



Looking after your  
**Mental Health**  
during COVID-19



Shropshire  
Council

# Looking after your **Mental Health** during COVID-19

V1.2

The coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak may cause you to feel anxious, stressed, worried, sad, helpless, overwhelmed, confused or angry. It's important to remember it is OK to feel this way and that everyone reacts differently to different events.

This document provides a summary of helpful resources and links to a range of practical tips, advice and support to help us through uncertain times. The resources are categorised under different sections and can be quickly identified on the following page links.

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## Local Immediate Support

*...for anyone needing a confidential listening ear or may be experiencing a mental health crisis*

- 1. Shropshire MIND:** Call 01743 368647 or email: [manager.shropshiremind@gmail.com](mailto:manager.shropshiremind@gmail.com)
  - Wide range of support and services for people and their families affected by mental and emotional distress
  - Calm Café accessible by appointment on the above number in the evening for anyone needing to talk or at imminent risk of a mental health crisis who need a safe environment to receive support (upstairs at Shropshire MIND, Shrewsbury 6-10pm on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday)
  - Shropshire Sanctuary open overnight for anyone with a mental health crisis – please note access is by referral only
- 2. Samaritans:** Call 116 123
  - Confidential listening and a safe place to talk about whatever is getting to you
  - If you are feeling distressed or are concerned about someone else
- 3. Shout! Crisis text line:** Text 85258
  - A free 24/7 text service for anyone worried about their mental health available at any time, any place and need immediate help
- 4. Young Minds Parents Hotline:** 0808 8025544 (9.30am – 4.00pm)  
Free, confidential online and telephone support including information and advice to any adult worried about the emotional problems, behaviour or mental health of a child or young person up to the age of 25.
- 5. Coronavirus (COVID-19) Shropshire Council Helpline** for non-health related queries. Open 8am to 6pm weekdays, 9am to 1pm Saturdays: Call 0345 678 9028.
  - For all health related queries please contact NHS 111 online service : <https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19>
- 6. Kooth:** free safe and anonymous online support for young people: [www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com)
- 7. Childline:** A listening and support emotional health and wellbeing service for children and young people under 25: Call 0800 1111.

## Online Resources for managing wellbeing during the Coronavirus pandemic

*A range of helpful guidance providing ideas on what you can be doing to keep mentally healthy during the pandemic and whilst staying at home.*

### 1. **COVID-19: guidance for the public on mental health and wellbeing**

[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing?utm\\_source=f4fe9d0e-2e25-4f75-acc1-64ceb6d0f3a4&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm\\_content=immediate](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing?utm_source=f4fe9d0e-2e25-4f75-acc1-64ceb6d0f3a4&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate)

### 2. **Every Mind Matters:** <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>

- Updated with tips and advice on Mental wellbeing while staying at home  
Coronavirus anxiety tips
- Understanding mental health and tips to manage wellbeing

### 3. **CALM** (Campaign Against Living Miserably) – Putting the social into social distancing:

[https://www.thecalmzone.net/2020/03/putting-the-social-into-social-distancing/?utm\\_source=CALM+Subscribers&utm\\_campaign=e1c9b7f526-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2020\\_03\\_19\\_11\\_37&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_6964bb7939-e1c9b7f526-242564545](https://www.thecalmzone.net/2020/03/putting-the-social-into-social-distancing/?utm_source=CALM+Subscribers&utm_campaign=e1c9b7f526-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_03_19_11_37&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_6964bb7939-e1c9b7f526-242564545)

- Tips on how to keep socially connected whilst avoiding physical contact with others (incl online video games, Netflix party, BBC Culture in Quarantine, online gigs/clubs etc)
- Helpline (0800 585858) and webchat <https://www.thecalmzone.net/help/webchat> are open everyday from 5pm to midnight to give support to anyone who needs it.

