

Looking after your Mental Health & Wellbeing during the COVID-19 Pandemic

We are now being advised to avoid all but essential social contact. More of us will be spending a lot of time at home and therefore our regular social activities will no longer be possible in the way we have previously.

Rather than focus negatively on this, it may help if we try to view this not as a “difficult” time, but as a “different” time. This thought change may help us view things as a new way of being.

It will mean a different routine to our daily life and as we all know, routine is helpful, giving us a sense of purpose and belonging. Initially, we may feel isolated and out of touch with reality, but for now, our reality is different. In terms of contact with others we need to be open to different ways of being in touch. Contact with others is so important to our mental health and wellbeing so think how to stay in touch with friends, family and work colleagues. This is a time where social media is useful, so use it for contact, use email, SKYPE, ZOOM, face time and of course, pick up the phone and talk! Be regularly in touch with the people who matter to you.

In terms of routine; create a new daily one. If you are working from home this is more straightforward as there are things that have to be done. Get up at your usual time and prepare to “go to work”. If you are unable to work for whatever reason, you need to make yourself the focus in terms of self-care. Try reading more or watching movies, having an exercise routine, trying new relaxation techniques, or finding new things to learn.

Remember all the times you have said things like “if only I didn’t have to work I would do that”. So, use this time to do some of those things. Try and rest and recharge and view this as a new different experience, one that might have its benefits. Use the time to find out how things work now, for example, consider your wider needs such as food, medication etc. Ask yourself “How will I get these things?”, “What is different?”, “How is my GP practice working now?”, “Do I have my prescription medications?” etc.

Try to avoid speculation and rumor and don’t be tempted to look up information from non-reputable sources about the current situation

Rumor can trigger anxiety and fear, so make sure you use reliable sources to obtain the information you need. Having good, sound information helps to diminish anxiety and helps us feel more in control.

You can get up-to-date information and advice from

- Gov. UK
- Public Health England
- Public Health Wales
- Health Protection Scotland

Remember to follow the hygiene advice such as hand washing with soap and hot water. This should be done whenever you change location for example getting home from shopping or outdoor exercising, eating or food preparation.

Remember in stressful times, it is good to have company, and whilst this may be difficult in person right now, keeping in touch with those who matter is fundamental in terms of our mental health and wellbeing.

Try to focus on the things you can do if you feel able, and remember the 5 steps to wellbeing which are:

- Connect
- Keep Active
- Learn new skills
- Give
- Pay attention to the present moment

Talk to your family and work with your children about coping in this different World. They may find it difficult to understand phrases such as social isolation, no physical contact with anyone outside of the household. Take time to explain what all this means without alarming them. Get them involved with food prep, teaching them the hygiene rules, make hand washing fun etc. Their day to day routine has changed with the closure of schools and nurseries, so they too will be away from their friends and like us, they will need a new daily routine.

It is okay not to feel okay, especially when we watch and hear the news which at times does sound scary. It is okay to feel overwhelmed and as if things will never change. Acknowledge that we don't have to be strong all the time! It is important to remember this, especially if you have experienced a mental illness in the past, or are currently living with a mental illness. Remember the coping strategies you used then and try to apply them to now. Consider what you need to do to keep yourself well and healthy if you have an underlying physical illness. Consider what you may need to do differently?

Try and reassure people you know who may be worried, and check in with people who you know are living alone, or who have an underlying illness - whether mental or physical

If the constant news about the virus is bothering you then limit the amount of news you watch. For example, don't watch every news bulletin broadcast throughout the day, limit it to one or two and certainly not news shown late at night as this may affect your sleeping.

Remember self-care, who is there that supports you through your work? Who is there that supports you in the home or amongst your friends and family? Think of the coping skills you have and all the things you are good at and use those skills now.

Consider things like relaxation, meditation, mindfulness, listening to music, keeping properly hydrated, eat sensibly and regularly. This is not the time to use more alcohol or drugs to get yourself through this challenging time. Drugs and alcohol misuse will only create problems further down the line.

Do remember that Care first is available to offer support counselling and advice 24/7. Look regularly at your own organisations Lifestyle site as this provides a wealth of practical information. There are also pre-recorded webinars that you can register to watch. There will also be a series of live webinars that you will be able to log in to and there are regularly updated articles on a range of subjects that you may find useful.

Care first Counsellors are available 24/7 via the Freephone number to provide additional support and information.