cope
- Feel a sense of control again
- Improve our mental health

### Diary Writing or Reflective Journaling and Debriefing Activities

**Reflective journaling** allows time for self-reflection and self-expression and encourages storytelling. Journaling provides an opportunity to get out feelings and concerns while also sharing memories and history. Such activities have proven to reduce stress and promote psychological and spiritual resiliency. Journals can be written, video recorded, or created through drawings or taking pictures. Some suggestions for questions to address while reflective journaling include:

- How does it feel to be in this current situation?
- What can be learned from this experience?
- Are there family heirlooms that provide a meaningful story to tell? How can those stories be shared?
- What stories from the past are helping you through this day, this week, or this month?

Journaling every day can help tell a story and make sense of experiences during stressful times. The below sites contain more information about reflective journaling and how to get started:

- [What is a Reflective Journal?](#)
- [How to Write a Reflective Journal](#)

**Debriefing** is important for individual and family support. Research shows that debriefing activities, such as talking through events, can help individuals and families endure emotional stress. Take time to encourage those in your life to share feelings, concerns, and stories. This can be a phone-based or virtual activity where you can call family members at the beginning or end of the day to discuss the challenges you each faced during the day. Debriefing conversations can help feelings seem more normal. Encourage discussion of difficult feelings, such as:

- the pressures faced;
- fears and anxieties;
- grief and suffering felt; or
- personal needs.

To learn more about the science behind on how debriefing and reflective writing helps individuals overcome adversity, you may wish to read the below research:

- [Digging Deep: Using Diary Techniques to Explore the Place of Health and Well-Being Amongst Older People](#)
- [Writing About Stressful Experiences on Symptom Reduction in Patients With Asthma or Rheumatoid Arthritis](#)
- [Online Positive Affect Journaling in the Improvement of Mental Distress and Well-Being in General Medical Patients With Elevated Anxiety Symptoms: A Preliminary Randomized Controlled Trial](#)
- [Building Team Resilience and Debriefing After Difficult Clinical Events: A Resilience Curriculum for Team Leaders](#)



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College of Health and Human Sciences

## Welcome to Families Tackling Tough Times Together!

We hope you find the enclosed ideas and suggestions helpful as you care for your family during the pandemic. We know the pandemic is a very big challenge. How families cope can affect both parents and children for a long time.

We are scientists, educators, and students from Purdue University, and we are here to help! For nine weeks this fall, we will provide weekly collections of ideas for families to use to build on their strengths.

These tools are free, flexible, and informed by science. They are designed for families of all types, with tailored suggestions for children, youth, young adults and older adults, and suitable for both civilian and military families. We hope that your family will try one activity each week!

### Would you like to earn financial rewards?

We especially welcome families living in the continental US who are interested in trying out project materials and telling us about their experiences. These families can earn financial rewards by sharing about one hour of their time over the next two months. Sign up now at the link below!

[https://purdue.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_3vK1BJq2EiUksAJ](https://purdue.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3vK1BJq2EiUksAJ)

For more information

- Join the Families Together Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/HHSFamiliesTogether/>
- Visit the project website: <https://www.hhs.purdue.edu/families-together/>