

## Coping & Wellbeing During Covid-19: A Guide for Staff and Parents

### Understanding Psychological Responses

Everyone will be affected in some way by this pandemic. The experience will be different for each individual and may change from day to day and across weeks as people adapt to changing circumstances. It is completely normal for different people to respond differently, and it is okay for people not to feel okay. Reactions that people might experience include:

- Increased tiredness: due to the mental workload and additional stress and anxiety associated with Covid-19 and adapting to a changed situation.
- Feelings associated with loss (of routine, of important planned activities, or due to a bereavement): anger, sadness, low mood, shock, denial, numbness and moving between different emotions.
- Emotional effects of being in quarantine, which might include boredom, depression, exhaustion, avoidance, detachment from others, anxiety, irritability, insomnia, confusion, anger and helplessness.
- Job stress related to compromised ability to do the job, lack of control over work, reduced concentration, and blurred boundaries between home and work.
- Post-traumatic stress responses as a result of exposure to the news, actual experienced events, or feelings of threat: this may be noticed as changes in cognition, mood, arousal and reactivity; avoidance of certain situations; and intrusion of thoughts, images or memories.
- Positive effects such as renewed commitment to work, personal and professional growth, increased voluntary efforts, a sense of meaning and life and feelings of gratitude, strength, hope and love.

### Healthy habits

There are daily supports you can put in place which will help to protect against some of the negative psychological impacts of the pandemic:

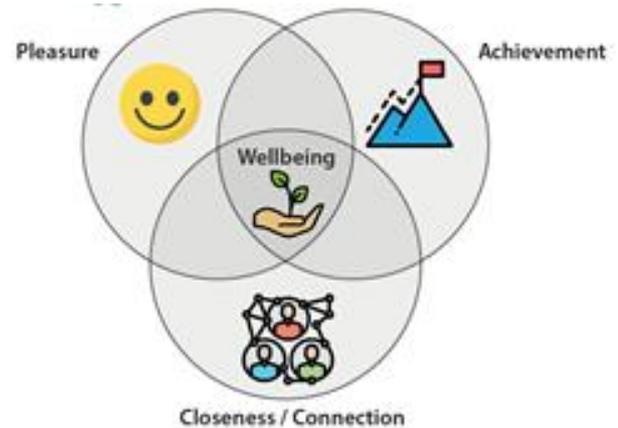
- Build structure into your day to maintain some routine, this could include a transition routine between home and work tasks.
- Aim to keep regular sleep and wake times and take other steps to maintain good sleep hygiene (<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/sleep-hygiene>).
- Allow yourself breaks in between work tasks.
- Maintain healthy food, drink and exercise goals.
- Reduce your exposure to the news, especially if this is something that causes anxiety: limit it to one or two times a day, at times when you are less likely to ruminate on information.
- Accept that things are out of your control and that they will not last forever. Focus on what you can control.
- Practice self-acceptance and have realistic expectations and standards for yourself – you can only be ‘good enough’.



## Helpful Ways of Coping

### Maintain balance in your life

Wellbeing comes from living a life with a balance of activities that give you feelings of pleasure, achievement, and closeness. Humans are social animals – we need connections to thrive and flourish. We would recommend trying to do at least some activities that are social and involve other people. In times like these you might have to find some creative ways to do social things at a distance. See Activity Menu in [APPENDIX 1: Maintaining balance in your life](#) for example activities.



### Five Ways to Wellbeing

The following are evidence-based strategies identified to support wellbeing<sup>1</sup>:

1. Connect: Find virtual ways to spend time with family, friends and colleagues.
2. Be Active: Plan daily exercise outside or using online videos or other indoor exercise options.
3. Take Notice: Practise being mindful of your own body and the environment around you.
4. Learn: If you have extra time, use this to try something new or focus learning on your role (e.g. new technology, ways of teaching) or wellbeing.
5. Give: This could include practical support as well as offering encouragement, time and expressions of gratitude to others.

### PERMA

A meta-analysis of research into coping identified 5 styles of coping and encouraged people to be aware of their dominant style but also explore other options for coping:

**Positive emotion:** spend time on healthy experiences and focus on positive things

**Engagement:** become immersed in worthwhile goals

**Relationships:** connect positively with others

**Meaning:** act with purpose

**Accomplishment:** achieve goals and manage setbacks

See [APPENDIX 2: PERMA – Questions You Can Ask Yourself to Promote Wellbeing](#) for questions to support with this

### Psychological First Aid

Psychological First Aid<sup>2</sup> is an evidence-informed approach which has identified key features that are helpful for traumatic situations:

- Increase your sense of **safety**
- Stay **connected**
- Cultivate **calmness**
- Improve your sense of **control**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mindkit.org.uk/5-ways-to-wellbeing/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nctsn.org/treatments-and-practices/psychological-first-aid-and-skills-for-psychological-recovery>

- Remain **hopeful**

See [APPENDIX 3](#): Psychological First Aid for ways to think about this.

Other coping resources

The *Mind* website provides useful information about how to cope with anxiety and self-isolation: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/> and <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/anxiety-and-panic-attacks/self-care-for-anxiety/>.

