

Looking after your mental wellbeing During Covid19 and Beyond



The following resource has been created by the Paediatric Psychology services team at CUH who have kindly offered to share it with all NICU staff in the EoE ODN. Although created as a response to Covid19, many of the elements can apply to a number of aspects of your personal and professional lives

In the resource below, we will cover the five essential aspects to help support people during traumatic or challenging situations (Hobfoll et al 2014): safety, calming, self-efficacy, connection and hope.

Safety (during the pandemic or other times of crisis)

Obtaining facts from reliable sources: We are all currently being inundated with information about COVID-19. It is important to be accessing updates from reliable sources. Be aware of various social media pages and WhatsApp messages that contain inaccurate information about COVID-19. Unreliable sources are likely to over-inflate the threat of the virus.

Setting limits on time spent reading the news: It is important to acknowledge how often you are checking the news and to set limits on this to give yourselves a break. It may help to dedicate the same time each day to look at the news and then plan an activity directly afterwards to help you to keep to time limits.

Working safely during COVID-19: It is important that all staff feel as safe as possible when coming into work. Please make sure you follow hospital updates on this and familiarise yourself with what equipment is required. If you need anything clarifying or have any concerns about this, please do not hesitate to discuss this with supervisors and line managers.

Gain some sense of control where you can: The first step of managing feelings of losing control is to realistically assess the things that we are able to control and make changes to.

Have a look at these:



Emotional wellbeing:

You might be experiencing a range of emotions at the moment, such as feeling sad, angry, anxious or guilty. Or you might not feel any of these emotions at all. However you are feeling is a normal reaction to a very challenging situation. Everybody is affected differently in challenging situations and it is important to remember that there is no right or wrong way of feeling. Your emotional reactions are normal and it is okay to feel the way you do.

Remember you won't necessarily view things the same way as others. Be mindful of their feelings, avoid dramatic language that might panic others and don't minimise or ridicule their fears

Calming

You are not abnormal for feeling the way you do. Your experiences and emotions are yours; they are not right or wrong. Take time to notice your feelings and physical sensations in your body.

Take notice of your ‘fight or flight’ response. When we are responding to stressors our bodies can enter the ‘fight or flight mode’; this means that we can experience physical changes in our bodies, such as a fast heart rate, tense muscles and a dry mouth. Due to COVID-19 (or other factors from work or home) we may be experiencing a range of situations that activate our fight or flight mode, such as worry about family members or changes to our job role. Take time to notice what your fight or flight responses are. It is important to be kind and non-judgemental to yourself; this is a natural response to stress and doesn’t mean that there is something wrong with you.

It is vital to continue to take breaks and think about your own self-care. In stressful situations it is common for self-care to be put on the bottom of our ‘to-do lists’, however it is more important than ever to prioritise this. It can be helpful to create a list of small things you can do, both at work and home, to help create some headspace away from stresses related to COVID-19 or other aspects of your work or home-life. For example, for some people this might be a five minute walk and for others it might be listening to music, or reading a book. It is helpful to plan in activities in advance and set reminders to increase the likelihood that you will remember to do them.

Use relaxation techniques: Using relaxation techniques helps to manage physical sensations related to stress. There are numerous relaxation techniques to try and it is important to use what works for you.

Please see the attached information sheet on relaxation techniques, taken from- <https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/Relaxation.pdf>

Below is an example of a five minute meditative breathing exercise. This can be used in different environments, including at work. It is best to practice in a calmer environment first as it will then be easier to use in more stressful situations later.

Quick meditation (taken from Verywell mind):

Close your eyes and relax. Take a few deep breaths from your diaphragm and release the tension in your body.

Focus on a five-count breath:

- 1. Slowly inhale from the belly*
- 2. Then into ribs*
- 3. Then into chest*
- 4. Up into crown of the head*

Then gently hold the breath for the fifth count

Reverse this process on the exhale for another count of five, exhaling from the crown, chest, ribs, belly, pausing on the last bit of breath out of the body, and then begin again.

Try to visualize the tension leaving your body from your head to your feet, either as imagining that the stress is literally draining from you through your toes, escaping your body with every breath, or simply melting away.

