

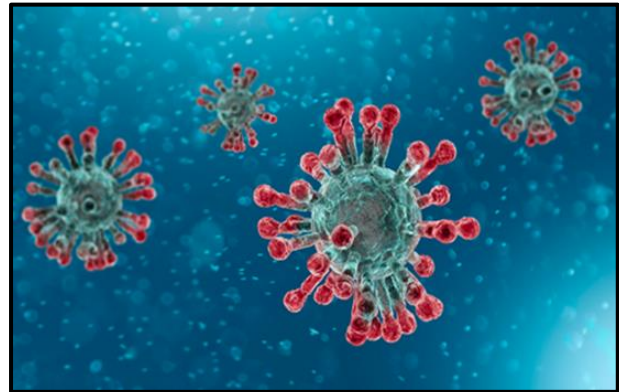
## **Top 10 tips for looking after your mental health and wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic**

This document gives simple and basic advice on the measures you can take to look after your mental health and wellbeing during the ongoing COVID-19/Coronavirus pandemic.

It is strongly recommended that Calderdale employees continue to follow the Government advice and guidance that is updated on a daily basis in order to keep you safe and infection-free. For further practical advice please look out for all Public Health updates via Ecall and speak to your line manager directly if you have any concerns.

### **Introduction:**

The coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak means that life is changing for all of us for a while. It may cause you to feel anxious, stressed, worried, sad, bored, lonely or frustrated. It's important to remember it is OK to feel this way and that everyone reacts differently. You may even be dealing with a long-term mental illness which is being exacerbated by the current challenging situation. Remember, this situation is temporary and, for most of us, these difficult feelings will pass. There are some simple things you can do to help you take care of your mental health and wellbeing during times of uncertainty. Doing so will help you think clearly, and make sure you are able to look after yourself and those you care about. Here are 10 ways you can help improve your mental health and wellbeing if you are worried or anxious about the coronavirus outbreak.



### **Tip 1: Stay connected with people**

Maintaining healthy relationships with people we trust is important for our mental wellbeing, so think about how you can stay in touch with friends and family while needing to stay at home. Remember that work is good for people so keep in touch with your colleagues as well. You could try phone calls, video calls or social media instead of meeting in person – whether it's with people you normally see often or connecting with old friends. There are lots of useful apps that you can download on your phone including 'Zoom' and 'WhatsApp'.



### **Tip 2: Talk about your worries**

It's normal to feel a bit worried, scared or helpless about the current situation. Remember it is OK to share your concerns with others you trust – and doing so may help them too. If you are feeling anxious or worried about COVID-19 then it can be good to get someone else's point of view. Think about who you speak to as speaking to someone else who is struggling might not be the best option. Find somewhere quiet where you can sit down and chat openly and honestly about your feelings and concerns. It is easy to get overwhelmed in your own pattern of negative thoughts, so talking these through can break those cycles. Try and assign yourself a buddy within your team – either a work colleague or manager – and check in on each other from time to time.



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You should discuss things that may be causing you concern and share ideas on how to keep the mind occupied during lockdown such as a must watch television series, a recipe to try and cook or some gardening tips. If you cannot speak to someone you know or if doing so has not helped, there are plenty of helplines you can try instead. If you prefer, you can contact an emotional support service such as the Samaritans or if you are worried about your physical health you can call NHS 111.

**Tip 3: Support and help others**

Helping someone else can benefit you as well as them, so try to be a little more understanding of other people's concerns, worries or behaviours at this time. Try to think of things you can do to help those around you. Is there a friend or family member nearby you could message? Are there any community groups you could join to support others locally? Remember, it is important to do this in line with official coronavirus guidance to keep everyone safe.



**Tip 4: Feel prepared**

Working through the implications of staying at home should help you feel more prepared and less concerned. Think through a normal week: how will it be affected and what do you need to do to solve any problems? If you have not already, you might want to talk with your manager or email the HR Hub ([HRCOVID@Calderdale.gov.uk](mailto:HRCOVID@Calderdale.gov.uk)), understand your sick pay and benefits rights, and get hold of some essentials for while you are at home. You could also think about whom you can get help from locally – as well as people you know, lots of local and community help groups are being set up. Try to remember this disruption should only be temporary. Write a daily list with all the tasks you want to complete and work your way through it to achieve a sense of accomplishment. Where possible try to stick to a regular work routine as this will give you a sense of purpose and you will find it easier to adapt back to the normal way of life when the lockdown is eventually lifted.



**Tip 5: Look after your body**

It is very easy to forget to have a well-balanced meal when we are stressed or anxious but cooking can help detract from negative thoughts and ensure that you eat well. If you are not into cooking then maybe ask a loved one or friend if they will help you. Sharing the task and talking about what you are cooking can help take your mind off your worries. There are a lot of good websites that have simple recipes that you can follow.



Our physical health has a big impact on how we feel. At times like these, it can be easy to fall into unhealthy patterns of behaviour that end up making you feel worse. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, drink enough water and exercise regularly. Avoid smoking or drugs, and try not to drink too much alcohol. You can leave your house, alone or with members of your household, for 1 form of exercise a day – like a walk, run or bike ride but make sure that you keep a safe 2-metre distance from others. Remember that walking is the single most effective thing you can do for both your physical and mental health and exercise releases endorphins making you feel better. Alternatively, you could try one of the easy 10-minute home workout videos available on YouTube or tune in to Joe Wicks P.E. lesson every day for inspiration. Encourage others in your household to get involved to keep you all motivated.

