

## 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:

### 1. 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.

### 2. 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.

### 3. 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](#).

### 4. 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](#).

## 5. 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](#).

## 6. 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

## 7. 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.

## 8. 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 penciled 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 as 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

## Guidance for businesses and employers

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:

1. Creating a staff page or forum on the company intranet where employees can stay connected
2. 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.)

3. Inviting conversations between staff and management teams to develop a mental health strategy
4. 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
5. Arranging for mental health awareness training and support for both managers and team members
6. 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

The information provided is meant as a general guide only rather than advice or assurance. Growth Platform does not guarantee the accuracy or completeness of this information and professional guidance should be sought on all aspects of business planning and responses to the coronavirus. Use of this guide and toolkit are entirely at the risk of the user. Any hyperlinks from this document are to external resources not connected to Growth Platform and Growth Platform is not responsible for the content within any hyperlinked site.