Connection

Talk to others. Everybody is having different experiences, thoughts and feelings at the moment. At times, it might feel like you are alone with these experiences. It can be helpful to talk to others about how you are feeling. Sharing feelings can help to normalise what we are going through. It can also be a helpful way to learn from others about their coping strategies and provide an opportunity to problem solve together.

Continue to connect with friends and family. Current restrictions mean that we may not be able to see our friends and family in the same capacity as we used to be able to. However, it is vital to still be able to connect with those who are important to you. Although virtual contact cannot replace face-to-face contact, there are different ways in which we can still maintain closeness. These are some suggestions for staying close to those around us: use platforms such as Facetime or Skype; watch the same TV program or film at the same time; read the same book; play games together through phone apps; challenge each other to an exercise workout or meet virtually and do the exercise together; write quizzes for each other; try a virtual karaoke evening together; bake together virtually! The list is endless... be creative and stay connected with those you love.

Together, you are part of an incredible movement. In the midst of all the challenges that you are currently facing, it can be easy to forget the outstanding team-work that is taking place. You are all doing an incredible job of pulling together, as a team, and contributing to a wider NHS staff force who are helping the country through an unprecedented crisis.

Self and collective efficacy

Self-efficacy/collective-efficacy is when we believe our actions (or our teams' actions) can result in positive outcomes. In challenging situations it can also include our perceived ability to problem solve and manage our emotions.

Identify and use resources: For many staff members COVID-19 has resulted in new challenges to manage. In navigating these it is important to identify helpful resources and to speak to supervisors or line managers if there is an area that you might benefit from more help with. It can also be helpful to share ideas amongst colleagues and to come together as a unit to help problem solve and manage challenging situations. For some, the main challenges might be emotional. It is very normal to be experiencing both practical and emotional challenges at this time. Please look back at the resources that have been shared to help think about how to help your emotional wellbeing at this time.

Think about your own resources and coping strategies: In the previous emails we have highlighted the importance of being compassionate with your emotional responses. We are all here, in an uncertain situation, doing what we can. In helping to get through this challenging time, it can be helpful to think about other obstacles you have faced in the past, and reflect on what helped you to get through them. You may benefit from writing this down and completing a 'self-care plan' to continually review and add to over the coming weeks.

Acknowledge your own and others success. In our day-to-day lives, it is important to consciously focus on areas in which we feel we are making achievements in, however small they may be. Take a moment to think about something that went well recently. What characteristics, or qualities, do you have that helped this to happen? What have you learnt from this experience? You can also think more broadly about your successes as a team. What achievements have you made in the past week? What allowed this to take place? Let your colleagues know if you feel they have made a positive difference. Celebrate the successes and the small wins - they are all incredibly important.

Hope

Our emotional responses are time-limited. It might feel hard to envisage a 'normal' way of being again. When you are feeling very anxious, stressed, or low in mood you might find that it is hard to imagine a time in which you may feel differently. It is important to hold in mind that are emotional experiences can change and you will not feel like this forever

Be aware of the nature of your thoughts. Due to our levels of anxiety in challenging situations some of our thoughts may not always be as accurate as they first appear. For example, it can be common to 'catastrophise' (jump to the worst possible outcome) and 'fortune tell' (believe we know what will happen in the future). This is a normal reaction to the situation and it is important to acknowledge these thoughts for what they are - *thoughts* and not *facts*. Some people find it helpful to acknowledge these thoughts and ask questions to help challenge the content of these thoughts. Questions might include - What is the likelihood this thought will come true? What is another way of looking at this thought? Sometimes it might be difficult to question your thoughts, especially in the face of uncertainty. In which case you might try to step back from the thought and let it pass. To help you to do this you might imagine the thought floating away in cloud, or imagining it as a leaf going down a stream.

Reflect on what you have learnt and continue to do what works for you. Reflect on what has gone well and what personal and team attributes have allowed this to happen. In looking after your wellbeing, continue to think about your strengths and sources of resilience, both individually and collectively. Reflect back on what has helped you to cope amongst the uncertainty, and continue to review and update your own wellbeing plans as time progresses. Many of us have experienced challenges in different, and often multiple, aspects of our lives due to COVID-19 and, yet, in a short space of time people have come together and made remarkable achievements.