The Anna Freud Centre has created a webpage with lots of examples of ways to manage feelings that people can use to get ideas: <https://www.annafreud.org/selfcare/>.

A menu of self-care activities can also be found here: [https://2950c04d-206b-4c18-b42f-9cec21f46c7d.filesusr.com/ugd/ec3214\\_b557c2d1086f40438da7af49cc02ab58.pdf](https://2950c04d-206b-4c18-b42f-9cec21f46c7d.filesusr.com/ugd/ec3214_b557c2d1086f40438da7af49cc02ab58.pdf).

Managing worries

It's important to note that everyone will be different, so here are some examples of ways that might help you to manage worries. Not everything will work for everyone. It is a good idea to think about what has helped you manage feelings of worry before and use those strategies as a starting point. Here are some examples to consider.

Practise identifying whether worry is 'real problem' worry, or 'hypothetical worry'

If you're experiencing lots of hypothetical worry, then it's important to remind yourself that your mind is not focusing on a problem that you can solve right now, and then to find ways to let the worry go and focus on something else. You might also use this tool with children if they are struggling to cope. See [APPENDIX 4: Worry decision tree](#) for a worry decision tree.

Practise postponing your worry

This means deliberately setting aside time each day to let yourself worry (e.g. 30 minutes at the end of each day).

Speak to yourself with compassion

Worry can come from a place of concern – we worry about others when we care for them. A traditional cognitive behavioural therapy technique for working with negative, anxious, or upsetting thoughts is to write them down and find a different way of responding to them.

Practise mindfulness

Learning and practising mindfulness can help us to let go of worries and bring ourselves back to the present moment. Focusing on the gentle movement of your breath or the sounds you hear around you, can serve as helpful 'anchors' to come back to the present moment and let go of worries. Activities for practising mindfulness can be found here:

- <http://www.safehandstinkingminds.co.uk/covid-anxiety-stress-resources-links/>
- <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/2268-mindfulness-for-parents>
- Apps such as Headspace, Calm and Smiling Minds
- Colouring and origami: <https://origami.me/>.

## Sensory Strategies

Think about how you can use your senses to ground yourself in the present moment:

- Sight: looking at something calming (e.g. bubble tube).
- Sound: calming music or noises.
- Touch/proprioception: deep pressure can often be calming to people.
- Smell: e.g. essential oils.
- Taste: e.g. having a cup of tea/hot chocolate.

## Find out more about anxiety

You could consider listening to some podcasts related to anxiety. One related specifically to coronavirus is here: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/how-to-handle-coronavirus-anxiety-special-edition/id1087147821?i=1000468295073>, and there is a collection of 8 Different Podcasts to listen to regarding anxiety here: <https://www.calmer-you.com/feeling-anxious-or-worried-listen-to-these-8-podcasts/>.

## Seeking further support

Many of the feelings you are experiencing right now could be considered normal reactions to abnormal events. Putting in place some of the suggested actions to cope and manage the worries may lead to a reduction in some of the negative effects associated with Covid-19 and self-isolation. However, if you are concerned about a persistent change in your mood or wellbeing, please contact your GP. There are also other organisations that can offer advice and support – you can visit <https://www.hertfordshirefamiliesfirst.org.uk/covid19-special-edition/current-news/links-for-mental-health-and-general-wellbeing> for further information or the [Error! Reference source not found.](#)

## APPENDIX 1: Maintaining balance in your life

### Use An Activity Menu To Give You Some Ideas To Stay Occupied



#### Animals

Pet an animal  
Walk a dog  
Listen to the birds



#### Be active

Go for a walk  
Go for a run  
Go for a swim  
Go cycling  
Use an exercise video at home



#### Clean

Clean the house  
Clean the yard  
Clean the bathroom  
Clean the toilet  
Clean your bedroom  
Clean the fridge  
Clean the oven  
Clean your shoes  
Do the washing up  
Fill / empty the dishwasher  
Do laundry  
Do some chores  
Organise your workspace  
Clean a cupboard



#### Connect with people

Contact a friend  
Join a new group  
Join a political party  
Join a dating website  
Send a message to a friend  
Write a letter to a friend  
Reconnect with an old friend



#### Cook

Cook a meal for yourself  
Cook a meal for someone else  
Bake a cake / cookies  
Roast marshmallows  
Find a new recipe



#### Create

Draw a picture  
Paint a portrait  
Take a photograph  
Doodle / sketch  
Organise photographs  
Make a photograph album  
Start a scrapbook  
Finish a project  
Do some sewing / knitting



#### Expression

Laugh  
Cry  
Sing  
Shout  
Scream



#### Kindness

Help a friend / neighbour / stranger  
Make a gift for someone  
Try a random act of kindness  
Do someone a favour  
Teach somebody a skill  
Do something nice for someone  
Plan a surprise for someone  
Make a list of your good points  
Make a list of things or people you are grateful for



#### Learn

Learn something new  
Learn a new skill  
Learn a new fact  
Watch a tutorial video



