COVID-19
Wellbeing Support for Health and Social Care Professionals

You are NOT alone
This too, shall pass.

Introduction

This is a challenging time that we were not prepared for.

We have been isolated from our loved ones and for many of us, our call to care for others has never been louder.

We have been hearing applause, thanks and kind words for care staff from around the world, but it can still feel very lonely.

This booklet is aimed to provide a little bit of comfort, a few techniques and a bit of positivity for all those caring for others and putting their own lives on hold at this scary time.
Being kind to ourselves

Going back to basics...

The things that we do, every day, on ‘auto-pilot’, the mandatory, sometimes mundane things, do actually have an impact on our mental health. Let’s take brushing our teeth, for example. We don’t do it to make ourselves feel better mentally, but it does play a part in maintaining our mental wellbeing. How? Because if we stopped doing it, we would notice an impact on our mood and how we feel about ourselves. At the same time, we can change some of our daily activities to make them more enjoyable, and, by doing them regularly, we are looking after ourselves, both physically and mentally. Here are a few suggestions:

- Decluttering
- Reading
- Watch a film
- Crafts and DIY
- Support groups
- Listening to music
- Candles
- Time with pets
- Write yourself a letter
- Cook your favourite meal
- Crossword or puzzle
- Look at photos
- Write a diary or journal
- List your achievements
- Talk about your feelings
- Good sleep hygiene
- Social media break
- Learn something new
- Call a friend
- Volunteer
- Have a bath
- Exercise
- Take a break
- Meditate
- Gardening
- Cleaning
- Write a to-do list

The above suggestions are with the current COVID-19 restrictions in mind. There are still so many things we can do without leaving home!
Mindfulness is...

Paying attention in a particular way

- on purpose
- in the present moment
- non-judgmentally

Mindfulness invites us to notice the things we would not usually notice. We do not notice what is happening in the present, because we get absorbed in thinking about our past – and our future.

The way to learn and perfect mindfulness is to practice it and repeat it, as much as possible.

Do ever feel like you are on ‘automatic pilot’ sometimes? Going through your day, doing things like driving, eating, exercising, without really being aware of what we are doing. This means that we are may not be fully ‘present’ moment-by-moment, for much of our lives.

There are so many day to day activities that we can do ‘mindfully’. Take washing the dishes, for example... When we wash the dishes, we may be ‘in our heads’ as we are doing it, thinking about what we have to do the next day, what you need to get at the shop, the bills you have to pay etc. But how much attention are we paying to the present moment? The bubbles; what they look like, feel like, smell like, sound like etc. We can tap in to these present sensations when we are doing almost anything. Practicing this, whenever you can, with different tasks, is the key to perfecting your mindfulness skills.
Caring for ourselves

Self-help techniques

We can look after ourselves at times of distress, anxiety and low mood in many different ways. The key is to find a technique which works for you – and to keep doing it! It may be the process of trial and error, but it will be worth it in the end!

Mindfulness

Most people hear the term ‘mindfulness’ and think it is all about meditation and being a bit hippy. It is so much more than that and can really change your life!

Mindfulness can be used in different ways and in different circumstances. You may be surprised how helpful it is.

Being kind to ourselves...too!

Taking care of ourselves is about much more than psychological techniques and meditation. Going back to the very basics can sometimes be the best place to start!

We will look into what ‘basic’ things, that we may take for granted, that could help us mentally, as well as physically.
Self-help techniques

Engaging our Senses

Engaging our senses, grounding ourselves by connecting to the present moment and our present experiences, can be really useful.

When you are feeling anxious, distressed or agitated, try out the following exercise:

If your mind starts to wonder to other things, just notice it and gently bring your attention back to the exercise.

- **Start with some controlled breathing.** In through your nose and out through your mouth.

- **Leaving your eyes open, notice 5 things you can see.** You can say them out loud or in your head. Pause to observe them.

- **Next, notice 4 things you can feel in the body.** This might be the feel of you sat on a chair, or a jumper touching your arm.

- **Name 3 things you can hear** – try to choose 3 different sounds. These could be internal and external noises.

- **Note 2 things you can smell** – your clothes, soap on your hands, smells in the room, for example.

- **Finally, find 1 thing you can taste;** it may be the leftover taste of a meal, or just your breath.

- **End with some more controlled breathing.**

This exercise invites you to be present with here and now.
Self-help techniques

Positive Affirmations

Although it might feel strange, giving yourself a boost and a reminder of your worth, can really help when we are feeling low, isolated and scared of the current situation. Here are some examples:

ALL IS WELL, RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW

I AM STRONG

I AM A GOOD PERSON

I AM UNIQUE

I HOLD MY HEAD UP HIGH

I AM IN CONTROL OF MY

I AM DETERMINED

I AM NEEDED AND WORTHWHILE

I AM LIKABLE

I CARE ABOUT OTHERS

Breathing techniques

Breathing: something that we do, spontaneously, all the time, without appreciation. Practising breathing techniques, for some, can be the key to managing distress.

1. Look at this square. For each side, follow this rhythm:
   Breathe in through your nose for the count of 4 seconds
   Hold for 4 seconds

2. Breathe out through your mouth for 4 seconds

3. Hold for 4 seconds

4. Repeat.
Positivity for the future

This will pass

And when it does, why not keep positive by planning the things that you want to do?

Idea: every time you wish that you could do something, see someone, or go somewhere, which you can’t do right now because of the restrictions, write them down and pop them in a jar or box.

When this challenging time is over, open your jar and work through all of your notes day by day and have some fun!

Further support

Samaritans – 116 123
Suffolk Mind – www.suffolkmind.org.uk
CRUSE bereavement care: 0808 808 1677 / www.cruse.org.uk
Suffolk Wellbeing Service: www.wellbeingnands.co.uk/suffolk
NSFT 24/7 mental health crisis line: 0808 196 3494
Staff support line: 0300 123 1335
Open seven days a week 2-5pm to those working for the NHS and care homes in Norfolk and Suffolk.

www.healthysuffolk.org.uk/COVIDHub

This booklet has been produced by Cat Ritson RMN from the Care Home Initiative Team hosted by East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust.