

Mental Health and Wellbeing Resources Pack: Support for individuals & businesses

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1. What is mental health?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines mental health as “a state of wellbeing in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”. In WHO’s constitution, it is clear that mental health is an integral part of people’s overall health and therefore it is important to not only address the needs of individuals with defined mental disorders (depression, anxiety disorder, conduct disorder, bipolar disorder and psychosis), but also to safeguard and promote the mental health of all people.

2. How can a pandemic affect people’s mental health?

During a pandemic it may be necessary for an individual to have prolonged or intermittent periods of isolation to protect themselves from transmission of a virus or disease. Studies have found that humans require frequent social contact to stay happy and healthy - this need intensifies during crisis events. Prolonged periods of social isolation can therefore negatively impact an individual’s mental health leading to depression and emotional distress.

Even in cases where an individual can self-isolate with others, the feelings of lack of control, isolation and ‘cabin fever’ can be powerful. Emotional distress is common both during quarantine and the period that follows*

**Douglas, Pamela & Douglas, David & Harrigan, Daniel & Douglas, Kathleen. (2009). Preparing for pandemic influenza and its aftermath: Mental health issues considered. International journal of emergency mental health. 11. 137-44*

According to the United Nations’ Inter-Agency Standing Committee, during the current COVID-19 quarantine people may :

- Feel stressed or worried about becoming ill, due to the contagious nature of the virus and the 14-day incubation period
- Feel stressed or worried when exhibiting symptoms of common illnesses, which can be mistaken for those of COVID-19
- Fear being separated from loved ones, losing loved ones and feel powerless in protecting them
- Fear losing their jobs and livelihoods
- Experience feelings of helplessness, boredom, loneliness and depression due to being isolated.

Frontline workers (doctors, nurses, pharmacists, ambulance drivers etc.) may also experience additional stressors such as:

- Fear of infecting loved ones and falling ill themselves
- Stigmatisation due to working with COVID-19 patients
- Stress caused by extremely high demands in the workplace and long working hours.

The impact on mental health can continue to be seen after the passing of a pandemic. This can include individuals exhibiting symptoms of PTSD, increased stress, anxiety, depression and other mental health disorders. Fear of stigma, social exclusion and discrimination may be experienced by individuals who are from, or perceived to be from, areas or countries where the virus originated.*

**Douglas, Pamela & Douglas, David & Harrigan, Daniel & Douglas, Kathleen. (2009). Preparing for pandemic influenza and its aftermath: Mental health issues considered. International journal of emergency mental health. 11. 137-44*

There is also some evidence showing the negative long-term consequences of quarantine including substance abuse and alcohol dependency. WHO have raised awareness on this and advise against excessive consumption of alcohol.

3. Guidance for individuals

It is important to remember that people deal with things in different ways. Everyone is experiencing their own challenges during this time and will need to find what works [best](#) for them in terms of self-care. [Guidance](#) and [advice](#) has been issued to the public to support their mental health and wellbeing and recommendations include:

Connecting with others and talking about your worries

This could be talking with friends and family in your household via phone call or digital channels, or reaching out to [specialist helplines](#) for support.

Looking after your body

This includes maintaining a healthy diet, [staying active](#) and sleeping well. The WHO have released [food and nutrition](#) tips, as well as tips on [staying active](#) during quarantine. [BlindAlive](#) also have a suite of audio exercise programmes for the visually impaired. Guidance is also available via the NHS' Every Mind Matter's [sleep page](#) for people experiencing trouble sleeping.

Looking after your mind

Keeping an active mind during quarantine is important to avoid any overthinking. This could include doing activities such as reading, writing, drawing or painting amongst others; further tips and tools can be found [here](#). Staffordshire University have an extended activity menu which you can access [here](#) (pages 3-6). Mindfulness is also a useful practice which can help reduce worrying and anxiety; the NHS provides further details on mindfulness [here](#). A series of mindful exercises and games for children can also be seen [here](#).

Staying on top of difficult feelings

Feeling concerned during the coronavirus outbreak is completely normal. However, some individuals may experience intense anxiety interfering with their day to-day activities - in these instances the 'AWARE' [technique](#) can be used to manage this. There are many resources available to help manage unhelpful feelings, such as the "Every Mind Matters" [page](#); the breathing exercises for stress management on the NHS [page](#), and advice on coping with stress on the WHO's guidance [poster](#).

A self-isolation journal recovery pack can be found [here](#) with useful checklists and exercises designed to help identify coping strategies and distraction techniques.

During times of uncertainty it can be easy to feel powerless and anxious over the lack of control of events. The 'Circle of Influence and Control' is an effective tool which can be used to help manage these feelings. Manchester Metropolitan University have provided a short overview on how to use this which can be found [here](#).

