



## **Coping with COVID-19 – advice for parents and carers**

The coronavirus is leaving many of us feeling anxious and more uncertain than ever about the future. You may be juggling going to work, risking your health to take care of others, or home-schooling your kids while working from home. You may be spending more time in the company of your partner, or maybe you moved back to the home you grew up in to care for older relatives. Perhaps you are separated from those you love as they need to stay in isolation, or maybe you have family living in different countries. Perhaps you are worried about your children who are vulnerable or more challenging because of health issues, neurodevelopmental issues or behavioural issues. Or, maybe you are concerned about the structuring of your finances and job security.

We recognise that the global coronavirus pandemic is not just affecting our physical health. The government and NHS have advice on how to help reduce the spread of the virus, such as handwashing, as well as guidance on social distancing and self-isolation.

The anxiety, stress and uncertainty of the pandemic – and the adaptation we have to make to our lifestyles – are also having an impact on our mental health. So whether you are required to work in your usual setting, required to work from home or required to self-isolate, it's important to manage stress and anxiety and practise self-care to protect your mental health well-being.

Firstly, we want to say that if you are feeling stress and anxiety, you're not alone. It's quite natural to feel this way under such unpredictable circumstances.

Here are a couple of tips we would like to give you to contain your anxiety and take care of your self.

**1. Keep a routine or plan your time.** This may feel challenging as there is less physical support that you can access from family and friends, or even going to the gym or swimming pool is no longer an option, yet without a routine, negative thinking can escalate. So be creative. Plan a day to do things you need or want to do; for example, if you love exercising, you can still do an online workout.

**2. Know the facts** that will help you to be in control and know what you can do. There is a lot of information about the coronavirus; you probably come across facts, assumptions or speculation, false reports and stories on social media, which, in turn, may amplify your anxiety. It can be very difficult to know whether or not some information is true. Access information throughout the government website and check NHS advice websites because those are the most up-to-date and reliable sources of information.

**3. Limit access to news** media so that you are not overexposed to the news. Knowing facts can help you feel in control, and you may feel less anxious, but the constant news reports could also become overwhelming. Try to choose news sources you can trust—and avoid social media because these channels tend to be filled with speculation.

**4. Find things that help you feel calm.** Be present and try relaxation and breathing techniques. Learn to breathe by trying mindfulness or relaxation apps, practicing deep breathing, or playing music. You also can make a self-care box or a happy box. A self-care box is something to get out on days when you feel low/sad/stressed/anxious etc. The aim is to pick objects for the box that will lift your mood. What goes in the box is individual to you.

### **For a better life**

### **5. Write down your worries and anxieties; try to keep a journal.**

It is important that you don't ignore your anxieties, but also don't allow your worries to take over you, so set aside a specific worry time of 10–15 minutes each day. Spend this entire time thinking about your worries; you can write down, draw, or make notes in a journal. It doesn't matter how you express your fears as long as you acknowledge that you are feeling this way, and then remember to put your worries away. You may also try some calming breathing.

### **6. Ensure you have access to natural light**

During the lockdown, exposure to natural light might be limited, and it may result in a drop in the production of melatonin and serotonin, which are essential for our mental health and well-being. So plan daily exercise during the daytime, and sit in the garden or next to the window to access daylight.

Eat foods that help boost melatonin such as walnuts, cherries, milk or bananas. Salmon, poultry, eggs, soy products, nuts, milk and spinach are among the foods that can help boost serotonin.

**7. Look after your well-being** by having a regular sleep pattern and getting enough sleep. It's easy to develop unhealthy coping strategies. So, reduce your consumption of drinks that contain caffeine or alcohol. Make an effort to exercise; when you exercise, your body releases endorphins, dopamine and serotonin—hormones that are essential for your health. You may need to modify the way you exercise; try working out in the garden, follow a dance routine or use your children's trampoline. Also, make healthier food choices to strengthen your immune system and improve your well-being.

### **8. Connect with friends and family.**

Being unable to visit your family and friends may feel heartbreaking, but try to connect with them over the telephone or online. Share your ideas, join online pub quizzes with friends and carry on with your membership if they offer online meetings.

**9. Avoid pressure.** The pressure to carry on with life as if nothing is happening and to be your perfect self; the pressure of having different values, making difficult decisions, and being criticised; and the pressure to look as though you have it all together can cause anxiety. Try to be kinder to yourself and acknowledge that you are doing your best under the circumstances you are in.

### **10. Talk to someone and ask for help.**

It's a strength to reach out and ask for support, so speak to someone you trust—whether a friend, a family member or a helpline.

You may want to make a list of people you know and identify those who are good at providing practical, psychological and moral support.

### **Support for your school**

- **PMHT** and EWBN are here for you and we can offer consultation. These provide opportunities to discuss any pupils who are causing concern due to emotional or emerging mental health issues, offering thinking space and advice for ways to support the pupil and staff.

### **Online support/ helpline**

- **Mind helpline** provides information and signposting service. Open 9 am to 6 pm, Monday to Friday (except for bank holidays). Infoline: 0300 123 3393 Email: [info@mind.org.uk](mailto:info@mind.org.uk) Text: 86463 Phone calls from UK landlines are charged at local rates.
- **Samaritan helpline** - Whatever you're going through, samaritan will face it with you. Open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Call 116 123 for free <https://www.samaritans.org/>

- **Mental Health Crisis Helpline:**The Mental Health Crisis Helpline is a telephone service offering support to adults of all ages in Surrey and North East Hampshire who are experiencing a mental health crisis.
- **The Mental Health Crisis Helpline** is a telephone service offering support to adults of all ages in Surrey and North East Hampshire who are experiencing a mental health crisis. Lines are open 24 hours, seven days a week. You don't need to book an appointment and calls are free of charge. 0800 915 4644
- **Action for Happiness** is a movement of people committed to building a happier and more caring society. We want to see a fundamentally different way of life - where people care less about what they can get just for themselves and more about the happiness of others.  
<https://www.actionforhappiness.org/about-us>
- **AnxietyUK** – offers support, advice and information on a range of anxiety disorders  
<https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/get-help-now/anxietyinformation/>
- **Anxiety Alliance** – helping and supporting those suffering from anxiety  
<http://www.anxietyalliance.org.uk/>
- [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk) Parents' helpline: 08088025544 (Monday-Friday, 9.30am- 4pm)
- **Papyrus HopeLine UK**- free confidential helpline or online support for anyone having suicidal thoughts, or for anyone concern about young person at risk of harming themselves. Helpline:08000684141 (Monday-Friday 10.am-10pm. ; Saturday-Sunday 2pm-5pm  
[www.papyrus-uk.org/support/for-you](http://www.papyrus-uk.org/support/for-you) [www.papyrus-uk.org/spport/for-parents](http://www.papyrus-uk.org/spport/for-parents)

#### **Information about healthy eating**

- <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/eatwell-palte.aspx>
- <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/food-and-mood/about-food-and-mood/>
- [https://www.studentsagainstdespression.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/understanding\\_food\\_and\\_mood\\_worksheet.pdf](https://www.studentsagainstdespression.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/understanding_food_and_mood_worksheet.pdf)

#### **YouTube clip**

- Children's and parent 'guide which is for children and young people about the feelings this pandemic might bring up for them These are from Dr Ellie Atkins who is a Clinical Psychologist in ICU at St Thomas'.  
Children's video: <https://youtu.be/M5z0GaNTM1g>  
an Adult quick guide: <https://youtu.be/D8GJ3ZOpd44>