### 4. **MIND – Coronavirus and your wellbeing:**

- A range of helpful resources for planning staying indoors, maintaining health through nutrition, deciding a routine, keeping active and finding ways to spend your time

### 5. **British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) - Coronavirus anxiety: how to cope if you're feeling anxious about the outbreak:** <https://www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/2020/28-february-coronavirus-anxiety-how-to-cope-if-you-re-feeling-anxious-about-the-outbreak/>

- Advice from counsellors about managing anxiety related to Coronavirus

### 6. **Future Learn:**

[https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/collections/keeping-busy-in-isolation?utm\\_campaign=fl\\_march\\_2020&utm\\_medium=futurelearn\\_organic\\_email&utm\\_source=newsletter\\_broadcast&utm\\_term=200325\\_GNL\\_\\_0030\\_COVID&utm\\_content=copy](https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/collections/keeping-busy-in-isolation?utm_campaign=fl_march_2020&utm_medium=futurelearn_organic_email&utm_source=newsletter_broadcast&utm_term=200325_GNL__0030_COVID&utm_content=copy)

- Courses for keeping busy during social distancing and isolation
- These courses will keep your mind active, inspire you to stay busy and broaden your mind and skill set whilst isolating at home

7. **Carers UK – Guidance for Carers:** <https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/health/looking-after-your-health/coronavirus-covid-19>
  - Includes FAQs and a Wellbeing Action Plan with tailored tips on keeping a positive frame of mind
8. **Recovery College – Coping during the pandemic (online learning):** <https://lms.recoverycollegeonline.co.uk/course/view.php?id=373#section-1>
  - A free online information learning course which provides easy to understand summaries of current guidance and links to the most up to date advice, as well as exploring how you might be feeling and what you can be doing to support your mental health at this time
  - The course also provides tips on how to manage a period of self-isolation and support other people you know (including children & young people)

## Resources for Parents, Carers and Services working with young people

*To provide guidance on managing stress and anxiety in children and young people*

1. **Anna Freud - Supporting schools & colleges: A guide to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of pupils and students during periods of disruption:**
  - Videos and FAQs: <https://www.annafreud.org/what-we-do/anna-freud-learning-network/coronavirus/>
  - PDF Guide: <https://www.annafreud.org/media/11160/supporting-schools-and-colleges.pdf>
2. **WHO – Helping children cope with stress during the COVID-19 outbreak:** [https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/helping-children-cope-with-stress-print.pdf?sfvrsn=f3a063ff\\_2](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/helping-children-cope-with-stress-print.pdf?sfvrsn=f3a063ff_2)
3. **Place2Be: Coronavirus: Helpful information to answer questions from children:** <https://www.place2be.org.uk/about-us/news-and-blogs/2020/march/coronavirus-information-for-children/>
  - Tips and useful resources to support your child and yourself
4. **British Psychological Society – advice to schools parents and carers to help children through the uncertainty of school closures:** <https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/bps-offers-advice-schools-parents-and-carers-help-children-through-uncertainty>
  - Tips for school, parents and carers
5. **Public Health England – Advice on the coronavirus for places of education (quick read version):** [www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/2020-03/V4%20Coronavirus%20advice%20for%20schools%20poster%2020302%20EDU15.0.4%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/2020-03/V4%20Coronavirus%20advice%20for%20schools%20poster%2020302%20EDU15.0.4%20(2).pdf)
6. **e-Bug: fun games and teaching resources about microbes, antibiotics and the importance of hand washing (for both teachers and students):** <https://www.e-bug.eu/>

## Resources aimed at Children & Young People to keep mentally well

1. **Covibook:** <https://www.mindheart.co/descargables>
  - An interactive resource designed to support and reassure children aged 7 and under, designed to help children explain and draw the emotions that they might be experiencing during the pandemic
2. **Young Minds – What to do if you're anxious about coronavirus:** <https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-you-re-anxious-about-coronavirus/>
  - Advice aimed at younger people including not overexpose yourself to the news, try and stick to normal routine, find things that help you feel keep calm and looking after your mental health while self-isolating

## Physical Health and mobility

With schools and leisure facilities closed and many of us spending more time at home, it is more important than ever that we keep moving and stay healthy and positive. The resources below can help us with exercise which in turn can make us feel happier, more energised and more optimistic.