Setting limits around news

The constant media coverage of COVID-19 can seem overwhelming and distressing. It is advisable not to spend an excessive amount of time monitoring the news and to only obtain information from credible, reputable sources. Do remember that the media will always put a negative slant on stories as this gains more attention, sells more papers and attracts more viewers - bad news is more profitable than good news.

For the latest information and advice on COVID-19, visit the [UK Government's website for Coronavirus](#) and the [NHS website](#). A WhatsApp Coronavirus Information Service is also available - to access the service, users will have to add the following number (+447860 064422) to their mobile phone contacts and message the word "hi" to this number. More details about the service can be viewed [here](#).

A visual resource to help people review the news can be found [here](#).

Setting goals and objectives

Setting specific personal goals can [motivate](#) individuals and offer a sense of 'something to look forward to'. By working through and achieving these goals, a person can feel more productive and have a [sense of purpose](#). Having a sense of purpose has been known to assist individuals in overcoming stress, depression, anxiety, and other psychological disorders*

*Schippers MC, Ziegler N. *Life Crafting as a Way to Find Purpose and Meaning in Life*. *Front Psychol*. 2019;10:2778. Published 2019 Dec 13. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02778

Maintaining a sense of hope, positive thinking and helping others

[Helping others](#) and volunteering one's time can be extremely rewarding and a highly effective way of improving a person's mood. This could be as simple as reaching out to friends and family to help or volunteering at local or national organisations. Volunteering opportunities and information can be found using the links below:

- [Do-it.org](#) - live volunteering opportunities across the country with different charities
- [Reach Volunteering](#) - skills based volunteering as a charity trustee
- [Charity Job](#) - live volunteering opportunities with different charities
- [NCVO](#) - connect volunteers with opportunities and run volunteer centres
- [Charity Choice](#) - list of registered charities in the UK
- [Charity Commission](#) - website to search charities and income.

Government guidance on how to volunteer safely can be seen [here](#).

There are a number of websites dedicated to publishing solely positive news stories, such as [Good News Network](#), which are often overlooked by the mainstream media. Reading these can help put things into perspective and help an individual maintain a more positive outlook. There are also many podcasts which focus on mindset, wellbeing and motivation which can be helpful for a daily boost of positivity and calm.

Maintaining a positive work/life balance

Working from home can present its own challenges, especially for those who are doing this for the first time. It can be very easy for the lines between work life and personal life to blur, with employees feeling that they can never 'switch off' and relax.

Some suggestions for working from home include:

- *Creating a workspace* – Setting up a defined workspace can help individuals easily get into a working frame of mind. Distractions will be minimised and the workstation can be left behind at the end of the day to signal the end of the working day. This can also serve as a visual cue for children to understand when parents are

working and when they are not.

- *Taking breaks* – It can be easier to work longer hours (with fewer breaks) when at home as there is no need to 'leave the office' to go home. Regular breaks should be scheduled in to leave the workspace and do an alternate activity for a few moments, such as making a drink, some light exercise or meditation. Designated lunch breaks should be pencilled in to diaries and adhered to – this allows a person to refresh and recharge for the afternoon ahead.
- *Being active* – Working from home means that individuals no longer have the physical activity associated with the morning and afternoon commute. Exercise is well known to improve mood and reduce stress so it is advisable to keep active and move regularly when not working. There are many apps which can help people start exercising such the NHS ['Couch to 5K' app](#) and Youtube videos such as the Joe Wicks' series or 'Yoga with Adrienne'.
- *Connecting with colleagues* – Use emails, phone calls or video calls to reach out regularly to colleagues and to see how they are. There are many alternative ways of staying in touch such as virtual lunches or virtual after work socials. Just because a physical face-to-face is not feasible at the moment doesn't mean you need to be isolated from your team. If you are a freelancer, reach out to your network connections or LinkedIn contacts or access the support available via the [Leapers community](#).

Additional resources

- [Safety and Health Practitioner's guide to home working](#)
- [Mental Health UK's – "Looking after children and yourself while working from home"](#)
- [Mental Health First Aid England's - Supporting your mental health while working from home guide](#)
- [NHS' 5 way to wellbeing resource pack](#)
- [Homenauts](#) - free resources for better mental health during the pandemic of COVID-19, including information on how sailors, arctic explorers and astronauts deal with being physically away from others for a long period of time

4. Guidance for businesses and employers

Guidance for line managers

In a time of crisis, leadership plays an important role in the way that an organisation responds. This section includes advice for line managers to help them support the mental health and wellbeing of their team.