#### Mend

Repair something in the house  
Repair your bike / car / scooter  
Make something new  
Change a lightbulb  
Decorate a room



#### Mind

Daydream  
Meditate  
Pray  
Reflect  
Think  
Try relaxation exercises  
Practise yoga



#### Music

Listen to music you like  
Find some new music to listen to  
Turn on the radio  
Make some music  
Sing a song  
Play an instrument  
Listen to a podcast



#### Nature

Try some gardening  
Plant something  
Do some pruning  
Mow the lawn  
Pick flowers  
Buy flowers  
Go for a walk in nature  
Sit in the sun



#### Plan

Set a goal  
Create a budget  
Make a 5 year plan  
Make a 'to do' list  
Make a 'bucket list'  
Make a shopping list



#### Read

Read a favourite book  
Read a new book  
Read the newspaper  
Read your favourite website



#### Schedule

Get up extra early  
Stay up late  
Sleep in late  
Tick something off your 'to do' list



#### Self care

Take a bath  
Take a shower  
Wash your hair  
Give yourself a facial  
Trim your nails  
Sunbathe (wear sunscreen!)  
Take a nap



#### Try something new

Try a new food  
Listen to some new music  
Watch a new TV show or movie  
Wear some new clothes  
Read a new book  
Do something spontaneous  
Express yourself



#### Watch

Watch a movie  
Watch a TV show  
Watch a YouTube video



#### Write

Write a letter with compliments  
Write a letter to your politician  
Write an angry letter  
Write a grateful letter  
Write a 'thank you' card  
Write a journal / diary  
Write your CV  
Start writing a book

APPENDIX 2: PERMA – Questions You Can Ask Yourself to Promote Wellbeing

<p>Positive Emotion</p>	<p>What’s going well at present?            What positive/healthy experiences can you plan to do today? (e.g. reading, music, food, games, exercise, meditation, learning, gardening etc etc).            What can you be grateful for today?            What small act of kindness can you do for someone else today? This week?            Who or what inspires you?            What can you do for amusement today?            How can you achieve a moment of calm?            Who do you feel love for? How can that inform your behaviour today?            What experience/activity/food/drink can you savour today?            Do you have a pet you can spend time with?</p>
<p>Engagement</p>	<p>What absorbs you?            What are your strengths?            How can you use one or more of your strengths today?            What can you achieve today through the exercise of one or more of your strengths?            What can you explore with curiosity today?            What gives you enjoyment?</p>
<p>Relationships</p>	<p>Who can you connect with today (in reality, over the telephone, online)?            In what way could you make a small, positive difference to someone else?            How can you show interest in another person or their work/hobbies/family etc?            How can you show kindness to, or simply be with, an animal?</p>
<p>Meaning</p>	<p>What do you see as your purpose? (this doesn’t always come readily to mind for people, so don’t worry if it doesn’t!)            How can you pursue this purpose today?            What small part can you play in contributing towards something bigger (e.g. community)?            What is the one thing that you can do today that the world needs?            What are your values (e.g. kindness, consideration, honesty, respect, contribution)?            What goals can you set for today that are informed by your values?</p>
<p>Accomplishment</p>	<p>What goal or goals, no matter how small, can you achieve today?            What challenge can you take on today?            How can you invest in your development today?            How might you go about it? What possible options can you think of?            What will you do?</p>

### APPENDIX 3: Psychological First Aid

<b>Increase sense of safety</b>	Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Properly dispose of used tissues. Cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, arm, or elbow if you don't have a tissue. Clean your hands after coughing or sneezing. Stay at home if you are sick. Avoid contact with those who are sick. Clean and disinfect objects or surfaces that may have come into contact with germs.
<b>Stay connected</b>	Seek support from family, friends, mentors, clergy, and those who are in similar circumstances. Be flexible and creative in accessing support via phone, email, text messaging, and video calls.
<b>Cultivate calmness</b>	Realise that it is understandable to feel anxious and worried about what may happen, especially when many aspects of life are being affected. If you find that you are getting more stressed by watching the news, reduce your exposure, particularly prior to sleep. While circumstances may be stressful and beyond your control, you can try to offset them with positive calming activities. Practice slow, steady breathing and muscle relaxation, as well as any other actions that are calming for you (yoga, exercise, music, keeping the mind occupied).
<b>Improve your sense of control</b>	Accept circumstances that cannot be changed and focus on what you can alter. Modify your definition of a "good day" to meet the current reality of the situation. Problem-solve and set achievable goals within the new circumstances in your life.
<b>Remain hopeful</b>	Look for opportunities to practise being more patient or kind with yourself, or to see the situation as an opportunity to learn or build strengths. Celebrate successes, find things to be grateful about, and take satisfaction in completing tasks, even small ones. Give yourself small breaks from the stress of the situation by doing something you enjoy. Draw upon your spirituality, those who inspire you, or your personal beliefs and values.

APPENDIX 4: Worry decision tree

Use This Decision Tree To Help You Notice 'Real Problem' Vs. 'Hypothetical Worry'

