Looking after your mental health during COVID-19
Introduction

When situations like COVID-19 arise, it can be a difficult and worrying time for all of us, and will affect each of our lives.

With information and guidance changing daily it can prove difficult to know what to do next, and managing new challenges whilst making sure you keep your feet on the ground can easily take a toll on our mental wellbeing.

Community has campaigned for years on the importance of mental health and ensuring everyone who experiences a mental health problem gets the support they need. With COVID-19 affecting all aspects of our members’ lives we know you will need even more support in protecting and maintaining good mental health.

This guide outlines ways to take care of your mental health, and offers simple steps to consider throughout the day to help you and those around you manage their mental health and wellbeing.

We know that it’s a really stressful time for the UK at the moment, but as a Community member you can count on us to lend a hand and offer you support. We’re in your corner.
Self-isolating

Having to self-isolate, if you’re working or not, can be a big shock to the system. Temporarily losing the freedom to leave your house at will could affect your mind’s ability to differentiate simple things like the flow of time and when to wake up and go to sleep. Here are a few tips to help you adjust to self-isolation:

Create a checklist


Keep your mind stimulated

It’s good to keep your mind active throughout the day - make sure you’re taking the time to do the things you enjoy such as reading, watching TV or exercising.

Bring the benefits of the outdoors, indoors

Something as simple as the amount of light in your home can affect your mood - the feeling of being outside can reduce feelings of stress or anger, and make you feel more relaxed. Make sure your home is filled with natural light and fresh air wherever possible, and if you live somewhere with a back garden then pop outside occasionally for a few deep breaths.

Stay active

Physical exercise has been proven to have wonderous effects on our mental health. You can find plenty of daily home workouts online for all ages and abilities. If you struggle with physical activity, a more mindful form of exercise like yoga or seated exercises could prove beneficial.
Working from home

It’s a common knowledge that a healthy work/life balance is crucial to your mental health, but what happens if work and life become one?

The latest Government advice is to work from home where possible, so here are some tips to help you adapt to your new workplace and maintain a healthy work/life balance:

Maintain your work hours

Having an office to travel back and forth from everyday creates the clear dividing lines between work and home that we need to switch off, but when that separation is removed it’s important to make sure your work doesn’t begin to creep into other aspects of your life. Defining a ‘shift’ at home sets clear stop/start times in your mind and help work stress and anxiety.

Create a workspace at home

Another tip to help you create clear lines between work and life is to dedicate a space in the home to work. Having somewhere to enter, leave and have breaks away from will keep you focussed during work and prevent the many distractions home working can present.

Start and end your day with a routine

How do we prevent the distractions of home working from taking away from our productivity? Make sure you have a routine in place to get you in and out of the chair every day.

Have a proper lunch break. Stop, make something nice to eat, and eat away from your work area and do an end of day email sweep to help your mouse move to the log off button. Find what helps your brain switch off and discipline yourself to do it.
Keeping updated

With information and advice changing by the hour, it’s important to know what we need to do to keep ourselves and our loved ones safe. It is important to find a balance of being informed and up to date on the news, but to limit your news intake if it is causing you stress. Here are a few tips to help out:

**Find a good news source and stick with it**

In a sea of clickbait and fake news, it’s easy for the ‘fight or flight’ part of our brain to start working overtime, this can often fuel anxiety. Find a trustworthy news source that provides good quality information about the virus and can help you feel more in control (we recommend using the official government website, you’ll find more details at the back of this guide).

**Set time limits on your digital life**

Set regimented time during the day to go online to keep in touch with loved ones and update yourself on the latest advice and guidance. Remember to regularly assess your social media activity - ask yourself if anything needs to be adjusted. Are there particular accounts or people that are increasing your worry or anxiety? Consider muting or unfollowing accounts or hashtags that cause you to feel anxious.
Find the right kind of content

The internet can be a handy tool to help you relax and stay calm, create bookmarks to your favourite websites or content creators online to visit when you begin to feel overwhelmed.

Stay connected

Humans are social creatures, our mental wellbeing relies on our ability to keep in touch with one another. Here are a few tips to keep in touch with your colleagues and loved ones:

If you’re working from home

Working from home in the digital age means you can replicate a large portion of your working day from home. If you’re part of a team call them regularly to keep the work moving, if you’re a solo worker schedule a morning and afternoon call with your manager to set yourself for the tasks ahead.

If you’re self-isolating

If you’re self-isolating with other people, make time throughout the day to pop the kettle on and catch up. If you have to keep away from your loved ones then there are plenty of ways to keep in touch without making physical contact. Community has partnered with Learn My Way to offer a digital skills course on digital communication, as a Community member you can access this training at:

community-tu.org/coronavirus-training-members
Resources

Government website: www.gov.uk/coronavirus

Mind: www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing

Mental Health Foundation: www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak

Acas: www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus

NHS medical: www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19

NHS exercise: www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/10-minute-workouts

Community’s own guidance: community-tu.org/coronavirus
We are Community.
The modern union for a changing world.

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