

Psychological wellbeing during COVID-19:

Looking after yourself and your family



During the COVID-19 pandemic you may experience a range of thoughts, feelings and behaviours that cause you to feel stressed and worried. Don't underestimate your ability to cope. There are many things you can do to maintain your wellbeing during this time.

We are all coping with this extraordinary situation differently. There are a wide range of normal reactions including:

- › Feelings of sadness, distress, worry, confusion or anger
- › Feelings of helplessness, boredom, loneliness, and depression due to being isolated
- › Fear of falling ill and dying
- › Fear of losing livelihoods, not being able to work during isolation, and of being dismissed from work
- › Fear of being socially excluded/placed in quarantine

- › Fear of being separated from loved ones and caregivers due to quarantine
- › Concerns about protecting or caring for loved ones
- › A feeling of community spirit as we tackle this COVID-19 outbreak together
- › Feeling grateful that our health service is caring for us and that our governments are supporting our economy; and
- › Opening up supportive connections with our family and community by phone and video calls.

These are common responses to an extraordinary situation. Most people get through challenging times by drawing on their own strengths and the support of others.

Maintaining good mental health

- › Try to establish a routine for our 'new normal' with a focus on healthy eating, a good sleep pattern, and regular exercise.
- › Stay informed about COVID-19 and what you can do to stay safe. It also helps to talk with family and friends and to think about ways you can support each other.
- › Limit how much time you are spending accessing news and other media about COVID-19. Keeping informed about what is happening is important but constantly reading, listening or watching the news can make you feel more distressed and less able to cope.
- › Some members of our community will struggle more than others. You can help by checking in with those who may be more vulnerable, such as grandparents, elderly neighbours, or family or friends who live alone. Technology can really help in this – phone calls, emails, social media are different ways of connecting.
- › These are difficult times, so try to be kind to yourself and others. We don't have all the answers, and we have to live with uncertainty, which can be very difficult at times.
- › Use credible sources to get information such as www.covid19.act.gov.au and www.health.gov.au
- › Remember this is a temporary situation. As a community and a nation, we can all help keep our communities safe.

Maintaining good mental health while isolating or physically distancing

The rules and guidance about physical distancing and isolation are changing how we live and interact with each other. We may feel frustrated, distressed or overwhelmed in coping with isolation and being separated from family and friends. There are things we can try that might help with these feelings.

- › Keeping positive really helps. Remind yourself about how you have coped with other challenges, as this can reassure you that you have the resilience to cope with this situation.
- › If you live with others, it's important to try and be considerate of everyone's needs, including having some time alone through the day.
- › In confined households, you might not get on as well as you'd like all the time! If there are conflicts and arguments, try to resolve things as calmly and as soon as possible.
- › You might not be able to physically spend as much time with people, but you can remain connected with family and friends by phone, email and social media.
- › We all benefit from exercise. It can be more challenging to do this at home, but there are different things you can try such as floor exercises, dancing, yoga, exercise DVDs or online videos. Take advantage of any outdoor space you have. A backyard or balcony can be a great space for exercise.
- › You may consider meditation, contemplation and prayer.
- › Many of us will have new things we keep meaning to try – now might be a good time to start!

Strategies for supporting children at home

- › For parents and carers, talk clearly and calmly with children about what is happening. The *Emerging Minds* website has useful suggestions on how to talk to children about their feelings and about COVID-19.
- › Help create some structure in their daily routine (even if this is different from their usual). This could include learning, playing and relaxing. Where possible, maintain schoolwork, study, and routine activities.

- › Limit how much they access distressing news, social media or images, to prevent anxiety and help them to cope better.
- › Use video technology to help children maintain social connection with their friends and family.
- › Remember that children often take their emotional cues from the important adults in their lives, so how adults respond to the crisis is very important.
- › Feeling a loss of hope or interest in the future
- › Feeling aggressive and out of control
- › Feeling really anxious, panicky, and experiencing difficulties in calming yourself
- › Feeling like you want to avoid conversations with people
- › Feeling excessive guilt; and/or
- › Experiencing thoughts of harming yourself or others or ending your life.

When to seek additional support

If you find yourself:

- › Unable to do simple day-to-day tasks or to take pleasure from the things you usually enjoy

If you experience any of the responses listed, please seek professional help. Services are listed in the *Immediate Assistance* section below.

Some helpful online resources

Australian Red Cross – Looking after yourself and your family
www.redcross.org.au/get-help/emergencies/looking-after-yourself

Emerging Minds – Supporting children during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak
<https://emergingminds.com.au/>

For immediate assistance

National

Lifeline – 13 11 14
 BeyondBlue – 1300 224 636
 MensLine Australia – 1300 78 99 78
 Suicide Call Back Service – 1300 659 467
 Kids Helpline – 1800 551 800
 QLife – 1800 184 527
 COVID-19 Hotline – 1800 675 398

Canberra and Surrounding NSW

Your General Practitioner
 Canberra Health Services Access Mental Health – 1800 629 354
 Domestic Violence Crisis Service – 02 6280 0900 or 1800RESPECT

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