

Resources for Promoting Mental and Physical Health during COVID-19

This document has been designed by the Department of Medical Psychology to collate information to help people cope with the COVID-19 outbreak. It provides some general tips on managing distress and contains links to other useful articles and resources.

General Tips

- **You are not alone.** Remember that the current situation is affecting everybody, and you are not alone in feeling distress. Reach out to friends and family and support one another. It can be tough to stay in your home for an indefinite period of time, but remember, it is not forever, the restrictions will be lifted, and for now, try to take each day as it comes.
- **Anticipate distress.** These are new and unprecedented times filled with uncertainty. Therefore, it's very important to anticipate that you will likely feel some level of distress during the coming weeks. Identify what might trigger low mood, anxiety or stress in yourself, for example following live COVID-19 update sites, and consider limiting or removing triggers from your life where you can.
- **Manage social media and news.** Social media and news outlets are constantly covering the outbreak with the latest figures and press releases. It's important to keep up to date with information; however, limiting your exposure to it can be helpful to prevent yourself from becoming overwhelmed.
- **Stay connected.** We need social contact for our emotional wellbeing, and it might feel difficult to fulfil that during isolation and social distancing measures. The use of technology is the best way to maintain social contact, whether that's by calling friends and family or by sending a quick text checking in. Video calling can be a big help if you are feeling disconnected, as you can see your loved ones and still do activities like have a cup of tea/coffee together.
- **Use past coping skills.** You have dealt with distress before, think about what strategies you used to cope then, and whether you could use those strategies again now. Being resilient is very important, and remember, these feelings will pass and you can get through this!

- **Consider your feelings as grief.** An article by grief expert David Kessler explains distress related to the COVID-19 situation in terms of the stages of grief. Find the full article at the link below:

<https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief>

- **Share the facts.** There is a lot of misinformation around the symptoms and advice for COVID-19. Knowing the true facts around the virus can be helpful for limiting anxiety. Below are some links to reputable sources:

Centre for Disease Control and Prevention fact sheet:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/share-facts-h.pdf>

NHS website:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19>

World Health Organisation:

<https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>

Managing low mood



With the change to your routine and the advice to stay at home widely enforced, you may find yourself feeling low. This is a normal reaction to the current situation, though it is important you take steps to look after yourself and protect your mental wellbeing.

1. If you are feeling low, a useful tactic to employ is bringing about the opposite emotion. This can be done through *undertaking any activity that brings you contentment*. Some examples include:
 - Watching comedy or a funny film.
 - Utilising any garden or outdoor space you have or going for a daily walk following government guidance and staying well away from other members of the public.
 - Cooking a nice meal or baking something.
 - Engaging in activities and hobbies which interest you.
 - Any other activity which you enjoy.
2. It's important to maintain a sense of achievement and purpose whilst staying at home, therefore its useful to try and *set some goals* for yourself each day.

They could be small tasks like doing some chores or DIY around the house, or you could take the opportunity to learn a new hobby or do a new activity you've always wanted to try, but never had time for. Achieving the goals you set for yourself can lead to a sense of fulfilment and help you feel like your day was meaningful.

3. Additionally, *reaching out to others* can be great for uplifting your mood. Call a friend or family member and talk about how you're feeling, as often voicing your emotions with someone who cares can help you feel better. Make sure to talk about things other than the outbreak too, as not everything is 'closed'.

If you feel you would benefit by talking to someone anonymously, below is a link to a list of mental health hotlines:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-health-helplines>



4. Finally, *take care of your physical wellbeing*, as this will help build your resilience to distress. The best way to do this is by sticking to your regular routine. Hence you should get up at your regular time, have meals at your regular times, include some exercise (this could be taking a walk provided you keep your distance from others, to more structured exercise), and make sure you sleep at a regular time too. Additionally, make sure you don't turn to unhealthy coping strategies such as alcohol, smoking or drugs. These can cause long term damage and have adverse effects on your mood and mental wellbeing.

Links to webpages on managing your mental wellbeing during the outbreak:

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/current-events/supporting-your-emotional-well-being-during-the-covid-19-outbreak>

<https://www.rethink.org/news-and-stories/blogs/2020/03/managing-your-mental-health-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>

<https://www.psy.ox.ac.uk/covid-19-info/covid-19-our-mental-health>



Managing anxiety

It is normal to feel anxious during this time of uncertainty, however, it is important not to let feelings of anxiousness overwhelm you and to take measures to protect your mental wellbeing.