1. **Cosmic Kids Yoga Youtube video:** <https://www.youtube.com/user/CosmicKidsYoga>
  - Yoga, mindfulness and relaxation designed specifically for kids aged 3+, used in schools and homes all over the world
2. **Joe Wicks – P.E. with Joe, Youtube Video:** <https://www.thebodycoach.com/blog/pe-with-joe-1254.html>
  - Join Joe Wicks the bodycoach every day for a home workout aimed at kids
  - Monday to Friday 9am on Youtube The Body Coach TV
3. **Les Mills on Demand At Home Workouts (free resource):** <https://watch.lesmillsondemand.com/at-home-workouts>
  - Temporary free site with over 100 workouts to do at home to keep fit and healthy while gym and exercise facilities are closed
  - Includes a range of video classes from mindfulness, dance fitness, martial arts inspired bodycombat and high intensity training for improving strength and fitness

**4. Energize – Movement, learning, active blasts and wellbeing resources:**

<https://www.energizestw.org.uk/energize-resources>

- Links to a wide range of free resources which can be used at home to improve our physical and mental wellbeing
- In addition to helping families with active learning, there are a range of website with information which everyone can benefit from

**5. AOC Sport – Resources to keep active during the coronavirus:**

<https://www.aocsport.co.uk/news-cs/resources-to-keep-active-during-the-coronavirus/>

- Links to organisations, including some colleges who have collated free online content suitable for students and staff while at home

## Additional helpful documents providing Advice and Tips

**Self-isolation Activities list – see page 9**

**Children’s 14 day Coronavirus challenge, list for parents and teaching staff – see page 11**

**Tips for managing Coronavirus anxiety – see page 13**

## Employment and Money Worries

*Financial pressures can have a significant negative impact on our mental health and can be amplified even more when there is economic uncertainty. The following resources provide some useful information for further advice and keeping yourself financially safe.*

**1. Citizens Advice - Coronavirus - what it means for you – Paying your bills:**

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/health/coronavirus-what-it-means-for-you/>

- Latest guidance and advice on paying bills, scams, going to work, taking children to school
- Advice on what to do if off work sick or told to stay at home because of Coronavirus if you’re employed, self-employed or claiming benefits
- Advice if you can’t pay your rent

**2. The Money Advice Service - Coronavirus – what it means for you and what you’re entitled to: <https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/articles/coronavirus-what-it-means-for-you>**

- Information on your rights to sick pay, benefits (including what you can claim if you’re self-employed or not entitled to Statutory Sick Pay)

**3. Step Change – Debt and Coronavirus:**

<https://www.stepchange.org/debt-info/coronavirus-affecting-finances.aspx>

- Advice on coronavirus and your finances
- Advice if you have an upcoming court hearing
- Advice if you're worried about school closures affecting your finances

**4. England Illegal Money Lending Team - Stop Loan Sharks: Helpline on 0300 555 2222 or website at [www.stoploansharks.co.uk](http://www.stoploansharks.co.uk)**

- Ensuring that illegal money lenders (loan sharks) do not take advantage and profit from other people's hardship
- Contact if you are being harassed or threatened by an illegal money lender
- Victims, friends, family members and the wider community are encouraged to come forward if they suspect someone is suffering at the hands of loan sharks

**5. Shropshire Larder: support with accessing free or low cost food for those on a low budget [www.shropshirelarder.org.uk/](http://www.shropshirelarder.org.uk/)**

**6. Coronavirus advice for employers and employees:**

[https://www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus?utm\\_source=HW+Chamber+of+Commerce+Subscriber+Master++%28DO+NOT+DELETE%29&utm\\_campaign=a14be303aa-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2020\\_03\\_02\\_04\\_03\\_COPY\\_02&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_5a433ef42a-a14be303aa-152634413](https://www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus?utm_source=HW+Chamber+of+Commerce+Subscriber+Master++%28DO+NOT+DELETE%29&utm_campaign=a14be303aa-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_03_02_04_03_COPY_02&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_5a433ef42a-a14be303aa-152634413)





