



Mental Health

Step Change in Safety understands that mental health is an important aspect of everyone's overall health and well being. The mental health awareness courses that we have run have been very well received and we were therefore very disappointed to have to cancel the ongoing programme we had planned because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst many member companies will have put measures in place to support their colleagues, we wanted to provide something to help people access accurate information and other support that is available.

It is important to recognise that we all have mental health all of the time. That it is important to look after yourself and others at this time. There is nothing to be embarrassed, or should we be surprised about in terms of experiencing dips in mental health during difficult times.

The COVID-19 outbreak is going to have an impact on everyone's daily lives, as the government and the NHS take necessary steps to manage the outbreak, reduce transmission and treat those who need medical attention. During this time, you may be bored, frustrated or lonely. You may also feel low, worried, anxious, or be concerned about your health or that of those close to you. Everyone reacts differently to events and changes in the way that we think, feel and behave vary between different people and over time. It's important that you take care of your mind as well as your body and to get further support if you need it.

What can help your mental health and wellbeing?

Consider how to connect with others: Maintaining relationships with people you trust is important for your mental wellbeing. Think about how you can stay in touch with friends and family via telephone, video calls or social media instead of meeting in person – whether it's people you normally see often or connecting with old friends.

Help and support others: Think about how you could help those around you – it could make a big difference to them and can make you feel better too. Could you message a friend or family member nearby? And try to be accepting of other people's concerns, worries or behaviours.

Talk about your worries: It is quite common to feel worried, scared or helpless about the current situation. Remember that this is a difficult time for everyone and sharing how you are feeling and the things you are doing to cope with family and friends can help them too. If you don't feel able to do that, there are people you can speak to via helplines or you could find support groups online to connect with.

Look after your physical wellbeing: Your physical health has a big impact on how you are feeling emotionally and mentally. At times like these, it can be easy to fall into unhealthy patterns of behaviour which in turn can make you feel worse. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, drink enough water, exercise inside where possible and outside once a day, and try to avoid smoking, alcohol and drugs.



Look after your sleep: Feeling anxious or worried can make it harder to get a good night's sleep. Good-quality sleep makes a big difference to how you feel mentally and physically, so it's important to get enough. Try to maintain regular sleeping patterns and keep good sleep hygiene practices – like avoiding screens before bed, cutting back on caffeine and creating a restful environment.

Try to manage difficult feelings: Many people find the news about COVID-19 concerning. However, some people may experience such intense anxiety that it becomes a problem. Try to focus on the things you can control, including where you get information from and actions to make yourself feel better prepared. It is okay to acknowledge some things that are outside of your control right now but constant repetitive thoughts about the situation which lead you to feel anxious or overwhelmed are not helpful.

Manage your media and information intake: 24-hour news and constant social media updates can make you more worried. If it is affecting you, try to limit the time you spend watching, reading, or listening to media coverage of the outbreak. It may help to only check the news at set times or limiting to a couple of checks a day.

Get the facts: Gather high-quality information that will help you to accurately determine your own or other people's risk of contracting COVID-19 so that you can take reasonable precautions. Find a credible source you can trust and fact check information that you get from newsfeeds, social media or from other people. Think about how possibly inaccurate information could affect others too. Try not to share information without fact-checking against credible sources.

Think about your new daily routine: Life is changing for us all for a while. Think about how you can adapt and create positive new routines – try to engage in useful activities (such as cleaning, cooking or exercise) or meaningful activities (such as reading or calling a friend). You might find it helpful to write a plan for your day or your week. Keep your mind active: Read, write, play games, do crossword puzzles, sudokus, jigsaws or drawing and painting. Find something that works for you.

Do things you enjoy: When you are anxious, lonely or low you may do things that you usually enjoy less often, or not at all. Focussing on your favourite hobby, learning something new or simply taking time to relax indoors should give you some relief from anxious thoughts and feelings and can boost your mood. There are lots of free tutorials and courses online and people are coming up with innovative online solutions like online pub quizzes and streamed live music concerts. Set goals: Setting goals and achieving them gives a sense of control and purpose – think about things you want or need to do that you can still do at home. It could be watching a film, reading a book or learning something online.

Take time to relax and focus on the present: This can help with difficult emotions, worries about the future, and can improve wellbeing. Relaxation techniques can also help some people to deal with feelings of anxiety.

Financial concerns: You may be worried about work and money if you have to stay home – these issues can have a big impact on your mental health. For guidance on what your rights are at work, what benefits you are entitled to and what further support is available please see below.

Resources

Mental Health First Aid England - <https://mhfaengland.org/>

Government - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing>

NHS - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/>

Mind - <https://www.mind.org.uk/>

Every Mind Matters - <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>

Samaritans – <https://www.samaritans.org/>

You can contact NHS 111 if you need urgent care but it's not life threatening.

Citizens Advice - <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>

National Debt - <https://www.nationaldebtline.org/>