

How to protect your mental health during times of self isolation

You can self-refer to South Tyneside Life Cycle Primary Care Mental Health Service on 0191 2832937 or via the Website below

During this time of uncertainty and recommendations to distance yourself from others, you may worry about how you will cope.

Here are a few ideas about how you can protect your mental health.

If you are in need of urgent mental health care, call the Crisis Team on 03031231145 or free via 111

Manage worry

There is so much uncertainty about the future at the moment - no one really knows what is ahead. Humans have a tendency to try and find certainty by worrying. However, if you reflect back over the years, you'll be able to recall times when you've coped with situations you never dreamed you would face.

Try to remember this now. There are things that are within our control in the here and now, such as discussing a plan of action with family and friends on how you are going to maintain contact with them, making meal plans for the next few weeks or getting hold of some books or equipment for craft activities.

If you find yourself worrying about things that are beyond your control - try the following:

1. Set yourself a worry time during the day - if a worry creeps in to your mind outside this time, then notice it as a worry (a what-if thought) and tell yourself you will come back to it later. During your worry time (e.g. 4-4.30) consider your worries and see if there are any possible solutions. If there are no solutions, then try and let it go with positive distraction activities (see below)

2. Create a list of positive 'grounding' activities you can go to when you are feeling overwhelmed with anxiety or hypothetical worries (worrying about things that haven't happened yet- future focused thinking) - ideas would be:
 - Going for a walk around the garden
 - Calmly breathe in for 4... and out for 4... your stomach should rise and fall (not your chest)
 - Be aware of your present surroundings- what can you see, hear, smell, feel? Be present in the moment and just notice what it feels like to breathe in and out
 - Look out of the window, notice the birds, the sky, clouds and whatever you can see. Open a window and feel the breeze on your face
 - Notice the chair you are sitting on, where your feet connect with the floor ... and breathe.
 - There are lots more useful resources online - search for information from trusted websites

Self care and routine

Humans need routine. Taking good care of yourself by planning a schedule will help you stay motivated and protect your mental well-being. Also continue to practice anything you have been learning in therapy.

Make sure you get up, washed and dressed each morning, take all prescribed medications and don't turn to alcohol or substances.

Schedule in time to catch up with the news - resist watching it too often and for too long - this will overwhelm you and increase the sense of helplessness/panic.

Here is an example of what a helpful schedule might look like:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
7-9am	Get up, Dress, Eat breakfast						
9-10am	Read / exercise	Speak with a friend or family member	Read / exercise	Speak with a friend or family member	Read / exercise	Speak with a friend or family member	Read / exercise
10-11am	Speak with a friend or family member	Read	Speak with a friend or family member	Read	Speak with a friend or family member	Read	Speak with a friend or family member
11am-12	Engage in a hobby						
12-1pm	Eat Lunch						
1-2pm	Do some exercise – (many options available on line for ideas)						
2-3pm	Engage in a hobby						
3-4pm	Prepare Evening meal						
4-5pm	Read, watch TV						
5-6pm	Eat evening meal						
6-7pm	Speak with a friend						Menu plan for the week ahead. Consider how you can get hold of the ingredients
7-9pm	Usual evening routine						
9-10pm	Write down something positive about today - no matter how small						
10pm-12	Evening routine						

Activities to do in the house

- Download WhatsApp, Zoom or Skype to your computer so you can see friends and family while you are talking (ask someone to talk you through how to do this on the phone if needed)
- Order, or ask someone to buy you a colouring book and do some mindful colouring, or teach yourself to draw via classes on YouTube
- Get creative - create a scrapbook, organise photo albums, make a family recipe book, write poetry or a story
- Write down your personal history/family tree for your family to read in the future - get a notebook to document this. Add photos, poems, prayers – anything that is significant to you
- Get out your recipe book- try something new (cooking, baking)
- Crochet, knitting, jigsaws, indoor or container gardening, playing a musical instrument
- Sort out the shed/garage/spare room/kitchen cupboards
- Search for things that interest you on-line or games such as scrabble, tetris, patience - if you need help with this ask a friend/child/grandchild/neighbour to help
- Watch a documentary or TV show and plan a call or WhatsApp chat to talk about it with someone else avoiding the temptation to talk about current situations)
- Read - or read to others such as a child, grandchild, partner or friend
- Listen or sing along to music (music has the power to reduce

stress, anxiety, and pain. It also improves immune function and sleep as well as helping memory)

- Dance - with someone else or on your own in your chair/ in the kitchen – ‘happy hormones’ will be released!
- If you have grandchildren, see if you can help with some part of their home learning- via phone or WhatsApp
- Play games - e.g, dominos or cards - this might be solitaire if you are on your own, or card games with a partner
- Write lists of what you will do when the social distancing is over - this will help calm you and the practice of imagining you engaging in the activity is a lovely form of relaxation
- Download podcasts, audiobooks or Apps such as Headspace (for meditation), Worry tree (to manage worry) or access Youtube for exercises such as Yoga or Pilates (for all ages)

There are local people offering help to collect prescriptions, food and offer practical support whilst you are self isolating. Connect with local groups via Facebook or ring your local council and ask if they can put you in touch with any initiatives.

There are COVID-19 self-help resources available:

<https://www.psychologytools.com/psychological-resources-for-coronavirus-covid-19/>

www.cci.gov.au has self-help resources that are free to access online.

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