## Self-Isolation Activities List

- Clear out your wardrobe or cupboards
- Give yourself a manicure/pedicure
- Read/write a book
- Do a crossword/Sudoku/word search/colouring in
- Binge watch a must-see boxset/film series or old feel good movie
- Make a photo album of phone photos - websites/apps like Snapfish and Freeprint will send you up to 50 photos for free (you just pay for postage)
- Gardening - mow the lawn, plant some flowers
- Start a blog
- Baking
- Learn a new recipe
- Learn how to knit/crochet
- Have a dance
- Exercise - home workouts, YouTube videos (Bodycoach TV), yoga
- Make a travel bucket list
- Learn a language - websites/apps like Duolingo and Babbel offer some languages for free
- Do some DIY - redecorate a room, fix something
- Call a friend or family member- video calls (Skype, Whatsapp, Facetime)
- Keep social online with free video apps;
  - Houseparty (includes integrated games) - <https://get.houseparty.com/Rcc3bfto44>
  - Zoom (allows upto 100 people on a call) - <https://zoom.us/download>
- Play a game - card games, board games, computer games or design your own!
- Learn to play an instrument
  - Bird watch, create a bird feeder [www.rspb.org.uk/fun-and-learning/for-kids/games-and-activities/activities/make-a-recycled-bird-feeder](http://www.rspb.org.uk/fun-and-learning/for-kids/games-and-activities/activities/make-a-recycled-bird-feeder)
- Make jams or preserve
- Have a home picnic
- Learn to give yourself/someone else a massage
- Have a digital detox-clear you email inbox, delete old files, update your passwords
- Sort through paperwork
- Research a topic of interest

- Do a jigsaw puzzle
- Sort through photos on your phone
- Learn a magic trick
- Listen to a podcast, radio show or audiobook- websites/apps like [www.digitalbook.io](http://www.digitalbook.io) and <https://librivox.org> have free public domain audio books
- Arts and crafts [www.craftideas.info/](http://www.craftideas.info/)
- Enter a competition
- Creating a home spa- bubble bath, face masks, foot spa [www.realbuzz.com/articles-interests/health/article/10-at-home-spa-treatments](http://www.realbuzz.com/articles-interests/health/article/10-at-home-spa-treatments)
- Listen to music
- Sign up to a free online class/course- try places like [www.reed.co.uk/courses/free](http://www.reed.co.uk/courses/free) and <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses>
- Create a time capsule
- Design a magazine or newspaper
- Online shopping
- Spending time with pets- teach them a new trick?
- Try a science experiment [www.iflscience.com/chemistry/unfinished-20-fun-science-experiments-you-can-do-home/](http://www.iflscience.com/chemistry/unfinished-20-fun-science-experiments-you-can-do-home/)
- Look through old photographs/home movies
- Write a letter to a family member/friend that you can send once your well
- Take a virtual tour of a museum [www.travelandleisure.com/attractions/museums-galleries/museums-with-virtual-tours](http://www.travelandleisure.com/attractions/museums-galleries/museums-with-virtual-tours)
- Find things to donate to charity (once it's safe to visit)
- Create your own cinema - make tickets, popcorn, lay down a rug
- Catch up with life admin - check insurance quotes, change your energy provider



## Children's 14 day Coronavirus challenge

# 14 DAY CHALLENGE

### Parents and Teaching Staff

We have put together 14 days of activities for your children. Each activity is hyperlinked to a resource on the ELSA Support website. Basically this means if you click the BLUE TITLE of each activity it will take you to a page on our website. You can download and print the activity for your children.

This list of ideas has been asked for by school staff in case of self isolation due to the current virus. The activities will help your children's wellbeing at this difficult time and hopefully help to keep them occupied in a proactive and beneficial way.

These activities could also be used during holidays.

You can do them in any order or miss days out. It doesn't really matter. It is purely there for you to use if you need to.

School staff you may choose to print out some or all of the activities for the children to take home. You also have permission to email the pdf of this file to parents if you want to. You may also host this file on your websites.

♡♡Debbie♡♡

## ELSA SUPPORT 14 day Home Challenge

Click the LINK to take you to a resource which you can download and print.

### Happy tab Booklet

Look at the five things you can do each day to help you feel happier. Developing relationships with others can be done by telephone or video chat. It could also be done by writing a letter or by making a card for someone.

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/international-day-of-happiness/>

### Jar of Courage

Make a jar of courage with help from an adult. Put the labels on your jar and fill it up with positive quotes. Take one out each day and read it. Believe it.

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/jar-of-courage-childrens-mental-health-week-3rd-to-8th-february/>

### Hug in a Mug

Give yourself a hug in a mug. Decorate the mug and add all the things that make you feel happy in the pieces of marshmallow.

