

Coping & Wellbeing During Covid-19: A Guide for Staff

Understanding Psychological Responses

Everyone will be affected in some way by this pandemic. The experience will be different for each individual and may change from day to day and across weeks as people adapt to changing circumstances. It is completely normal for different people to respond differently, and it is okay for people not to feel okay. Reactions that people might experience include:

- Increased tiredness: due to the mental workload and additional stress and anxiety associated with Covid-19 and adapting to a changed situation.
- Feelings associated with loss (of routine, of important planned activities, or due to a bereavement): anger, sadness, low mood, shock, denial, numbness and moving between different emotions.
- Emotional effects of being in quarantine, which might include boredom, depression, exhaustion, avoidance, detachment from others, anxiety, irritability, insomnia, confusion, anger and helplessness.
- Job stress related to compromised ability to do the job, lack of control over work, reduced concentration, and blurred boundaries between home and work.
- Post-traumatic stress responses as a result of exposure to the news, actual experienced events, or feelings of threat: this may be noticed as changes in cognition, mood, arousal and reactivity; avoidance of certain situations; and intrusion of thoughts, images or memories.
- Positive effects such as renewed commitment to work, personal and professional growth, increased voluntary efforts, a sense of meaning and life and feelings of gratitude, strength, hope and love.

Healthy habits

There are daily supports you can put in place which will help to protect against some of the negative psychological impacts of the pandemic:

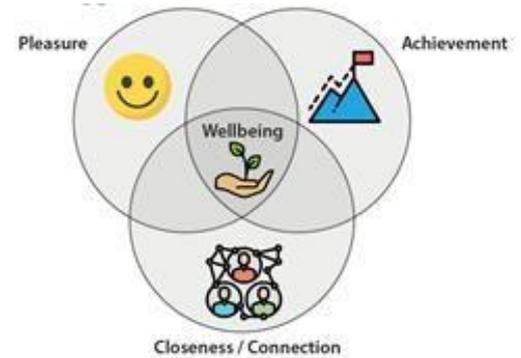
- Build structure into your day to maintain some routine, this could include a transition routine between home and work tasks.
- Aim to keep regular sleep and wake times and take other steps to maintain good sleep hygiene (<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/sleep-hygiene>).
- Allow yourself breaks in between work tasks.
- Maintain healthy food, drink and exercise goals.
- Reduce your exposure to the news, especially if this is something that causes anxiety: limit it to one or two times a day, at times when you are less likely to ruminate on information.
- Accept that things are out of your control and that they will not last forever. Focus on what you can control.
- Practice self-acceptance and have realistic expectations and standards for yourself – you can only be ‘good enough’.



Helpful Ways of Coping

Maintain balance in your life

Wellbeing comes from living a life with a balance of activities that give you feelings of pleasure, achievement, and closeness. Humans are social animals – we need connections to thrive and flourish. We would recommend trying to do at least some activities that are social and involve other people.



Five Ways to Wellbeing

The following are evidence-based strategies identified to support wellbeing¹:

1. Connect: Find virtual ways to spend time with family, friends and colleagues.
2. Be Active: Plan daily exercise outside or using online videos or other indoor exercise options.
3. Take Notice: Practise being mindful of your own body and the environment around you.
4. Learn: If you have extra time, use this to try something new or focus learning on your role (e.g. new technology, ways of teaching) or wellbeing.
5. Give: This could include practical support as well as offering encouragement, time and expressions of gratitude to others.

See <https://www.justtalkherts.org/media/documents/resilience-at-home-guide.pdf> for a checklist resource to help you incorporate five ways related activities into your days.

PERMA

A meta-analysis of research into coping identified 5 styles of coping and encouraged people to be aware of their dominant style but also explore other options for coping:

Positive emotion: spend time on healthy experiences and focus on positive things

Engagement: become immersed in worthwhile goals

Relationships: connect positively with others

Meaning: act with purpose

Accomplishment: achieve goals and manage setbacks

Psychological First Aid

Psychological First Aid² is an evidence-informed approach which has identified key features that are helpful for traumatic situations:

- Increase your sense of **safety**
- Stay **connected**
- Cultivate **calmness**
- Improve your sense of **control**
- Remain **hopeful**

¹ <https://www.mindkit.org.uk/5-ways-to-wellbeing/>

² <https://www.nctsn.org/treatments-and-practices/psychological-first-aid-and-skills-for-psychological-recovery>

Other coping resources

The *Mind* website provides useful information about how to cope with anxiety and self-isolation: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/> and <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-healthproblems/anxiety-and-panic-attacks/self-care-for-anxiety/>.

The Anna Freud Centre has created a webpage with lots of examples of ways to manage feelings that people can use to get ideas: <https://www.annafreud.org/selfcare/>.

A menu of self-care activities can also be found [here](#)

Managing worries

It's important to note that everyone will be different, so here are some examples of ways that might help you to manage worries. Not everything will work for everyone. It is a good idea to think about what has helped you manage feelings of worry before and use those strategies as a starting point. Here are some examples to consider.

Practise identifying whether worry is 'real problem' worry, or 'hypothetical worry'

If you're experiencing lots of hypothetical worry, then it's important to remind yourself that your mind is not focusing on a problem that you can solve right now, and then to find ways to let the worry go and focus on something else. You might also use this tool with children if they are struggling to cope.

Practise postponing your worry

This means deliberately setting aside time each day to let yourself worry (e.g. 30 minutes at the end of each day).

Speak to yourself with compassion

Worry can come from a place of concern – we worry about others when we care for them. A traditional cognitive behavioural therapy technique for working with negative, anxious, or upsetting thoughts is to write them down and find a different way of responding to them.

Practise mindfulness

Learning and practising mindfulness can help us to let go of worries and bring ourselves back to the present moment. Focusing on the gentle movement of your breath or the sounds you hear around you, can serve as helpful 'anchors' to come back to the present moment and let go of worries.

Activities for practising mindfulness can be found here:

- <http://www.safehandsthinkingminds.co.uk/covid-anxiety-stress-resources-links/>
- <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/2268-mindfulness-for-parents>
- Apps such as Headspace, Calm and Smiling Minds
- Colouring and origami: <https://origami.me/>.

Sensory Strategies

Think about how you can use your senses to ground yourself in the present moment:

- Sight: looking at something calming (e.g. bubble tube).
- Sound: calming music or noises.
- Touch/proprioception: deep pressure can often be calming to people.
- Smell: e.g. essential oils.
- Taste: e.g. having a cup of tea/hot chocolate.

Find out more about anxiety

You could consider listening to some podcasts related to anxiety. One related specifically to coronavirus is here: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/how-to-handle-coronavirusanxiety-special-edition/id1087147821?i=1000468295073>, and there is a collection of 8 Different Podcasts to listen to regarding anxiety here: <https://www.calmer-you.com/feelinganxious-or-worried-listen-to-these-8-podcasts/>.

Seeking further support

Many of the feelings you are experiencing right now could be considered normal reactions to abnormal events. Putting in place some of the suggested actions to cope and manage the worries may lead to a reduction in some of the negative effects associated with Covid-19 and self-isolation. However, if you are concerned about a persistent change in your mood or wellbeing, please contact your GP. There are also other organisations that can offer advice and support – you can visit <https://www.hertfordshirefamiliesfirst.org.uk/covid19-specialedition/current-news/links-for-mental-health-and-general-wellbeing> for further information.