Below is a link to the Psychology Tools guide to managing worry. This guide is excellent for explaining worrying and providing tips to manage worry during this time:

<https://www.psychologytools.com/articles/free-guide-to-living-with-worry-and-anxiety-amidst-global-uncertainty>

Additionally, use the APPLE technique to mindfully manage your thoughts as they come:



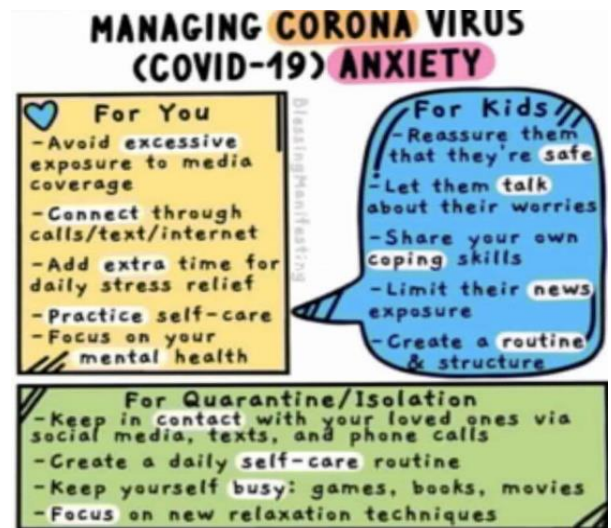
ACKNOWLEDGE - Notice and acknowledge the thought as it comes to mind.

PAUSE - Don't react as you normally do. Just pause, and breathe.

PULL BACK - Tell yourself this is just the anxiety talking, and this thought or feeling is only a thought or feeling. Don't believe everything you think - thoughts are not statements of fact.

LET GO - Let go of the thought or feeling. It will pass. You don't have to respond to them. You might imagine them floating away in a bubble or cloud.

EXPLORE - Explore the present moment, because right now, in this moment, all is well. Notice your breathing, and the sensations of breathing. Notice the ground beneath you. Look around and notice what you see, what you hear, what you can touch, what you can smell. Then, shift your focus of attention to something else - on what you need to do, on what you were doing before you noticed the worry, or do something else - mindfully, with your full attention.



Links to webpages with tips on managing anxiety during the outbreak:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

<https://www.verywellmind.com/managing-coronavirus-anxiety-4798909>

<https://news.stanford.edu/2020/03/17/tips-coping-anxiety-face-covid-19>

<https://metro.co.uk/2020/03/04/deal-coronavirus-panic-health-anxiety-12344957>

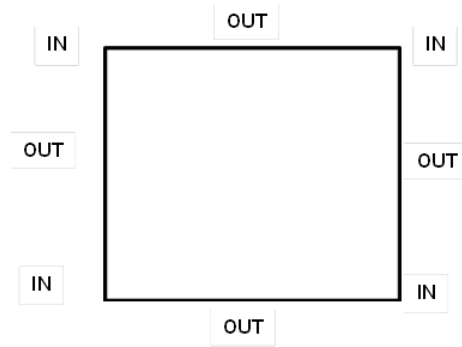
Relaxation

Practicing relaxation techniques can help you become less reactive to anxiety and stress. Try putting aside 10-30 mins for relaxation a day, whether that's following a guided script (see links below) or partaking in calming activities like drawing a hot bath.

Use quick techniques like square breathing to calm yourself in the moment:

Look at one corner and breathe IN, then breathe OUT letting your eyes follow the edge of the square. At the next corner, breathe IN, then again breathe OUT following

the edge of the square with your eyes. Keep going until you feel calmer and your breathing feels more in control again.



Apps like headspace are useful for controlling anxiety and have lots of resources for keeping calm. Try a free 10 minute guided relaxation:

<https://www.headspace.com/meditation/10-minute-meditation>

Additional guided relaxation recordings:

<https://www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk/aboutus/departments-services/pain-management/pain-management-programmes/pain-management-programme-relaxation-recordings>

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is all about bringing your awareness to the present moment and being immersed in whatever you're doing/ wherever you are, or whatever emotional/mental state you are in. Focusing your attention in this way can have many benefits such as relieving stress, improving your overall mental wellbeing, improving your sleep, and health benefits such as lowering blood pressure. Below are links to free resources if you wish to try being mindful:

Downloadable short mindfulness exercises:

<http://www.freemindfulness.org/download>

Mindfulness audio exercises (5, 11, 20 mins):

<https://www.mindful.org/audio-resources-for-mindfulness-meditation>

Link to lots of downloadable mindfulness resources such as daily mindful activity calendars:

<https://blog.calm.com/mindfulness-resources>

Advice for supporting children and young people

Children and young people will be anxious and worried during this time of uncertainty, and it is important as parents and carers to look after their mental wellbeing. Remember, children will look to you to judge how to respond, so make sure you look after yourself and limit panic around them, but equally make sure you convey your feelings and explain the coping mechanisms you use. Below are some links to useful guides on how to help children and young people cope during this time:

World Health Organisation leaflet:

https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/helping-children-cope-with-stress-print.pdf?sfvrsn=f3a063ff_2

Link to a PDF which collates lots of useful guidance from several trusted sources:

<https://emergingminds.org.uk/supporting-children-and-young-people-with-worries-and-anxiety-coronavirus/>

Contains links to lots of useful pages around understanding and managing children's behaviour during this time:

<https://childmind.org/coping-during-covid-19-resources-for-parents/>

Apps



CALM – contains guided relaxation scripts and also contains sleep tips.



Headspace – mindfulness app with guided relaxation scripts, designed to bring balance and peace across all aspects of daily life.



Relax and Rest Guided Meditations – 5, 13 or 24 minute guided relaxation scripts focusing on the breath, body and deep relaxation.