Communicate

To reduce the sense of isolation when working from home, managers need to ensure the lines of communication are always open. It is important to keep staff regularly updated regarding the business' response to the pandemic, together with any appropriate government or public health guidelines. Line managers should:

- Encourage people to talk about mental health and provide a non-judgmental space for them to do so
- Actively reach out colleagues – always remember to [ask twice](#)
- Listen and show empathy – once a person knows they are being given the space and time to talk, they will
- Take appropriate action if you think someone is at risk of harming themselves or is at risk of harm from someone else

For more information on how to manage conversations around mental health, see [here](#).

Involve the team

Line managers should [engage](#) with staff and empower them to contribute ideas which may help improve operations during this period of disruption. Software such as Skype or Zoom can help promote communication and team building by allowing all of the team members to be visible to one another during a meeting or conversation.

Activities such as the [“How to Draw Toast”](#) game can help teams unpack complex problems in a more collaborative and effective manner by understanding that having different views can have a positive effect and learning that combining features can lead to a great system.

Be agile and flexible

Business operations will need to be flexible and adaptable during the pandemic. Each person’s situation will be different and line managers should endeavour to accommodate appropriate working arrangements where possible, (such as employees with young children or those who care for family members for example).

Define objectives and expectations

Managers should provide clear, attainable goals for their team members and define what is expected of them. This will minimise uncertainty in terms of individuals’ roles and responsibilities and therefore reduce stress and anxiety. This may be no different to their usual work, but it will help them with structuring their day and provide a confidence boost when goals are achieved.

Signpost to mental health support

Line managers should look out for signs of emotional distress and refer staff to more structured support where necessary (either internal or external – see Section 6 in this document). In the event that someone is in urgent need of help, direct the individual to the Samaritans (08457 90 90 90) whose lines are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, or any [other crisis helpline and listening service](#).

The British Safety Council offers a free [Mental Health Awareness course](#) providing practical skills to spot some of the signs of mental health disorders and the appropriate steps to take; they also offer free online courses on managing [mental health](#) and [stress](#) within teams. The mental health charity, Mind, have also published a [guide](#) on how to use wellness action plans to support the mental health of team members.

The pandemic may impact a furloughed employee’s mental health more than one who is continuing to work. Additional measures should be put in place to support these individuals during the furlough period such as regular wellbeing calls, weekly virtual social activities and encouraging the use of the Employee Assistance Programme, if available. City Mental Health Alliance UK have created a useful guide on this, [here](#).

Additional Resources

- [Mental Health at Work Toolkit](#) (includes resources for specific sectors i.e. construction, finance, education, rail industry etc.)
- [Mates in Mind’s “Making workforce mental health work” briefing tool](#)
- [CBI’s mental health and wellbeing in a crisis factsheet](#)
- [Business in the Community’s Suicide prevention toolkit](#) (includes link to domestic abuse toolkit and others)
- [CIPD’s Health and Wellbeing report 2020](#) (Chapter 5: How do employers manage employee health and wellbeing?)
- [Unilever’s line manager mental wellbeing training](#)

Guidance for businesses and company actions

For businesses who do not already have a policy in place, now is the time to set out a formal approach to staff mental health and wellbeing across all areas. This will create a culture of ‘open-ness’ where staff feel safe to share their thoughts and can support one another without judgment.

These next steps could include:

- A. Creating a staff page or forum on the company intranet where employees can stay connected
- B. Creating a folder on the company shared drive with a list of mental health resources and support. (Any new folder or page created should be easily accessible by staff who have been furloughed.)
- C. Inviting conversations between staff and management teams to develop a [mental health strategy](#)
- D. Training and [Implementing Mental Health First Aiders](#), (this may not be possible in the current environment, due to COVID-19 restrictions), establishing [Mental Health Champions](#) in the workplace, as well as setting up smaller scale "Time to Talk" sessions between line managers and staff and/or between peer groups
- E. Arranging for mental health awareness training and support for both managers and team members
- F. Investing in an [Employee Assistance Programme](#) which can provide access to counselling and additional resources. To help small businesses (1-100 employees) during COVID-19, 87percent are offering free access to their confidential employee [mental wellbeing platform](#) until the end of June 2020 (Free access codes are also provided to those aged 18-24).

Some of these actions will require additional time and cost to roll out on a larger scale, however, the investment will demonstrate the company's commitment to the wellbeing of its employees.

Additional resources

- ACAS – Framework for positive mental health

5. Social media assets

In light of the effects of COVID-19 on mental health, several organisations have launched awareness campaigns that companies can become involved with.