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/mug-full-of-happiness/>

### Star Breathing

Learn how to do star breathing so that you feel nice and calm when you feel either anxious, angry or upset. I bet you could draw your own star too. See if you can copy the poster and draw your own.

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/breathing-techniques/>

### Self-Esteem Bookmark

Colour your own self-esteem bookmark and read it every day to remind yourself how amazing you are. You can use it when you read your book. You can do lots of reading at this time.

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/self-esteem-bookmarks/>

### Mindful Flip Flop

Colour your own self-esteem bookmark and read it every day to remind yourself how amazing you are. You can use it when you read your book. You can do lots of reading at this time.

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/mindful-flip-flop/>

## Happiness Challenge

There are five days worth of activities here but I bet you could do them all in a day if you set your mind to it. Lots of lovely happiness fun.

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/elsa-support-5-day-happiness-challenge/>

## Mandala Wishes

Today you need to draw your picture in the centre of the mandala and then think about your wishes. Write them in the petals and then do lots of lovely mindful colouring.

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/mandala-wishes/>

## Mindful Rainbow Walk

You might only be able to go into your garden if you have one, but you could do this around your house and by looking through your windows. What do you notice?

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/mindfulness-rainbow-walk/>

## A-Z of Self-Care

What can you do to look after yourself? Read through the poster and then make your own A-Z of self-care.

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/a-to-z-of-self-care/>

## Doodle a day

Doodling is relaxing. Try filling this all in today. What creative doodles can you do?

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/doodle-a-day/>

## 20 Faces

Can you fill in all faces with different expressions? Think about all the emotion words you know and try and put a face to each one.

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/20-faces/>

## Mindful Challenge

There are five days of activities here, but I bet you can do them all in a day if you set your mind to it. Have a lovely mindful time!

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/elsa-support-mindfulness-challenge/>



## My Perfect Day

What would your perfect day look like? Fill in this comic strip with all the things that would make it just perfect.

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/my-perfect-day/>

## Coronavirus Anxiety

As the coronavirus spreads, more and more people are becoming anxious about what it might mean for themselves and their loved ones. It's completely understandable (and normal!) to feel anxious about this emerging health crisis. As part of efforts to take best care of body and mind, here are some tips that might **help in tolerating these uncertain times.**



When stressed, our brains want us to be able to predict and consider the worst case scenarios to help us prepare and protect ourselves. This is great when there is a way of problem solving the situation – not so great when there isn't. Our brains are predisposed to focus on threat. We will forget the “everyday” and bring full attention to things which are scary, without taking time to really think about the facts.

For example, we might think nothing of getting in our cars everyday but be scared of spiders, even though the evidence suggests we are more likely to be at risk in a car than from a spider.

Furthermore, as a species we are not very good at tolerating uncertainty, something that in the current climate we might need to allow! Our minds want us to have explanations so when we can't find them our brains will fill in the gaps, and if anxiety has any say these explanations will be usually based on our biggest fears.

**Anxiety can snowball;** we start with one worry and before we know where we are it's grown and grown and we're now headed for a full on catastrophe (the “what if”... “but then what if...” scenario), even when the likelihood of each possible thing coming true may be minimal. Anxious thoughts get in the way of our minds taking in what we need to know and deciphering fact from fiction.

The uncertainty of the coronavirus is scary. And scary gets our attention! However, it might help to try to stay grounded and get the facts instead of allowing our minds to make up the information for us. **Try to find a source of information which is reliable.** Snippets of information from social media may represent one person's worry thoughts, rather than the actual risk/facts. **Make sure you are informed but not overloaded – consider limiting your exposure to information.** For example, by restricting where you go to find information to reputable sources (such as the NHS, Government sites, World Health Organisation), or by setting boundaries around how much time you will allow yourself to read/listen to the news.