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Finally, don't neglect your personal hygiene just because you are working from home. Remember to wash frequently and ensure you maintain your dental hygiene. It is easy to let this slip when you are not interacting with other people, but it plays a huge part of wellbeing.

**Tip 6: Stick to the facts and manage your social media**

Over the last few weeks the media has been full of updates about the Coronavirus – from daily bulletins on the TV to minute by minute stories in your social media feeds – it is hard to avoid! It is important to stay informed about the Coronavirus, but having a non-stop stream of notifications and speculation isn't helping and may affect your mental health. If you feel you are being overwhelmed by social media updates, try turning off your news notifications on your phone. These days we all have mobile phones next to us 24/7 and the temptation to grab the phone at every notification can be overwhelming. Instead, check your settings and turn off notifications for your news apps.



Better still, check to see what apps are sending updates and uninstall them. If you want to stay informed, set some time aside each morning and evening to log onto the internet. You could also try muting people sharing updates and/or misinformation. Both Facebook and Twitter have the ability to mute users. If someone you follow is sharing updates that make you feel uneasy or sharing misinformation then mute them. Muting someone doesn't mean you have to unfollow them but it does mean you don't see their posts for a while - and they won't be notified that you have done this. Find a credible source you can trust – such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), GOV.UK or the NHS website – and fact-check information you get from newsfeeds, social media or other people. Think about how possibly inaccurate information could affect others too. Try not to share information without fact-checking against credible sources. You might also want to consider limiting the time you spend watching, reading or listening to coverage of the outbreak, including on social media, and think about turning off breaking-news alerts on your phone. You could set yourself a specific time to read updates or limit yourself to a couple of checks a day.

**Tip 7: Stay on top of difficult feelings**

Being concerned about the coronavirus outbreak is perfectly normal. However, some people may experience intense anxiety that can affect their daily life. Try to focus on the things you can control, such as your behaviour, who you speak to, and where and how often you get information. It's fine to acknowledge that some things are outside of your control, but if constant thoughts about coronavirus are making you feel anxious or overwhelmed, try some ideas to help manage your personal anxiety or listening to an audio guide.



**Tip 8: Do things you enjoy or learn something new**

If we are feeling worried, anxious or low, we might stop doing things we usually enjoy. Focusing on your favourite hobby, relaxing indoors or connecting with others can help with anxious thoughts and feelings. If you cannot do the things you normally enjoy because you are staying at home, think about how you could adapt them, or try something new. There are lots of free tutorials and courses online, and people are coming up with inventive new ways to do things, like hosting online pub quizzes and music concerts. You can also use this time to get round to that list of jobs that you have been



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putting off for a while, such as decorating the house or repairing something that is broken. You might even want to look to see if there are any free courses on the Open University Open Learn website that you could take part in. Learning something new is a great way to stimulate the brain and tune out those anxious thoughts.

**Tip 9: Focus on the present**

Focusing on the present, rather than worrying about the future, can help with difficult emotions and improve our wellbeing. Try not to think about what you ‘could’ or ‘should’ be doing and take each day as it comes so you don’t overwhelm yourself. Relaxation techniques can also help some people deal with feelings of anxiety. Simple breathing exercises or practicing mindfulness and meditation can really help focus the mind and put things into perspective. If you are interested in giving mindfulness a go there are lots of free videos on YouTube and there is also a [free online course](#) through Monash University.



**Tip 10: Look after your sleep**

Good-quality sleep makes a big difference to how we feel mentally and physically, so it is important to get enough. Try to maintain regular sleeping patterns and keep up good sleep hygiene practices – like avoiding screens before bed, cutting back on caffeine and creating a restful environment. For more advice please read the following sleep guides - [Basic Introduction to Sleep](#), [Top 10 tips](#) for better sleep and [Food for Thought](#).



**EXTRA TIP: Working from home using DSE?**

Make sure that your DSE workstation and arrangements are adequate to protect your health and safety. There is lots of guidance which has already been circulated via email to all staff but this can also be found on the Health and Safety document library. If you are unsure how to effectively set up your workstation there is a free DSE e-learning module available for all staff. For access to this online training, please email [Richard.Polak@Calderdale.gov.uk](mailto:Richard.Polak@Calderdale.gov.uk)



You can also contact Occupational Health if you have any health concerns arising from your homeworking set up. Please email [OccupationalHealth@calderdale.gov.uk](mailto:OccupationalHealth@calderdale.gov.uk)

**Conclusion:**

There are plenty of things you can do and places to get more help and support if you are struggling with your mental health. Information on [stress](#), [anxiety](#), [sleep](#) and [low mood](#) can be found online and have lots more helpful tips and specific advice. If you are a parent or caregiver for a child or young person, Young Minds has guidance on [talking to your child about coronavirus](#). The [NHS mental health and wellbeing advice](#) pages also have a self-assessment, as well as audio guides and other tools you can use while staying at home. Remember, it is quite common to experience short-lived physical symptoms when you are feeling low or anxious. Some of these, like feeling hot or short of breath, could be confused with symptoms of coronavirus. If this happens, try to distract yourself. When you feel less anxious, see if you still have the symptoms that worried you and if you are still concerned, visit the NHS website for further advice.

**Take Coronavirus seriously. Stay home, Stay safe. Remember that this is only temporary and things will return to normal eventually.**