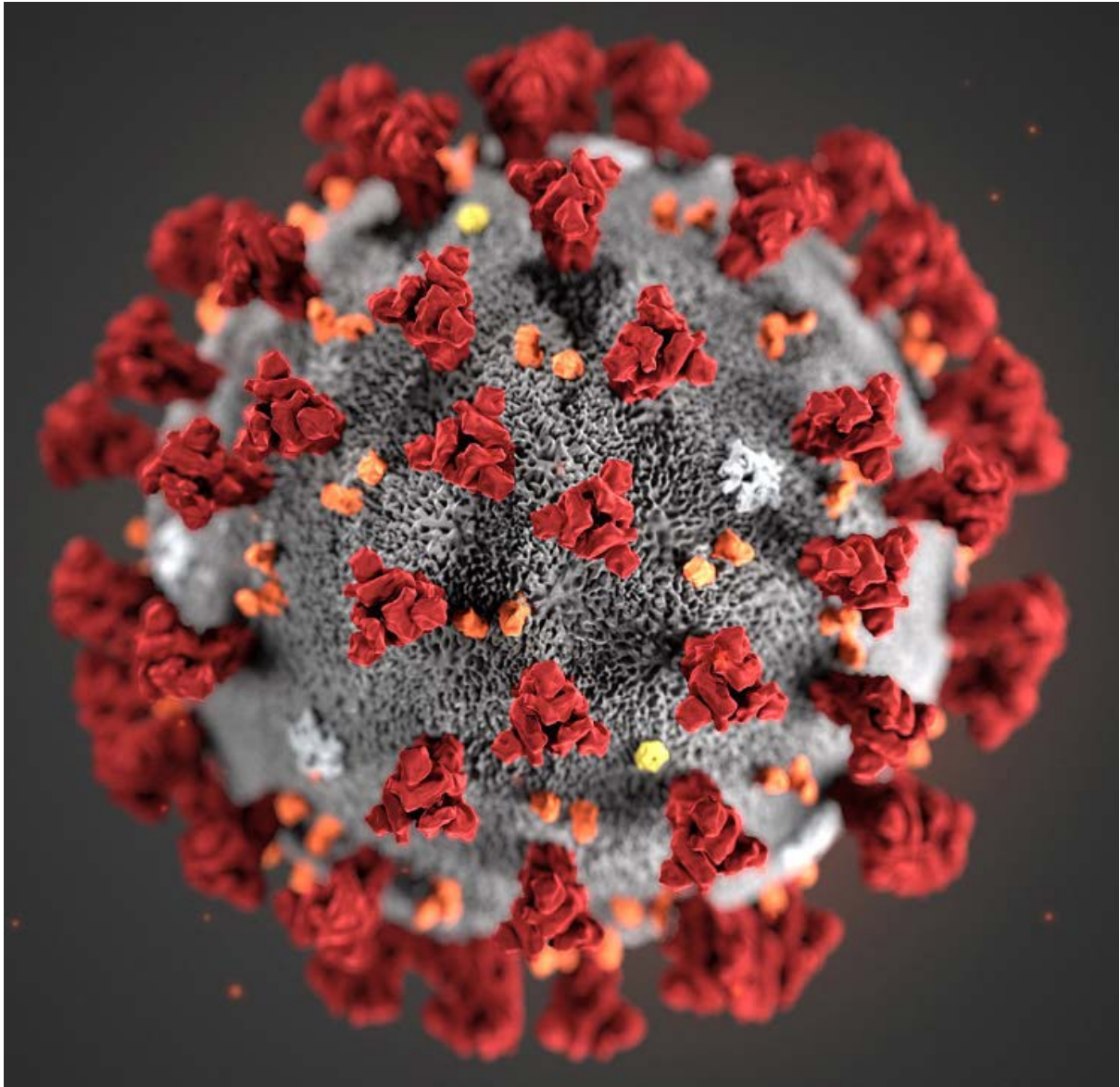


Mental Health and the Coronavirus



Welcome to this short module on how to support your Mental Health during the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The module is divided into 2 sections:

- Start Here
- Useful Links

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Section 1 – Start Here

Maintaining good Mental Health

Novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is a new strain of coronavirus first identified in Wuhan City, China.

The constant news regarding the pandemic can feel relentless, with news updates delivered to our phones and our homes via news apps, social media and worried messages from friends and loved ones.

All the of above has the potential to take its toll on people's mental health and more so if a person has a condition identified as in the "at risk" categories or anxiety based conditions.

We have been told what steps to take to protect ourselves from the physical health issues relating to COVID-19 but how do we protect our mental health?