In fitting with the current context, and the theme of hope, I thought it would be helpful to share this quote from Helen Keller:

'Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it'.

APPLE

A Mindful Response to Thoughts



ACKNOWLEDGE - Notice and acknowledge the thought as it comes to mind.

PAUSE - Don't react as you normally do. Just pause, and [breathe](#).

PULL BACK - Tell yourself this is just the anxiety or depression talking, and this thought or feeling is only a [thought](#) or feeling.

Don't believe everything you think! Thoughts are not statements of fact.

LET GO - Let go of the thought or feeling. It will pass. You don't have to respond to them. You might imagine them floating away in a bubble or cloud.

EXPLORE - Explore the present moment, because right now, in this moment, all is well. Notice your [breathing](#), and the sensations of breathing. Notice the ground beneath you. Look around and notice what you see, what you hear, what you can touch, what you can smell. Right **NOW**. Then, SHIFT YOUR FOCUS OF ATTENTION to something else - on what you need to do, on what you were doing before you noticed the worry, or do something else - [mindfully](#), with your full attention.

[Online resources to help support your mental wellbeing](#)

Living with worry and anxiety amidst global uncertainty

[https://www.psychologytools.com/assets/covid-19/guide to living with worry and anxiety amidst global uncertainty en-gb.pdf](https://www.psychologytools.com/assets/covid-19/guide%20to%20living%20with%20worry%20and%20anxiety%20amidst%20global%20uncertainty%20en-gb.pdf)

Relaxation

<https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/Relaxation.pdf>

FREE NHS WELLBEING APPS

NHS England are offering the following wellbeing apps to all NHS staff for free until the end of December 2020.

Unmind

Unmind is a mental health platform that empowers staff to proactively improve their mental wellbeing. Using scientifically-backed assessments, tools and training you can measure and manage your personal mental health needs, including digital programmes designed to help with stress, sleep, coping, connection, fulfilment and nutrition.

- Go to nhs.unmind.com/signup
- Sign up with your NHS email address
- Download the Unmind app from your appstore - your organisation name is NHS.

Headspace

Headspace is a science-backed app in mindfulness and meditation, providing unique tools and resources to help reduce stress, build resilience, and aid better sleep.

Go to <https://www.headspace.com/nhs> for NHS staff to access, with the option to select clinical or non-clinical staff to start enrolling.

You will need to use your NHS email address to sign up

Sleepio

Sleepio is a clinically-evidenced sleep improvement programme that is fully automated and highly personalised, using cognitive behavioural techniques to help improve poor sleep.

1. Visit sleepio.com/redeem on your laptop or desktop computer
2. Enter redeem code NHS2020 and sign up for an account using your name and email address
3. Complete the sleep test
4. Get started!

Daylight is a smartphone-based app that provides help to people experiencing symptoms of worry and anxiety, using evidence-based cognitive behavioural techniques, voice and animation.

1. Click on the following link: daylight.com/NHSaccess
2. Answer a few short questions to tailor the programme to you
3. Sign up for an account using your name and email address
4. Download the Daylight smartphone app (search 'Daylight - Worry Less', available on both iPhone and Android)
5. Get started!

Use access code: NSFT2020

FREE NHS WELLBEING APPS

SILVERCLOUD

SilverCloud can help you to maintain a healthy mind during this challenging time. You, like many others, may be feeling anxious over the coronavirus outbreak. The pandemic is causing new challenges and greater levels of stress and anxiety than usual. Healthcare workers are facing extra strain in supporting and managing these issues. This is on top of concern about contracting COVID-19 or worrying about family or friends. SilverCloud Health is a digital mental health company with a range of online programmes that help to ease your levels of stress and maintain a healthy mind during this challenging time. The programmes use proven methods including, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and positive psychology. Programmes are available to help with sleep, stress and resilience using tools, videos and activities to help you to feel better

Access them anytime, on any device (your phone, computer or tablet)

All information you enter is anonymous, confidential and secure

Instant access to self-help support:

You can sign-up online at: <https://nhs.silvercloudhealth.com/signup/>



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East of England Neonatal ODN
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