Stop, Breathe and Think – Daily mindfulness app that tailors recommended technique based on your mood.



DARE, Break free from Anxiety – app which challenges you to sit comfortably with your anxious feelings, and helps you cope with them as they arise.



Nature Sounds Relax and Sleep – app which contains various sights and sounds from nature, useful if you are self-isolating or quarantined and can't access outside spaces.

Only available on Google Play store.



Colorfy – digital colouring app which can be used as a mindful distraction technique.

Additional useful links:

World Health Organisation advice for coping with stress during this time:

https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/coping-with-stress.pdf?sfvrsn=9845bc3a_8

World Health Organisation general mental health advice:

<https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf>

Russ Harris author of “The Happiness Trap” practical steps on how to respond to the outbreak and associated negative feelings. Uses an Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) approach:

<https://www.baps.org.uk/content/uploads/2020/03/FACE-COVID-by-Russ-Harris-pdf-pdf.pdf>

Mind.org.uk advice for coping with the outbreak. Contains practical tips for planning an extended home stay, and looking after your wellbeing whilst at home:

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing>

Mentalhealth.org.uk practical tips for managing your mental health during the outbreak:

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

Tips on how to cope whilst also having a chronic illness:

<https://www.healthline.com/health/tips-for-coping-with-coronavirus-fear-while-chronically-ill>

Mental Health Crisis Support

If you need help urgently and it is an **emergency (immediate/serious/life threatening mental and/or physical health emergency)**, dial **999** for an ambulance (You can call 999 from a mobile phone even if it has no credit) or attend **A&E**. For example, if you have physically harmed yourself and need medical attention.

If you need help **urgently** but it is not an emergency you can call (self-refer) the **Central Access Point (CAP) on 0116 295 3060**. The CAP is open 24/7 so you can at anytime. The CAP will assess your needs and signpost/refer you to the most appropriate help based on your needs. They can then signpost or help you access the best support to meet your needs. This might be to get help via a new Urgent Care Hub set up during the coronavirus, a crisis team, community mental health team, or other service within mental health services or other provider.

Helplines

Call a **helpline**. The following helplines are available:



- **The Samaritans:** 116 123 (freephone) 24/7 or 08457 909090. Or email "jo@samaritans.org.uk". Additionally, the branch at 1a, Elmfield Avenue, Leicester, LE2 1RB provide a walk in service between 9:30am and 9pm 7 days a week.
- **SANE-Line:** 0300 304 7000 (4.30pm-10.30pm every day of the year)
- **CALM** (Campaign Against Living Miserably): 0800 58 58 58 (Freephone) (5pm-midnight 365 days a year). They also offer a webchat option between those hours.
- **Shout** (text service): TEXT 85258 (Freephone) 24/7.

1. Create a **Personal Safety Plan**. This is a personalised plan to support you step-by-step when you may be in a crisis, though it does require creation in advance. It may be easier to complete the plan with a trusted person such as a friend or therapist. Your safety plan may include:
 - Your warning signs and how to recognise them
 - A list of things or strategies which have helped you feel better in the past
 - The names and contact details of people or organisations you can contact during a crisis
 - Steps to make your environment safe and how to access a safe place if needed.
2. Learn how to **help yourself**. This could be through strategies you could use whilst in a crisis which would be helpful to prepare in advance. The following suggestions could be kept in a 'coping kit' alongside your personal safety plan:
 - Get yourself through the next 5 minutes, remove anything you could use to harm yourself and tell someone how you're feeling. This can help you ride out the difficult feelings and help you feel more in control.
 - Distract yourself. Focusing your senses can help ground you and your thoughts, such as thinking about what you can smell, see, hear, taste and touch. You could also engage in strategies such as holding an ice cube until it melts and noticing the coldness, tearing up something into many pieces or taking a cold shower/bath.
 - Engage in deep breathing and relaxation techniques. There are many free guided relaxation resources available, for example apps such as headspace and calm, or YouTube videos.
 - Challenge your thoughts and find reasons to live. This is a great strategy to use in a crisis to try and ground yourself. You could create a comfort box which contains memories and items which are meaningful to you, such as positive quotes or photographs or letters and notes to yourself. You could make plans to do something you might enjoy in the near future, or simply make a note of things you are looking forward to, or are grateful for, such as seeing the next episode of a TV show or eating a favourite meal. Most importantly, remember to be kind to yourself, talk to yourself like you would to a good friend, and do what you need to do to remind yourself that you will get through this.

3. Download the '**Stay Alive**' app - which has dedicated information about services available in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. It also guides people through creating a personal safety plan and contains lots of useful tools and resources to help you stay safe.

Useful links:

- The get self help website has tips for coping in a crisis.
<https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/suicidal.htm>
- Self-Referral form for psychological therapies on the NHS.
<https://beta.nhs.uk/find-a-psychological-therapies-service/>
- Services in your area tool which you can use to find local services such as support groups.
<https://www.rethink.org/help-in-your-area/about-services-and-groups/>
- Mood self-assessment questionnaire used by GP's with links to useful resources based on your answers.
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mood-self-assessment/>