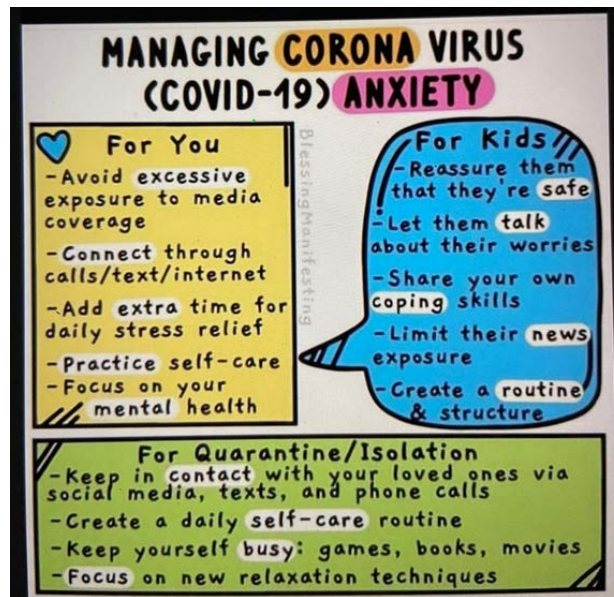
This short module aims to provide you with the advice and tips to protect your mental health and improve your resilience to the constant bombardment of information.

There are links available at the end of the module should you need further advice or support.

Let's start with the basics

Being concerned about what you hear and see in the News and Social Media is totally understandable, however, the fact that this information is on our phones, tablets and radios constantly, can mean for some it becomes overwhelming. This is particularly the case if someone has an existing mental health condition.

For some, anxiety is based upon worrying about "what will happen if..." When we are anxious, we typically feel scared which is totally normal. It's common that these thoughts could lead us to think of the most extreme and usually irrational outcomes.



What can we do to prevent or reduce this?

- **Limit your access to the News**

If watching the news, reading newspapers or listening to the news on your radio make you anxious, reduce the amount of time you watch, read or listen.

Pick one bulletin a day, or pick a time to read the newspaper and only consume the news at those times.

- **Limit where you get your information**

Make sure you are staying informed with accurate information when you want to know more.

Stick to trusted sources like the NHS websites and the government briefings.

Try to avoid Social Media when it comes to obtaining facts.

- **Take a break from Social Media**

While Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and countless other social media platforms can be great for maintaining contact with friends and loved ones, if you find that you are struggling with all the information that is being discussed, take a break from it.

In a similar way to how we advise you restrict how you consume your news, allocate "downtime" from your device and try and stick to it.

Mute hashtags or keywords to ensure you aren't bombarded with a particular subject.

If you need to keep your device on you, switch off notifications for those apps during your "downtime".

- **Stay in Contact**

Social Media is an excellent way for people to maintain contact with others especially if they are self-isolating.

Taking breaks to have conversations with friends is known to help reduce your anxiety levels. However, to prevent conversations becoming about triggering subjects, suggest "topics to avoid" when starting the calls.

If you know someone who is usually anxious, reach out to them, they will probably be delighted to receive your call.

Equally if you are struggling do not be afraid to reach out yourself.

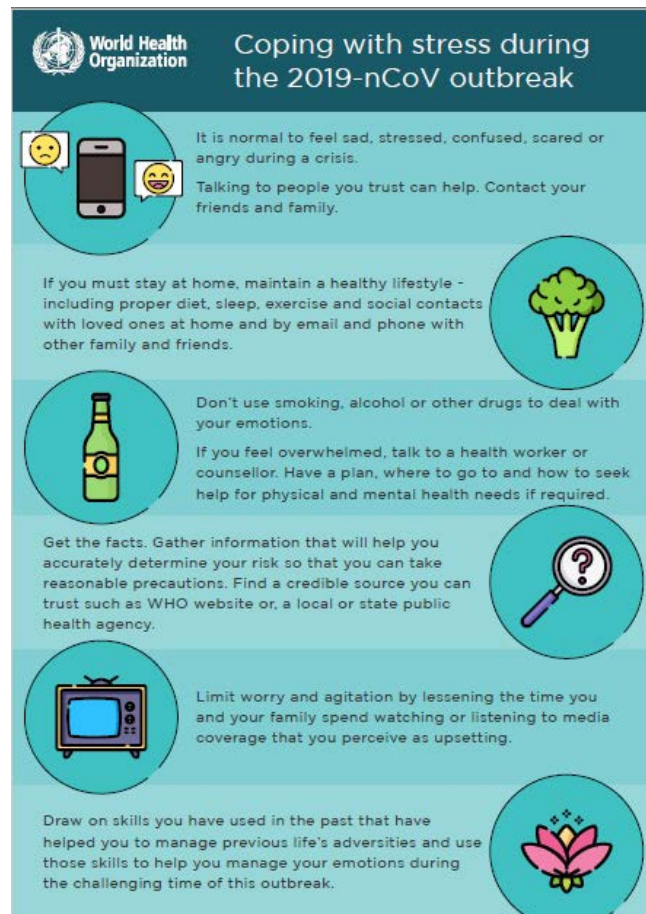
Staying at Home

Government are now advising us to avoid all but essential social contact. More of us will be spending more time at home without our regular social activities. 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 we didn't chose it.