Now we know thoughts can be catastrophic, uncontained, and can snowball, **when you notice your mind back on the topic of coronavirus try to step back. Labelling thoughts as thoughts can help**, for example instead of “I have coronavirus and I could die”, try to rephrase this “I recognise I am having the thought that I have coronavirus and I could die”. Emphasising the difference between what is reality and what is a thought can help gain perspective. We can’t stop ourselves from worrying (the example that if you are asked not to think about a penguin on ice skates, let’s notice where your mind goes!), but we can train our brains to focus on something else. Make time for worry, but also **put in boundaries with how much mental space you will allow coronavirus to take**. Think about what is in your control and what is not. Worrying about coronavirus will not guarantee a better outcome, so to help you in the moment schedule some coronavirus free time where you can put your attention onto something else.



**Take steps to minimise coronavirus related risk.** The advice that resonated for me was to assume you are a carrier and to put reasonable and appropriate precautions in place to prevent the risk to others. Act in a way which could minimise the risk of infection to others, rather than acting from a place of avoidance or fear of contamination yourself. Coronaviruses are spread through everyday contact, through touch, a cough, or a sneeze. If you’re sick, stay home. If you’re not sick, stay away from close contact with a person who is and engage in healthy habits when it comes to cleanliness. **Listen to the advice from the medical professionals around how to practice good self-care and reduce risk of infection.**



**Stay connected.** We are always much better at offering advice and reassurance when it’s someone else going through a tricky time – remember our loved ones can do the same for us! They could provide a space to have your thoughts and feelings normalised and offer you some distraction or reassurance. Particularly as more and more of us are opting to self-isolate, remaining in contact with others will be even more important. You might need to get creative! Think about substitutes for face-to-face contact if you believe yourself to be a risk. If you are not able to speak with your friends or family, think about how to connect with those further afield. Suggestions could include writing a letter to a distant loved one, finding a new online group for your local community, or finding an online forum about a hobby or interest that you have.



**Use your past coping skills.** Think about what has helped you in the past when you have felt stressed or overwhelmed. It could be yoga, relaxation, mindfulness, trying a new recipe, talking with a friend, distracting yourself with a puzzle, making time for self-soothing (taking a nice bath for example)... the list is endless! What helps will be different from person to person – **use what works for you.**

**Consider the 5 steps to mental wellbeing.** The more you nurture your mental health, the more resilient to anxiety and stress you will enable yourself to be. Strategies for mental wellbeing include: staying connected with other people; be physically active; learn new skills; give to others; pay attention to the present moment. You might need to adapt some of these if you are self-isolating or unable to participate with your usual activities. Some ideas include: trying a new exercise regime at home; making time for a long phone call to a friend; finding a new hobby; practising a mindfulness exercise. There are some great resources online that can help with activities during periods of self-isolation, why not try [www.dothinkshare.com](http://www.dothinkshare.com) or check out our list of self-isolation activities.



TALK & LISTEN,  
BE THERE,  
FEEL CONNECTED



DO WHAT YOU CAN,  
ENJOY WHAT YOU DO,  
MOVE YOUR MOOD



REMEMBER  
THE SIMPLE  
THINGS THAT  
GIVE YOU JOY



EMBRACE NEW  
EXPERIENCES,  
SEE OPPORTUNITIES,  
SURPRISE YOURSELF



Your time,  
your words,  
your presence

Information from the media is changing day by day. This can make times feel uncertain and the future unpredictable. Thinking too far ahead can feed those “what if..” thoughts. **Breaking your day into chunks could help you to step back.** Instead of thinking about the whole day, think about the “now and next”. What are you doing in this moment, and what do you plan to do in the next. Think in terms of the present and immediate future. You’ll deal with anything that comes up as you need to, but contemplating something that hasn’t happened yet can be a playground for anxious thoughts.



# Information for GPs and other primary care workers on supporting the mental health of children and young people during the COVID-19 outbreak

*Dr Nihara Krause, Consultant Clinical Psychologist and CEO of stem4. March 2020*

This briefing note for GPs and allied health professionals, together with the attached handouts for children, young people and their families summarises key mental health and psychosocial support considerations in relation to the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak.

## **Context**

COVID-19 is a new RNA virus from the coronavirus family. The context of COVID-19 is constantly evolving, making it difficult for health professionals to give consistently clear advice. In any pandemic, it is common for anyone to experience increased stress and worry, however, children and young people can be vulnerable to further increased risk and worry based on their cognitive maturity, real and perceived consequences, co-existence of mental and physical health problems and access to uncensored information online. In addition, the emotional dysregulation that often exists in adolescence with intense ups and downs, further makes it difficult to cope.

