

Keeping Emotionally Well During Difficult Times

This booklet has been designed to support adults working with young people during the COVID-19 outbreak. The booklet is separated into the following sections:

- Key points for adults to keep in mind
- How to discuss COVID-19 with young people
- Strategies to promote wellbeing
 - Learning to Breathe
 - Wellbeing ideas
 - What can I try to manage any difficult thoughts that I might have?
- Reference List

Key points for adults to keep in mind

- 1. Do not be afraid to discuss COVID-19.** Most young people will have already heard about the virus or seen people wearing face masks, so parents shouldn't avoid talking about it. Not talking about something can make children/young people worry more.
- 2. Be developmentally appropriate.** Try not to volunteer too much information, as this may be overwhelming. Instead, try to answer the young person's questions. Do your best to answer honestly and clearly. It is okay if you can't answer everything; being available is what matters.
- 3. Take your cues from the young people.** Invite your young people to tell you anything they may have heard about the COVID-19, and how they feel. Give them ample opportunity to ask questions. You want to be prepared to answer (but not prompt) questions. Your goal is to avoid encouraging frightening fantasies.
- 4. Manage your own anxiety.** If you notice that you are feeling anxious, take some time to calm down before trying to have a conversation or answer your young people's questions. Managing the amount of time you spend checking the news and engaging in relaxing/distracting activities can help you to manage your own feelings of anxiety too.
- 5. Be reassuring.** Hearing about the COVID-19 on the news may make some young people worry that they'll catch it. It's helpful to reassure your young people's about how rare the COVID-19 actually is (the flu is much more common) and that young people actually seem to have milder symptoms.

Focus on what you're doing to stay safe. We know that the COVID-19 is transmitted mostly by coughing and touching surfaces. The NHS recommends thoroughly washing your hands as the primary means of staying healthy. So remind young people that they are taking care of themselves by washing their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds (or the length of two "Happy Birthday" songs) when they come in from outside, before they eat, and are blowing their nose, coughing, sneezing or using the bathroom.

6. **Stick to routine.** Keeping to routines and predictability can be helpful for reducing worry. Structured days with regular mealtimes and a daily timetable are an essential part of keeping young people happy and healthy. Equally, making sure we are talking to parents about keeping a consistent routine at home alongside a bedtime routine which allows our young people to have adequate amount of sleep each night.
7. **Keep talking.** Tell young people that you will continue to keep them updated as you learn more. Open communication is important for young people to feel both contained and safe. "You can say, 'Even though we don't have the answers to everything right now, know that once we know more, an adult will let you know, too.'" Remember to be truthful and age appropriate – allow children and young people to ask questions.
8. **Handling questions.** It is helpful to remember that young people sometimes ask the same questions over and over. As adults, this can raise our own anxieties at times of stress – but try to remember that they're simply checking and processing the information just like we are, when we choose to check the news, speak to loved ones or read social media.

How to discuss COVID-19 with young people

The following prose can be adapted as appropriate for the developmental age of the young people you are working with. "The world might feel like an uncertain or scary place at the moment. You may have been seeing some changes recently, like needing to wash your hands a bit more, having to stay away from your loved ones e.g. grandparents, and not being able to see some of your friends in school. You might be feeling a range of different emotions; some people might be feeling worried, frustrated, angry or sad - or a combination of all of these! All of these emotions are okay."

We all have different ways to manage how we are feeling. With all of these things impacting on how you live your life at the moment, you might feel like you need an extra bit of support to help you and others manage.

Helpful Strategies to Promote Wellbeing

Learning to Breathe

This simple technique involves focusing on and slowing down our breathing patterns. Many people find this simple exercise very relaxing. It can be particularly helpful for those who feel dizzy or light-headed when they feel worried or stressed. This sometimes happens because people's breathing changes and gets quicker when they feel distressed. When we are feeling panicked breathing is really important to help us feel okay again. Here's how to do it:

1. Get into a comfortable position
2. Work out a stable breathing rhythm. Perhaps try to breathe in for three seconds, hold this breathe for two seconds, and then breathe out for three seconds. It can be helpful to count as you do this (e.g. IN: 1-2-3, HOLD: 1-2, OUT: 1-2-3, HOLD: 1-2). Imagine blowing up a balloon as you breathe in and imagine deflating it as you breathe out. Or pretend that you have a candle in one hand and a flower in the other. Take a long deep smell of the flower and then slowly blow out the candle.
3. Repeat this action for a few minutes. You should soon begin to feel more relaxed. If you were feeling dizzy then this should also get better after a few minutes. Make sure you breathe in and out *slowly*.