It will mean a different rhythm of life, a chance to be in touch with others in different ways than usual.

At times of stress we are better in company, involve your family and children in your planning. Minimise the negative impact on your children and explain the facts to them - be truthful as much as possible without scaring them-engage them in a way that is appropriate for them.

See below for tips to help you deal with Staying at Home and Self-isolation.



- **Keep in touch**

Make sure you stay in touch with friends and work colleagues via phone, email or social media.

Update your contacts check you have contact numbers and email addresses for those you want to stay in touch with.

Agree regular check-ins to help you feel connected.

There are plenty of options to keep in touch - use email, phone and social media.

- **Create a routine**

Plan your time to make sure you aren't sat worrying. Catch up on a box set or two, dig out that copy of the book you have been meaning to read for the last year. If you're with others, break out the board games.

If you have a list of things you always meant to do, now maybe the time.

Having a routine will help you focus on things other than anxiety triggers.

- **Time for you**

Create a self-care routine where you can concentrate on your physical or mental wellbeing. This can take the form of exercises, where appropriate or relaxation techniques.

If you have access to the internet, resources such as YouTube, can be an excellent resource for many different relaxation techniques.

- **Be Creative!**

If you have ever wanted to try something new, this could be the opportunity to do so.

If you have others home with you, why not get them to join in and plan time for it during your day.

- **Maintain your physical health**

Exercise is a critical component of dealing with stress, equally, ensuring you are maintaining a healthy - balanced diet will also help.

Stay hydrated, it drink plenty of water during the day.

Supporting your children

Your children will have had similar contact with the media and their own social media contacts as well as discussions in school, this could cause them to be scared.

World Health Organization Helping children cope with stress during the 2019-nCoV outbreak

- Respond to your child's reactions in a supportive way, listen to their concerns and give them extra love and attention.** Children may respond to stress in different ways such as being more clingy, anxious, withdrawing, angry or agitated, bedwetting etc.
- Remember to listen to your children, speak kindly and reassure them.** Children need adults' love and attention during difficult times. Give them extra time and attention. If possible, make opportunities for the child to play and relax.
- Try and keep children close to their parents and family and avoid separating children and their caregivers to the extent possible. If separation occurs (e.g. hospitalization) ensure regular contact (e.g. via phone) and re-assurance.**
- Keep to regular routines and schedules as much as possible, or help create new ones in a new environment, including school/learning as well as time for safely playing and relaxing.**
- Provide facts about what has happened, explain what is going on now and give them clear information about how to reduce their risk of being infected by the disease in words that they can understand depending on their age.** This also includes providing information about what could happen in a re-assuring way (e.g. a family member and/or the child may start not feeling well and may have to go to the hospital for some time so doctors can help them feel better).

How can you support them?

- **Reassure them**

Let them know they are safe, explain the precautions they can take to protect themselves.

- **Let them talk**

Give them time and space to discuss their concerns with you, sharing concerns and knowing they are listened to will help them to deal with their situation.

- **Share your methods**

If your children know how you cope when scared or anxious, it can give them understand that it is normal to feel this way.

Some of the techniques you use may also be of benefit to them, sharing these may help them cope with their own fears.

- **Limit their exposure**

Where possible, limit their exposure to news and social media. The constant bombardment of information can be distressing to children who may not be able to filter what they are seeing or hearing.