- [Every Mind Matters campaign](#)
Public Health England has launched this campaign to encourage adults to look after their mental health, using the "Every Mind Matters" platform and its self-care resources. The campaign resources include a PR toolkit with suggested social media posts, accompanying graphics, web banners, email signatures and others.
- [Let's talk loneliness](#)
This government campaign has been launched to tackle loneliness during the coronavirus lockdown. The campaign includes a downloadable toolkit and resources.
- [WHO #HealthyAtHome](#)
The WHO has released guidance to support mental health during the social distancing period, as well as published social graphics which can be used to raise awareness

A business may also choose to create their own bespoke campaign, with tailored graphics and region or sector specific content, to promote their mental health and wellbeing approach in the workplace.

Recommendations – ideas for social posts

Social posts:

- With information on support available in the region of interest
- With information on support available in sector(s) of interest
- Explaining mental health

- Explaining how the pandemic can affect people's mental health
- With tips and tools available to improve mental health
- With quotes from credible sources on mental health
- Case studies from staff or clients having implemented successful mental health strategies.

The above information could take several formats including blog posts, articles, graphics, fact sheets, gifs or infographics amongst others.

6. Support resources

General

- [Government guidance on the mental health and wellbeing aspects of coronavirus](#)
- [NHS Mental health helplines directory](#)
- [NHS Mental health app directory](#)
- [Samaritans COVID-19 page](#)
- [SHOUT - free, confidential support, 24/7 via text.](#)
- [MHFA England's resources hub](#)
- [Trauma Response Network](#)

To find mental health support services near you, see [here](#). A range of self-help leaflets is also available [here](#).

For parents / carers

- [UNICEF Coronavirus portal](#)
- [Young Mind's "talking to your child about coronavirus" blog](#)
- [WHO's "helping children deal with stress" poster](#)
- [Mindheart's mini COVID-19 e-book for children under 7](#)
- [Nosycrow's e-book for older children](#)

For young people

- [Government guidance on supporting young people's mental health](#)
- [NHS's Support finder tool](#)
- [Kooth – free online support for young people](#)
- [Young Mind's "Looking after yourself" page](#)
- [Youth Access's resource page](#)

For older adults

- [Age UK – COVID-19 support page \(0800 678 1602 – lines are open every day, 8am to 7pm\)](#)
- [Silverline's helpline](#)
- [Information for people affected by dementia - Alzheimer's society page](#)

Bereavement support

- [NHS – bereavement support page](#)
- [Cruse's dealing with bereavement and grief page](#)
- [The Compassionate Friends offer support to families after the death of a child of any age and from any cause: \[tcf.org.uk\]\(http://tcf.org.uk\) \(0345 123 2304\)](#)
- [Tommy's Organisation](#)

Abuse and Domestic violence support

- [Government guidance and support available](#)
- [National Domestic Abuse Helpline \(free, and in confidence, 24 hours a day on 0808 2000 247\)](#)
- [Staying safe during COVID-19 – a guide for victims and survivors of domestic abuse](#)
- [Business in the community's domestic abuse toolkit for employers](#)

Addiction support

- [Double impact's support page for people in recovery from addiction](#)
- [Alcohol health alliance UK resource](#)
- [UK addiction treatment centres resources](#)

For people severely affected by mental illness

- [Rethink's blog](#)
- [Mental Health org's "Living with the pandemic if you already have mental health problems" page](#)

LGBT support

- [NHS – Support Group Directory](#)
- [LGBT foundation](#)
- [Mind Out](#)
- [The Trevor Project](#)

Healthcare workers support

- [NHS Support \(helpline and apps\)](#)
- [Health Education England's free eLearning](#)
- [Mental Health at Work's toolkit](#)
- [Doctor's Support Network](#)
- [Academy of Medical Royal Colleges – resource page](#)
- [Psychology Tools' directory of support available](#)
- [Intensive Care Society's resource pack](#)
- [Royal College of Nursing support page](#)
- [MIND's Support for people working in healthcare and emergency services](#)
- [Community Care's emotional resilience guide](#)
- [Skills for Care's personal resilience guide](#)

Support for people with disabilities

- [The Bunker Support group](#)
- [Contacts' helpline for parents and carers of a disabled child](#)
- [The Deaf Health Charity's Crisis Text Service](#)
- [Look UK's helpline](#) - 07464 351958 (advice, emotional support and information for young people with visual impairments, their families, parents and carers)
- [Guide Dog's resource page and helpline](#)

Support for autistic people

- [NHS' Directory of support available](#)

- [National Autistic Society](#)
- [Autism Society of Minnesota Guide to Managing Self-Quarantine and Social Distancing](#)
- [Ambitious about Autism's resource page](#)



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