Wellbeing

It is important to look after your wellbeing as well as focusing on your studies. Your body and mind will only perform well for you if you are taking care of yourself. There are a number of things that you can do to help improve your wellbeing and keep you in good shape:



- Make sure you are getting plenty of sleep! This might seem like an obvious one, but the average teenager is only getting 7 hours sleep a night. According to guidelines, published by the NHS, 5 year olds should be getting about 11 hours of sleep a night whilst teenagers should be getting at least 9 hours a night. Make sure you are limiting your screen use before bedtime. Try and make sure you are not looking at a screen at least 30 mins before bedtime. If your screen has a night mode, make sure it is on. Blue light from a screen stimulates your brain and can keep you awake at night or disturb your sleep patterns.
- Try and get some exercise. This will not only help you sleep better, but it will also improve your overall wellbeing. Exercise produces chemicals in our brains that contribute to our mood and help to lessen anxiety. Children and teenagers should be aiming for at least 60 minutes' exercise every day, including aerobic activities such as fast walking and running. If intense exercise is not your thing you can still get exercise by going for a walk or taking the stairs instead of a lift. Exercise can also help tone your body and keep you at a healthy weight. One of the biggest reasons people don't stick to exercise regimes is because they get bored of it. Pick something that you enjoy! Do you like to work out alone, or with others? There are a ton of different activities and sports that you could do. Think about what you might enjoy the most and what is practical for you to be able to do.
- Relax and have fun! Spend time with the people you care about, do the things you love, and focus on what's good. That helps you feel good about yourself, just as you are. Make sure you are building opportunities for rest and relaxation along with your studies – both are important to our wellbeing.
- Remember what we put in our bodies also affects our mood and wellbeing. By eating a varied and balanced diet you should be able to get all the energy and nutrients you need from the food and drink you consume, allowing your body to

grow and develop properly. Have a look at this Eatwell guide:
<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide/>



- Eating healthily doesn't have to mean giving up your favourite foods. It simply means eating a *variety of foods* and cutting down on food and drinks high in *fat* and *sugar*, such as sugary fizzy drinks, crisps, cakes and chocolate. These foods should be eaten less often and in smaller amounts.



- Make sure you're drinking plenty of water, keeping well hydrated allows our bodies and minds to function properly. Remember, you're made up of 70% water – a hydrated body is a happy body!

What can I try to manage any difficult thoughts that I might have?

It's important to remember that feeling uncertain, confused or having difficult thoughts is completely understandable, particularly at present – COVID-19 has created a lot of uncertainty for all of us. Sharing these thoughts with others will be important, but you may also find it helpful to 'take your mind off your worries' from time to time.



Here are some ideas that you could try:

- **Connect with others** – make time to check-in with others, to have a chat. This doesn't have to focus on understanding COVID-19, although it could be helpful to put time to one side with someone you trust, to ask any questions you may have about this (you might also want to set a time limit for this!)
- **Connect with others in other ways** – FaceTime, WhatsApp, X-box Live etc – speaking to one another may feel more important than ever, especially if either you or someone you know is having to stay at home or spend less time with others.
- **Try to manage feelings of uncertainty** – try to separate what is in your control and what is out of your control. Keep a focus on trying to do the things that you can control.
- **Take a break from / switch off from social media and the news.** Try to avoid checking excessively – it's good to know what's happening, but too much

information can feel overwhelming. Maybe find a 'distraction' activity to do instead, if you have a habit of just checking your phone.

- **Try moving social media apps away from your home screen** for a while or turn off their notifications.



- **Remember that the worry can often spread faster than the illness itself** – whilst lots of people will be talking about COVID-19, far fewer will actually feel unwell.
- **Try some distraction techniques** – the less time we spend focusing on difficult thoughts, the less chance our worries have to grow. For example:
 1. You may want to occupy your thoughts by setting yourself a thinking puzzle, this could be anything: Counting backwards from 123 in nines, naming all the players in your favourite sports team, spelling the names of your family backwards. The puzzle has to be hard, to challenge you – giving yourself a quick distraction can allow any difficult thoughts to pass. This way, the puzzle should take over and drown out the negative thoughts!
 2. Describe what you see - this involves describing to yourself in detail what you see. When you feel worried, describe everything **but** the thing that is making you worry in as much detail as possible. Try to do this as quickly as you can; what do you see, what colours, shapes, sizes, what can you smell, what can you feel or hear?
 3. Another idea to help with this is '5, 4, 3, 2, 1 thinking' – list 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste.