Some potential fears young people have include:

- Fear of the illness effects of the virus
- Fear of the virus affecting loved ones
- Fear of the worst/death
- Fear of social restrictions they may have to comply with
- Fear of social exclusion
- Being stigmatised for passing on the illness
- Lack of choice over decisions that directly affect them
- Feeling bored and unoccupied
- Missing out on important or looked forward to events

Their stress and worry may be shown in a number of different ways including:

- Seeking constant reassurance – online, from parents, from GPs and other health professionals
- Increased anxiety or low mood
- Panic attacks, prompted by being in situations where they feel at risk
- Increased irritability and anger
- Indifference, lack of motivation, procrastination
- Increase in risk taking behaviour
- Avoidance of activities and social situations



For those with co-existing mental health conditions such as anxiety disorders and depression, the impact is magnified.

## **Health Professionals' Response to Mental Health Issues**

The response of health professionals must be tailored to each individual and grounded in understanding the person and their context. Assessment of pre-existing and ongoing issues, comorbid conditions and an evaluation of existing social support will need to be taken into consideration. In addition, the developmental level of the child or young person needs careful consideration. It is also important to adjust recommended prevention and treatment strategies to suit the individual. For example, social distancing and self-isolation is not a favoured behaviour of young people and is unlikely to be followed unless anxiety over the consequences of doing this is allayed (please see handout for teens on dealing with self-distancing and social isolation). On the other hand, young people who experience social anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) or depression may use social distancing and/or social isolation as a coping strategy, so it is a fine balance in terms of encouraging the use of this behaviour to deal with the containment of an infectious disease versus promoting avoidance behaviour that enhances a mental ill health problem. Similarly, for those young people who have contamination fears associated with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), handwashing can take a significance that is out of proportion with what is needed for good hygiene.

Some actions that can be taken include:

- A brief assessment of presenting issues, needs and available resources
- Promote self-care strategies as suitable and reinforce with family/carers (see additional handouts for teens on dealing with Coronavirus Anxiety and Parent Guidance on dealing with
- Coronavirus Anxiety in children and young people. Clear Fear app helps children and young people manage symptoms of anxiety using a CBT approach; Calm Harm app provides a range of strategies to regulate emotions and manage the urge to self-harm and Combined Minds app help parents and carers support young people who are anxious)
- Encourage identifying and challenging negative coping strategies (for example compulsive handwashing) and address fear and stigma.
- Provide accurate information on COVID-19 which includes possible symptoms, signposting to 111, and simple steps to manage the condition at home.
- Discuss how parents/carers can carry out watchful waiting and when and how to connect remotely with health professionals
- Referrals pathways for those young people presenting with diagnoseable mental health conditions should be activated
- Risk assess and discuss a monitoring strategy

Key documents:

England: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/>

Scottish information: <https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/a-to-z-of-topics/wuhan-novel-coronavirus/>

Public Health Wales: <https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/>

Northern Ireland: <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/news/covid-19-coronavirus>

Resources:

<https://stem4.org.uk/>

Mobile Phone apps:

[www.clearfear.co.uk](http://www.clearfear.co.uk)

[www.calmharm.co.uk](http://www.calmharm.co.uk)

[www.combinedminds.co.uk](http://www.combinedminds.co.uk)

## Advice for young people who have to social distance or self-isolate due to COVID-19

*Tips by stem4 CEO Dr Nihara Krause, Consultant Clinical Psychologist*

Social distancing and/or self-isolating is an effective way to stop the spread of the Coronavirus infection and to protect older adults and those who have poor health. However, given the importance of belonging, social distancing is probably one of the hardest behaviours for young people to carry out. Dr Nihara Krause (CEO of teenage mental health charity stem4), encourages the use of the following tips for young people in order to maintain positive mental health amidst self isolation:

- View social distancing as 'contact distancing' rather than a distance from friendships. So, whilst you reduce contact to pass on an infection, boost your friendships by planning some on-line meetings with family members or a friend. Make these times special.
- FOMO? Feeling left out and actually being left out are two different things. Challenge why you perceive yourself to be left out, for example, is it related to attributing something negative to yourself such as a belief that 'no one likes me'? Remind yourself of the fact that everyone has been asked not to connect. This will help you to change your thinking to something more positive.
- Whilst social distancing and loneliness are not the same, the feelings that are generated may be experienced in the same way. Counter this by thinking of ways to reach out and initiate a conversation with someone every day.

