

Caring for your wellbeing during COVID-19

During these uncertain times, the health, safety and wellbeing of our staff and the people we support is our top priority.

Supporting you through COVID-19

We recognise that these are stressful times for our staff. In response, we have prepared this handout to provide you with valuable information and tips to care for your wellbeing during the COVID-19 situation.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

If you require additional support, we encourage you to utilise our EAP, which is a free and confidential service for Challenge Community Services staff members and their families.

Our EAP provider NewPsych is offering face-to-face (with social distancing) and Telehealth consultations during this time. Contact NewPsych to speak with an EAP counsellor.

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Tips for coping

Practising self-care

To help encourage a positive frame of mind, it is important to look after yourself. Everybody practises self-care differently with some examples including:

- Maintaining good social connections and communicating openly with family and friends
- Making time for activities and hobbies you enjoy
- Keeping up a healthy lifestyle by eating a balanced diet, exercising regularly, getting quality sleep and avoiding the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs to cope with stress
- Practising relaxation, meditation and mindfulness to give your body a chance to settle and readjust to a calm state.

Coping with self-isolation

Maintain a positive outlook during periods of self-isolation by:

- Reminding yourself that this period of self-isolation is temporary
- Thinking of the benefits of self-isolation to the wider society, including slowing the spread of the virus and protecting those most vulnerable in your community
- Remaining mindful that medical and scientific experts are following strict protocols to contain the virus and treat those affected
- Ensuring you have access to accurate, reliable and up-to date information that communicates what is expected from you if you are in isolation.

(Reference: The Australian Psychological Society Limited (APS); 2020. Tips for coping with coronavirus anxiety.)

Exercising mindfulness

Mindfulness is a form of self-awareness training adapted from Buddhist mindfulness meditation. It has been adapted for use in treatment of depression, and for assisting with mood regulation.

We all have the capacity to be mindful. It simply involves cultivating our ability to pay attention in the present moment and allows us to disengage from mental "clutter" and to have a clear mind. It makes it possible for us to respond rather than react to situations, thus improving our decision making and potential for physical and mental relaxation.

One Minute Exercise

Sit in front of a clock or watch that you can use to time the passing of one minute. Your task is to focus your entire attention on your breathing, and nothing else, for the minute. Have a go - do it now.

Mindful Walking

While walking concentrate on the feel of the ground under your feet, your breathing while walking. Just observe what is around you as you walk, staying in the present.

Breathing Exercise

Stay with any distressing thoughts for a few moments, then as you let them float away, you gently redirect your full attention to your breathing. Pay attention to each breath in and out as they follow rhythmically one after the other. This will ground you in the present and help you to move into a state of awareness and stillness.

(Reference: Black Dog Institute; 2020. Mindfulness in everyday life.)

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Dealing with anxiety

Learn the facts

Constant media coverage about COVID-19 can keep us in a heightened state of anxiety. Try to limit media exposure and seek out factual information from sources such as the Australian Government's health alert or trusted organisations such as the World Health Organization.

Keep things in perspective

When we are stressed, it is easy to see things as worse than they really are. Rather than imagining the worst-case scenario and worrying about it, ask yourself:

- Am I getting ahead of myself, assuming something bad will happen when I really don't know the outcome? Remind yourself that the actual number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Australia is extremely low.
- Am I overestimating how bad the consequences will be? Remember, illness due to COVID-19 infection is usually mild and most people recover without needing specialised treatment.
- Am I underestimating my ability to cope? Sometimes thinking about how you would cope, even if the worst were to happen, can help you put things into perspective.

(Reference: The Australian Psychological Society Limited (APS); 2020. Maintaining your mental health during isolation.)

Structure your day

While in isolation it is beneficial to plan out your days to restore a sense of purpose and normality to your daily life. Schedule tasks such as cooking and laundry, as well as activities you enjoy to help you stick to your routine. Structuring activities around mealtimes and bedtime can also help you keep to your schedule while ensuring you eat regularly and get enough sleep.

Given the current need to practise social distancing and isolation, many people are also being encouraged to work from home where possible. Working from home can bring a whole new set of challenges and the need to provide structure to your day is even more important.

Some tips to help you have a sense of normality and work effectively from home are listed below.

- Change out of your pyjamas each morning
- Set up a dedicated workspace
- Set a strict schedule
- Limit distractions.

Staying connected

Positive social connections are essential for our mental health and can help us cope in times of stress. In the current crisis, we are being asked to distance ourselves from others so it is important that we maintain our social networks using available methods of communication.

This can be as simple as phoning a friend to share your experience, using videoconferencing technology to check in with a family member, or spending quality time with the people you live with.

Where to seek information

World Health Organization

The World Health Organization (WHO) is an agency of the United Nations responsible for international public health. Global information on COVID-19 is available on their website. www.who.int

Australian Government Department of Health

The Australian Government Department of Health is managing the COVID-19 outbreak in Australia. They are updating their website with the current situation, latest case numbers and related information. www.health.gov.au

State Health Authorities

New South Wales and Queensland Health provide advice and information for their residents, including information about COVID-19 testing and social distancing requirements. www.health.nsw.gov.au
www.health.qld.gov.au

Sources

Black Dog Institute; 2020.

Mindfulness in everyday life. www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/clinical-resources

The Australian Psychological Society Limited (APS); 2020. Maintaining your mental health during isolation.

The Australian Psychological Society Limited (APS); 2020. Tips for coping with coronavirus anxiety. www.psychology.org.au/COVID-19-Australians