Remember, not all of the ideas in this booklet will work for everyone, don't be afraid to try some, but to ignore others – it's important to focus on the strategies that seem to work for you.

Reference list

Key Stage 1 (ages 4 to 7)

Activities

Cosmic Kids <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wf5K3pP2IUQ>

Smiling Mind: moving meditation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=buPuB4Sa0zU>

Meditation and sleep stories from Calm: https://www.calm.com/blog/take-a-deep-breath?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=715072-free-mindfulness-resources-from-calm

Books

“Have You Filled A Bucket Today? A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids” by Carol McCloud. Encourages positive behaviour and expressing kindness and appreciation.

“Puppy Mind” by Andrew Jordan Nance. A reading of the book can be found: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xd7Cr265zgc>

“Huge Bag of Worries” by Virginia Ironside
Explores how we can manage worries and encourages discussions.

Key Stage 2 (ages 7 to 11)

Apps

Stop, breath and think; Headspace and Calm. There are free resources from Calm accessible here: https://www.calm.com/blog/take-a-deep-breath?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=715072-free-mindfulness-resources-from-calm

Smiling Mind: moving meditation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=buPuB4Sa0zU>

Books

“What To Do When You’re Scared & Worried: A Guide for Kids” by James Crist. A help guide to processing fears and worries (ages 9-13).

“Something Bad Happened: A Kid’s Guide to Coping with events in the News” by Dawn Huebner. How to process different world events (ages 6-12).

“The unworry book” by Alice James.

“Starving the anxiety gremlin” by Kate Collins-Donnelly

“Looking After Your Mental Health” by Alice James and Louie Stowell.

Programmes

Stallard, P. (2002). 'Think Good Feel Good'

Woloshyn & Chamberlain (2009). 'Mighty Moe – The Anxiety Workbook for Young people'.

Key Stage 3 and 4 (11 to 16)

Apps and resources

Stop, breath and think; Headspace and Calm. There are free resources from Calm accessible here: https://www.calm.com/blog/take-a-deep-breath?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=715072-free-mindfulness-resources-from-calm

Moodjuice (2015): <http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk>

Programmes

Stallard, P. (2002). 'Think Good Feel Good'

Woloshyn & Chamberlain (2009). 'Mighty Moe – The Anxiety Workbook for Young people'.

Sleep Guidelines

NHS (2020). 'Guidelines for wellbeing in young people and young people': <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/sleep-tips-for-teenagers/>

Some Useful Organisations

The following organisations or services may be able to offer support, information and advice.

Child Line

Childline is yours – a free, private and confidential service where you can talk about anything. Whatever your worry, whenever you need help, we're here for you online, on the phone, anytime.

Phone:

0800 1111 or use the *online chat app*

Samaritans

Samaritans provides confidential emotional support, 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide. *You **don't** have to be suicidal to call us.* We are here for you if you're worried about something, feel upset or confused, or you just want to talk to someone.

Phone:

08457 90 90 90

Web Site:

<http://www.samaritans.org>

Anxiety UK

National charity established in 1970 to provide support and services to those suffering from all anxiety disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder, generalised anxiety disorder, panic attacks, social phobia, simple phobia, phobia and tranquiliser issues.

Phone:

08444 775 774

Web Site:

<http://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/>

Breathing Space

Breathing Space is a free, confidential phone line you can call when you're feeling down. You might be worried about something - money, work, relationships, exams - or maybe you're just feeling fed up and can't put your finger on why.

Phone:

0800 83 85 87

Web Site:

<http://www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk>

Living Life to the Full

Living Life to the Full is an online life skills course made up of several different modules designed to help develop key skills and tackle some of the problems we all face from time to time.

Web Site:

<http://www.lltff.com/>

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- National Health Service (NHS)
- Mind Hong Kong - Managing our Mental Health & Staying Well during a Virus Outbreak Responding to 2019-nCoV