## How parents can manage their teenager's mental health whilst maintaining their own during the COVID-19 outbreak

*Tips by stem4 CEO Dr Nihara Krause, Consultant Clinical Psychologist*

Feeling safe is essential in the effective management of anxiety. The current, everchanging global health situation can therefore contribute to increasing anxiety symptoms in all of the family. The teen years in particular, need special focus since adolescence can be a time when emotions are experienced intensely. Dr Nihara Krause encourages the use of the following tips for parents and carers amidst the pandemic:

- Explain the nature of anxiety to your teen. Anxiety is an essential emotion we all feel in response to threat. It will bring about a response which affects all parts of our body, our thinking and our behaviour. When anxiety is managed it can be helpful - allowing us to harness it's protective nature to spur us into positive health management.
- Help them to develop positive self-care behaviours to maintain health and hygiene. This will build their confidence in their ability to protect themselves and learn to take responsible action.
- Help them to challenge negative thoughts that may make them overestimate dangers, leading to difficulties such as over thinking and over worrying. This means providing them with facts to minimise fear. Make sure these facts are from a trusted, scientific source.
- Help them regulate the amount of information they have access to through the news, social media and online. Misinformation spreads fast and an 'infodemic' is as unhealthy to the mind as a pandemic may be to a nation.
- Practicing social distancing does not come easily to teenagers. Risking becoming what may be perceived as an 'outcast' is probably one of the biggest punishments a teen may feel. Provide a benefit to social distancing such as, for example, being able to do a task they highly value. This will provide an incentive to follow through with distancing rather than make it a punishment to try and avoid.

## How teens can manage anxiety over the Coronavirus outbreak

*Tips by stem4 CEO Dr Nihara Krause, Consultant Clinical Psychologist*

Many teenagers are experiencing anxiety about getting and passing on the Coronavirus. Anxiety is an uncomfortable emotion but it can also be helpful in making sure we take steps to protect ourselves. Rather than focussing on the discomfort created by experiencing anxiety, Dr Nihara Krause encourages young people to use its warning function to take some of the steps below:

- Focus on the facts rather than on any 'catastrophic' thoughts you may have. The health risk of Coronavirus is very low for most teens. Understand that you can effectively reduce the risk of passing it on to loved ones by washing your hands with soap and water.
- Aim for a balance in safety behaviours. Though it is not effective to ignore activities (such as handwashing), over doing anything traps you in a negative spiral.
- Aim to get adequate rest. This might be by listening to your favourite playlist, playing with a pet or just chilling with someone you like. Sleep is important for maintaining positive mental health.
- Use the 'Take Five' technique when you feel physical symptoms of anxiety, such as a racing heart. Stretch out your hand and trace your thumb with a finger from the other hand. Breathe in as you move upwards and breathe out as you move downwards on the inner side of your thumb. Repeat for each finger.

## Dr Krause's Tips for Teens To Manage Anxiety Surrounding the Coronavirus Outbreak



Minimise what you watch and read on the news & social media. Being on the receiving end of repeated news can be overwhelming.



You can effectively reduce the risk of passing on an infection by washing your hands with soap and water.



Aim for a balance in safety behaviours. Though it is not effective to ignore activities (like handwashing), over doing anything traps you in a negative spiral.



Aim to get adequate rest. Sleep is important for maintaining positive mental health.



Make a list of fun indoor plans, ensuring some of them include things you can do on your own - in case you need to self distance.



Eat well and regularly. We use more energy when we are anxious.



Remember, parents get anxious too but that doesn't mean the world is unsafe – it just means that they may need to read and apply some of these tips too!



'Take Five' to manage the physical symptoms of anxiety. Stretch out your hand and trace your thumb with a finger from the other hand. Breathe in as you move upwards and out as you move downwards. Repeat for each finger.



Focus on the facts rather than on any 'catastrophic' thoughts you may have. The health risk of Coronavirus is very low for most teens.