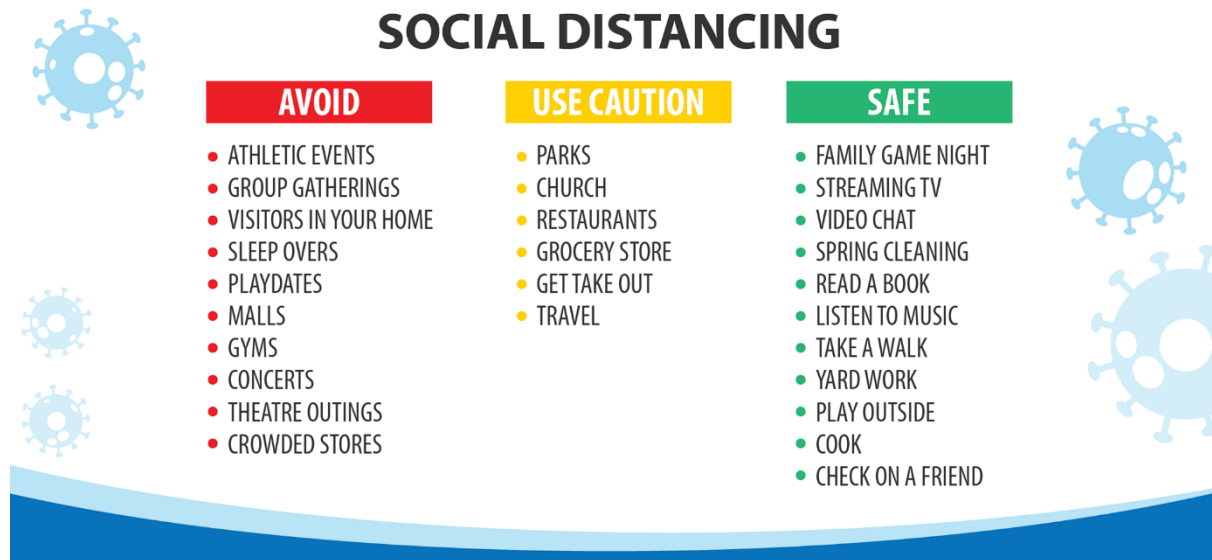
- **Create a routine**

Children like to have a routine, it is comforting for them to know that things happen at specific times.

Incorporating their access to media and social media could also help them.

Social Distancing – Tips and Advice

Don't forget, if you do arrange to meet friends, maintain at least 2 metres between you as per government guidelines.



SOCIAL DISTANCING

AVOID	USE CAUTION	SAFE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ATHLETIC EVENTS• GROUP GATHERINGS• VISITORS IN YOUR HOME• SLEEP OVERS• PLAYDATES• MALLS• GYMS• CONCERTS• THEATRE OUTINGS• CROWDED STORES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• PARKS• CHURCH• RESTAURANTS• GROCERY STORE• GET TAKE OUT• TRAVEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• FAMILY GAME NIGHT• STREAMING TV• VIDEO CHAT• SPRING CLEANING• READ A BOOK• LISTEN TO MUSIC• TAKE A WALK• YARD WORK• PLAY OUTSIDE• COOK• CHECK ON A FRIEND

Long Term Mental Health

Government estimations suggest the Coronavirus Pandemic could last for several months. It is important that during this time that you allow yourself the ability to "step away" from things as much as possible.

What does this mean and how should you do it?

Anxiety UK recommends a technique for dealing with anxiety and worries.

This technique is known as "**APPLE**"



A – Acknowledge

Notice and acknowledge the uncertainty as it comes to mind.

P – Pause

Don't react as you normally do. Don't react at all. Pause and breathe.

P – Pull back

Tell yourself this is just the worry talking, and this apparent need for certainty is not helpful and not necessary. It is only a thought or feeling. Don't believe everything you think. Thoughts are not statements or facts.

L – Let it go

Let go of the thought or feeling. It will pass. You don't have to respond to them. You might imagine them floating away in a bubble or cloud.

E – Explore

Explore the present moment, because right now, in this moment, all is well. Notice your breathing and the sensations of your breathing. Notice the ground beneath you. Look around and notice what you see, what you hear, what you can touch, what you can smell. Right now. Then shift your focus of attention to something else - on what you need to do, on what you were doing before you noticed the worry, or do something else - mindfully with your full attention.

Section 2 – Useful Links

Further Information

If you or any member staff is feeling stressed, isolated or generally worried and would like to talk things through call Occupational Health on **01443 494003**.

Where possible a Counsellor will aim to call you back within 48 hours.

Further support and information on mental health matters is available from RCT Council Occupational Health Unit on **01443 494003**.

We also recommend that you use these sites as accurate sources of support and information.

For mental health support:



- www.mind.org.uk



- www.anxietyuk.org.uk/ - Online advice and support for anxiety conditions.



- www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters - An online assessment and practical advice tool for managing your mental health.



- www.valleyssteps.org -Valleys Steps offers online resources for relaxation and stress management.



- www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/talking-to-your-children-scary-world-new - has advice on how to talk to your children about scary world events.



- www.callhelpline.org.uk - Community Advice and Listening Line - Confidential emotional support and information on mental health.



- www.thecalmzone.net

Support for men struggling with their mental health problems. Telephone 0800 585858



- If you are experiencing a personal crisis, are unable to cope and need support. Text Shout to 85258 or visit www.giveusashout.org



If you or someone you know is struggling and needs immediate support, trained professionals are available 24/7 on - Freephone 116123 or visit their website www.samaritans.org

For information about the COVID-19 Coronavirus please see the below:



- www.who.int



www.nhs.uk



- www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public