# Coronavirus and protecting your mental health

*Based on advice from the Mental Health Foundation*

Infectious disease outbreaks, like the current Coronavirus (COVID-19), can be scary and can affect our mental health. While it is important to stay informed, there are also many things we can do to support and manage our wellbeing during such times.

Here are some tips we hope will help you, your friends and your family to look after your mental health at a time when there is much discussion of potential threats to our physical health.

## Looking after your mental health while you have to stay at home

The government is now advising us to avoid all but essential social contact. This will mean that more of us will be spending a lot of time at home and many of our regular social activities will no longer be available to us. It will help to try and see it as a different period of time in your life, and not necessarily a bad one, even if you didn't choose it.

It will mean a different rhythm of life, a chance to be in touch with others in different ways than usual. Be in touch with other people regularly on social media, e-mail or on the phone, as they are still good ways of being close to the people who matter to you.

Create a new daily routine that prioritises looking after yourself. You could try reading more or watching movies, having an exercise routine, trying new relaxation techniques, or finding new knowledge on the internet. Try and rest and view this as a new if unusual experience, that might have its benefits.

Make sure your wider health needs are being looked after such as having enough prescription medicines available to you.

## Try to avoid speculation and look up reputable sources on the outbreak

Rumour and speculation can fuel anxiety. Having access to good quality information about the virus can help you feel more in control. You can get up-to-date information and advice on the virus here:

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

## You should only leave the house for:
1. shopping for basic necessities, for example food and medicine, which must be as infrequent as possible
2. one form of exercise a day, for example a run, walk, or cycle - alone or with members of your household
3. any medical need, or to provide care or to help a vulnerable person
4. travelling to and from work, but only where this absolutely cannot be done from home

Wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and hot water whenever you get home or into work, blow your nose, sneeze or cough, eat or handle food. If you can't wash your hands straightaway, use hand sanitizer and then wash them at the next opportunity. Stay 2 metres apart from anyone outside of your household and stay at home if you are feeling unwell.

## Try to stay connected

At times of stress, we work better in company and with support. Try and keep in touch with your friends and family, by telephone, email or social media, or contact a helpline for emotional support.  You may like to focus on the things you can do such as:

stress management - keeping active - eating a balanced diet

Stay in touch with friends on social media but try not to sensationalise things. If you are sharing content, use this from trusted sources, and remember that your friends might be worried too.

Also remember to regularly assess your social media activity. Tune in with yourself and ask if they need to be adjusted. Are there particular accounts or people that are increasing your worry or anxiety? Consider muting or unfollowing accounts or hashtags that cause you to feel anxious

## Talk to your children

Involving our family and children in our plans for good health is essential. We need be alert to and ask children what they have heard about the outbreak and support them, without causing them alarm.

We need to minimise the negative impact it has on our children and explain the facts to them. Discuss the news with them but try and avoid over-exposure to coverage of the virus. Be as truthful as possible. Let's not avoid the 'scary topic' but engage in a way that is appropriate for them.

## Try to anticipate distress

It is OK to feel vulnerable and overwhelmed as we read news about the outbreak, especially if you have experienced trauma or a mental health problem in the past, or if you have a long-term physical health condition that makes you more vulnerable to the effects of the coronavirus.

It's important to acknowledge these feelings and remind each other to look after our physical and mental health. We should also be aware of and avoid increasing habits that may not be helpful in the long term, like smoking and drinking.

Try and reassure people you know who may be worried and check in with people who you know are living alone.

Try to manage how you follow the outbreak in the media. There is extensive news coverage about the outbreak. If you find that the news is causing you huge stress, it's important to find a balance. It's best that you don't avoid all news and that you keep informing and educating yourself, but limit your news intake if it is bothering you

## What to do if you are still struggling?

If you think you or someone you know could be experiencing a problem with their mental health, then it is important to talk about it and to get help. Speak to a health professional - talk to your midwife or Health Visitor and they will be able to provide you with emotional support and signpost you to more help.

IAPT Talking Therapy services are continuing to provide assessments and treatment over the phone and via video call and so you can still access therapeutic support from your own home. You can either self-refer online (please see accompanying list of local contact details) or speak to your Health Visitor and they can refer you.

Similarly GP surgeries are still providing telephone assessments and can discuss possible medication options with you should you feel that you would benefit from this. Your Health Professional can also refer you to additional community mental health teams which continue to operate.

## **Useful Websites**

Anxiety UK - advice and helpline
*https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/blog/health-and-other-forms-of-anxiety-and-coronavirus*

Mind - Coronavirus and your wellbeing
*https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/#TakeCareOfYourMentalHealthAndWellbeing*

Mental Health Foundation - Looking after your mental health during coronavirus outbreak
*https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak*

PANDAS charity – perinatal mental health helpline
*http://www.pandasfoundation.org.uk*

OCD Action - skype/phone support groups
https://www.ocdaction.org.uk/support-groups/online2

Place2Be - Talking to children about coronavirus
https://www.place2be.org.uk/about-us/news-and-blogs/2020/march/coronavirus-information-for-children

Supporting young people's mental health during coronavirus
https://www.annafreud.org/coronavirus