



City of
Stoke-on-Trent

**Children & Family Services
Educational Psychology Service**

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Look after your mental health - informed by the psychological research community

It is normal to feel worried, stressed and anxious when we are faced with uncertain situations, but the sooner we acknowledge and learn to take care of our mental health, the healthier and better equipped we'll be to cope with the situation we're having to face.

Information and news

- 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/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response> and NHS common questions: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>
- Avoid excessively checking social media and the news. Seek information updates at specific times during the day once or twice. Identify reliable sources of information (such as the WHO and medical sources, see above) rather than relying purely on social media or news media.
- Try moving key social media and news apps (that are particularly prone to sensationalism) away from the home-screen of your phone or disabling them for a while and turn off notifications from key apps.

Talking to your children

- During times of stress and crisis, it is common for children to seek more attachment and be more demanding on parents. Discuss coronavirus with your Children in honest and age-appropriate information. If your children have concerns, addressing those together may ease their anxiety. Children will observe adults' behaviours and emotions for cues on how to manage their own emotions during difficult times.
- 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. Detailed advice here: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/talking-to-your-children-scary-world-news>

Looking ahead/Hope

- Look for opportunities to help others: Acts of benevolence, charity and humanity help to restore positivity about the world. Focus on the *positives* in the situation, the people helping in hospitals, schools, communities, i.e. community groups springing up in the UK, Project Hope- <https://www.projecthope>.
- Look ahead to a time when things will gradually improve as the conditions become more normalised. Start to think and plan what you might do in the future, things to look forward to.
- Focusing on the altruistic reasons for social distancing, quarantine or isolation can also help reduce psychological distress. Remember that by taking such measures, you are reducing the possibility of transmitting coronavirus and protecting those who are most vulnerable.

- Try to move away from reading and talking about statistics on deaths and try to focus on number of recoveries and success stories.

Structure your day

- Create a new daily routine that prioritises looking after yourself. Try reading more or watching movies, having an exercise routine, try new relaxation techniques, or find new knowledge on the internet. Try and rest and view this as a new if unusual experience, that might have its benefits.
- Make time to do things at home that have made you and your family feel better in other stressful situations, such as reading, watching films, listening to music, playing games, exercising, or engaging in religious activities (i.e. prayer, participating in services on the Internet).
- Provide opportunities for physical exercise if possible (i.e. Wii, gardening). Generally, 20 minutes of exercise a day can also help lift your mood via the release of endorphins, as well as reducing feelings of tension. Think about watching exercise YouTube videos or download a new exercise app.

Feelings and Anxiety

- Recognise that feelings such as loneliness, boredom, fear of contracting disease, anxiety, stress, and panic are normal reactions to a stressful situation such as a coronavirus. It's important to acknowledge these feelings.
- Try alternative ways of making contact with others (i.e. phone calls, text messages, video chat and social media to access social support networks). If you're feeling sad or anxious, use these conversations as an opportunity to discuss your experience and associated emotions. This may help you feel more grounded and remind you that there are people in your life who you can connect with.
- Try not to catastrophise; instead focus on what you can do and accept the things you can't change. You may also choose to download smartphone applications that deliver mindfulness and relaxation exercises or refer to websites below.
- If you have panic attacks or flashbacks, it might help to plan a 'safe space' in your home that you'll go to. You can also find ways to comfort yourself if you're feeling anxious. For example, there are games and puzzles you can use to distract yourself, and breathing exercises which may help.
- The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) has more information on how to cope if you're feeling anxious about coronavirus. <https://www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/2020/28-february-coronavirus-anxiety-how-to-cope-if-you-re-feeling-anxious-about-the-outbreak/>
- Some mental health difficulties can cause difficult feelings or behaviours to do with washing or hygiene. If you experience this, you might find it hard to hear advice about washing your hands. If this is making you feel stressed or anxious, here are some things you could try:
 - Don't keep re-reading the same advice if this is unhelpful for you.
 - Let other people know you're struggling. For example, you could ask them not to remind you to wash your hands.
 - Breathing exercises can help you cope and feel more in control. You can find a simple breathing exercise on the NHS website. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/ways-relieve-stress/>
 - Mind pages on relaxation also have some exercises you can try, and other relaxation tips. <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/relaxation/relaxation-tips/>
 - Set limits, like washing your hands for the recommended 20 seconds. Plan something to do after washing your hands. This could help distract you and change your focus.

A long gap from work and other meaningful activities interrupts your daily routine and may result in feelings of sadness or low mood. Extended periods of time spent at home can also cause feelings of boredom and loneliness. Loneliness and isolation can have a significant impact on mental health.

- Spending time alone can be rewarding. Having or finding a sense of purpose is likely to be helpful during the isolation and quarantine period i.e. gardening, DIY, online learning, projects, learn new skills. Focus on the pleasure the activity gives you and the fact that being alone can be a positive thing.
- Reach out to those you know who are in a similar situation if in isolation. Facebook groups have already formed to facilitate communication and support people asked to quarantine.
- Variety is important, and it might also be helpful to engage in other creative pursuits and hobbies that can be done on your own away from screens (and especially away from social media).
- In close proximity with others reduce conflict if possible. Try to have some time away from each other. If you start to feel that a situation is likely to escalate, it is a good idea to take at least a 15-minute timeout. Sit in separate rooms and let everyone calm down. Normally after 15 minutes, the reason for the argument does not seem as important.

Getting help:

If you are concerned that you are developing a mental health problem you should [seek the advice and support of your GP](#) as a matter of priority. If you are in distress and need immediate help and are unable to see a GP, you should visit [your local A&E](#).

- You can use MIND information page to find the right service: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helplines/> or Call the Mind infoline on 0300 123 3393 (UK landline calls are charged at local rates, and charges from mobile phones will vary considerably). Or email info@mind.org.uk.
- The Help Hub will be open next week supporting those in isolation: <https://www.thehelpclub.co.uk/>
- If you're experiencing a mental health problem or supporting someone else, you can call [SANEline](#) on 0300 304 7000 (4.30pm–10.30pm every day).
- If you're under 35 and struggling with suicidal feelings, or concerned about a young person who might be struggling, you can call [Papyrus HOPELINEUK](#) on 0800 068 4141 (weekdays 10am-10pm, weekends 2pm-10pm and bank holidays 2pm–10pm), email pat@papyrus-uk.org or text 07786 209 697.
- For support in a crisis, Text Shout to 85258. If you're experiencing a personal crisis, are unable to cope and need support. Shout can help with urgent issues such as suicidal thoughts, abuse or assault, self-harm, bullying.
- Samaritans-24 hour confidential listening and support for anyone who needs it. (Adults included.) www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help-you/contact-us -jo@samaritans.org, Phone 116 123 (24 hours)
- YoungMinds Crisis Messenger provides free, 24/7 crisis support across the UK if you are experiencing a mental health crisis- <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/get-urgent-help/youngminds-crisis-messenger/> If you need urgent help text YM to 85258 Texts are free from EE, O2, Vodafone, 3, Virgin Mobile, BT Mobile, GiffGaff, Tesco Mobile and Telecom Plus.

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-you-re-anxious-about-coronavirus/>

If the current news on coronavirus (COVID-19) is making children feel anxious, concerned or stressed, here is a website from Young Minds that may be helpful (***bullet points can all be clicked on for more information***).

References

- Coping with life in isolation and confinement during the Covid-19 pandemic by Nathan Smith and Emma Barrett, University of Manchester, <https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/coping-life-isolation-and-confinement-during-covid-19-pandemic> accessed 18/03.20
- Mental Health Foundation, <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak>, accessed 17th March 2020