

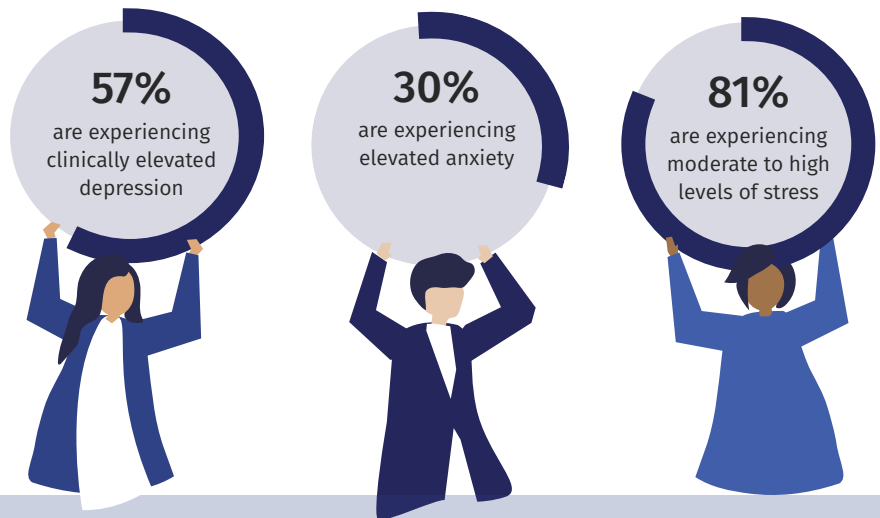


# Supporting Pregnant Individuals To Cope with Stress During COVID-19

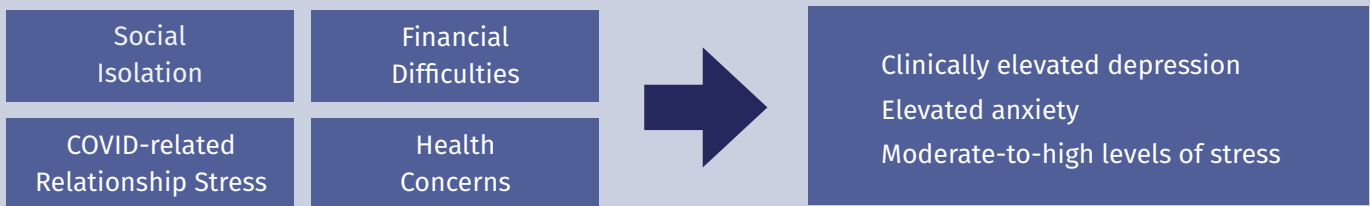
This resource provides current evidence about how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted individuals' psychological well-being and levels of stress during pregnancy. Guidance on supporting individuals who are pregnant to effectively cope with different kinds of stress specifically related to COVID-19 is also outlined.

## The Impact of COVID-19 on Individuals' Mental Health During Pregnancy

In Ontario, during the pandemic, individuals have experienced high rates of mental health difficulties during pregnancy.<sup>1</sup>



There are four specific COVID-related stressors that contribute to this increased risk of mental health difficulties.



HOWEVER, an individual's perception of the potential impact of COVID-19 is just as important as experiencing direct COVID-19 stressors!





In Ontario, pregnant women who perceived the impact of COVID-19 to be more negative, experienced more mental health problems.



**PRACTICE TIP:** Assist clients to identify & think about the positive aspects of their life, including their personal strengths.

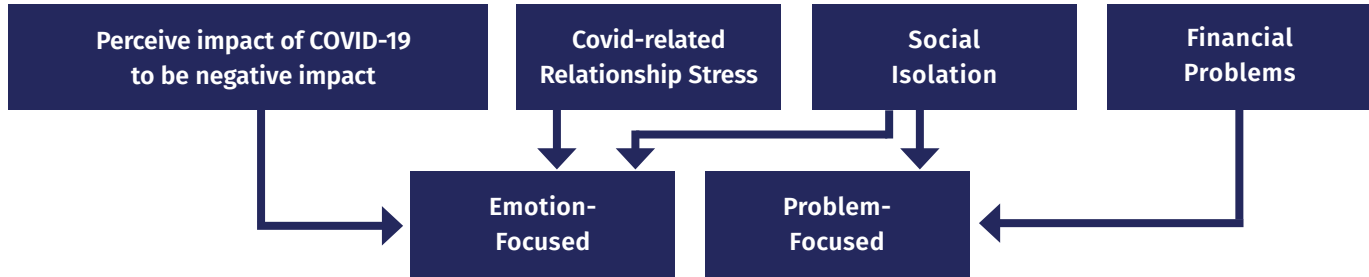
# Supporting Your Clients to Cope with Mental Health Challenges During COVID-19

There are different types of coping strategies you can recommend to clients to protect against experiencing escalating mental health challenges during or after pregnancy.

 <b>EMOTION-FOCUSED COPING</b>	 <b>PROBLEM-FOCUSED COPING</b>	 <b>DYSFUNCTIONAL COPING</b>
<p>Cope with negative emotions &amp; thoughts</p>	<p>Cope by actively addressing the stressor</p>	<p>Unhelpful coping strategies</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Reaching out to others for emotional support</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Positive reframing</b> (thinking about positive aspects of the situation, looking for something good in what's happening)</li> <li>✓ <b>Acceptance</b> (learning to live with the new normal)</li> <li>✓ <b>Humour</b> (making jokes, trying to make light of the situation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Active Coping</b> (focusing on what can be done by the client, even small things, to change the situation; taking action to address stressor)</li> <li>✓ <b>Planning</b> (coming up with a strategy of what the client can do, making lists of what steps to take)</li> <li>✓ <b>Seeking Instrumental Support</b> (seeking advice or help from others about how to address the problem, seeking resources)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ <b>Self-Blame</b> (criticizing/blaming oneself)</li> <li>✗ <b>Denial</b> (refusing to believe the situation, telling oneself “this isn’t real”)</li> <li>✗ <b>Behavioural Disengagement</b> (giving up on trying to deal with the problem, giving up attempting to cope)</li> <li>✗ <b>Use of Substances</b> (e.g., increased use of alcohol, cannabis, vaping)</li> <li>✗ <b>Self-Distraction</b> (doing things to stop thinking about the problem (e.g., watching TV, sleeping, daydreaming).</li> </ul>
<p> <b>CAUTION:</b> self-distraction might help in the short-term, but over the long-term does not effectively address the problem or the associated negative feelings/thoughts.</p>		

In general, emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping are more effective and lead to better mental health outcomes, than dysfunctional coping.

The client’s perception of COVID-19 and the specific stressors they are experiencing will determine which strategies might be most helpful:



<sup>1</sup> Khoury, J.E., Atkinson, L., Bennett, T., Jack, S.M., Gonzalez, A. (2021). COVID-19 and mental health during pregnancy: The importance of cognitive appraisal and social support. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 282, 1161-1169. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2021.01.027>

**Citation:** Khoury, J.E., Gonzalez, A., & Jack, S.M on behalf of the PHN PREP Project Team (2020). *Supporting pregnant individuals cope with stress during COVID-19*. [<https://phnprep.ca/resources/pregnant-individuals-stress-covid-19>]. School of Nursing, McMaster University.

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