

AP PSYCHOLOGY & CONSULTING SERVICES

TIP SHEET

Working Remotely During a Period of Uncertainty and Prolonged Isolation



As we navigate through an uncharted and challenging period of uncertainty, people are being faced with the need to work from home for a prolonged period of time. There are multiple considerations to take into account when working from home:

- There are operational challenges, with the need to manage the environment that you are working in.
- There are social challenges, with possibly other people using your home for a range of purposes.
- There are isolation challenges we face by being asked to remain at home for the foreseeable future.
- There are also psychological challenges in managing all of this, with no real understanding of the timeframe.

This tip sheet provides information and practical suggestions to help you cope better with working remotely during a period of uncertainty and prolonged isolation, e.g. COVID-19.

Working remotely during a period of uncertainty and prolonged isolation

- ✓ **Work at home setup** - If you can, set aside an area in your home that is separate from the rest of your life. Establishing a physical boundary will also make it easier for you to communicate this boundary to others in your household.
- ✓ **Create a defined workspace** - to differentiate between your 'work life' and 'home life' while working from home. This is important even if you do not have others in the household, as it supports you in defining a boundary between work and life.
- ✓ **Set up a daily routine** - including things you do before work, your 'setting up for the work day' routine, and your 'end of the work day' routine.
- ✓ **Discuss your working routine** - and intentions with other people in your house. If you have children, speak with them about the ways they may be able to recognise when you are 'at work' on a break and when you have finished for the day. It is important to establish a way that a child can connect with you if needed. This may be through an online message or by attaching a post-it note on your desk. This will support you in reinforcing boundaries.
- ✓ **Reach out** - to your friends and family to increase your social connectedness through this period. We are social creatures, and we need social connection to thrive.
- ✓ **Rituals** - Use things like clothing, times or areas of your house, to symbolise when you are 'working' and when you are 'at home' (e.g. wearing certain shirts or trousers, sitting in a specific room or chair, may be that you are 'working').
- ✓ **Set up regular virtual meetings** - colleagues. If you can use videoconference platforms, this can help to foster inter-connectedness.
- ✓ **Take regular breaks** - away from work stations. If there are others in household this may be collaborative on regular break times.
- ✓ **Speak to your manager** - or about any challenges you are facing about working remotely. This includes challenges (e.g. technology, post) (e.g. focus, distractions) due to social in speaking down due to social. In speaking with your manager you have both decided on a plan that includes an opportunity to reflect on your psychological during a period of uncertainty.

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TIP SHEET

Coping with Feelings of Anxiety and Worry During a Challenging Period of Uncertainty



As we navigate through an uncharted and challenging period of uncertainty, people will experience a range of feelings related to anxiety, fear and worry. This is quite a normal response to what is a very challenging time for many.

There are ways we can manage our own feelings of anxiety, worry and fear. Coping with these feelings will help you manage your mental health and help you when you are supporting other people you care about.

This tip sheet provides information and practical suggestions to help you cope with feelings of anxiety and worry during a challenging period of uncertainty, e.g. COVID-19.

Seven practical steps to coping with feelings of anxiety and worry

1. **Pause** - Take a moment to pause and breathe. Do this regularly throughout the day.
2. **Acknowledge and Accept** - Take notice, acknowledge and accept the thoughts and feelings you are experiencing with curiosity and kindness. Say statements like "I'm noticing that I am feeling worried, and that's ok".
3. **Letting go** - It can be helpful to actively let go of unpleasant thoughts or feelings that you are experiencing. Some people find it helpful to imagine the emotion washing away like water, or a thought floating away in a bubble or cloud.
4. **Anchor yourself to the present** - Tap into your five senses and connect with the 'here' by focusing your attention on your five senses:
 - i. Notice five things you can see;
 - ii. Notice five things you can hear;
 - iii. Notice five things you can touch;
 - iv. Notice five things you can smell;
 - v. Notice five things you can taste.
5. **Mindfulness** - Engage in mindfulness and meditation to ground you. Download apps to support you to manage your thoughts and feelings. Examples include the Smiling Mind and Headspace apps.
6. **Focus** - Take the time to focus on the 'here and now' and what is within your control.
7. **Commit** - Commit to doing something positive and with purpose. It may be something to address your worries (for example, making a plan), or something to make you feel better, like engaging in your favourite hobby.

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TIP SHEET

Building and Maintaining Resilience During a Period of Uncertainty



As we are faced with a period of uncertainty and prolonged isolation, it is important to build and maintain our resilience. Your resilience is related to how you adapt to and overcome challenging, uncertain, and stressful situations.

This tip sheet provides information and practical resources on building and maintaining your resilience during a time of uncertainty, e.g. COVID-19.

Understanding resilience during a period of uncertainty

During a time of uncertainty and stress, it can be easy to get caught up in things that you cannot control. A helpful strategy is to focus on what is within your control and try to limit the energy spent thinking or worrying about things that are out of your control.

For example:

"I can control the amount of media exposure I receive and place limits on this so that I am not overwhelmed." (e.g. COVID-19)

"I cannot control other people's choices to have constant exposure to media."

Four strategies to build and maintain resilience

Self-care is an important part of managing our wellbeing and building our resilience to deal with uncertainty. As we think about the things we can control and how we choose to build resilience, we can implement some of the elements of these four strategies to

- ✓ **Emotional/Social**
 - Identify/name what you are feeling (e.g. "I am feeling anxious")
 - Allow time to spend with people you care about and interacting with peers and colleagues
 - Engage in mindfulness-based activities
 - Seek support (social or professional) when you feel you need to
- ✓ **Spiritual**
 - Practice meditation or yoga
 - Celebrate the wins, whether these are big or small
 - Think about what your values and goals are. Being mindful of these and engaging in actions that align with your goals
 - Use positive affirmations
 - Connect with yourself, friends and family
- ✓ **Mental**
 - Self-reflection/reflect on your emotional state
 - Accept limitations (e.g. there are certain things that you can control/cannot control)
 - Practice gratitude and positive thinking - list two things that you are grateful for and two things that you are looking forward to
- ✓ **Physical**
 - Have good sleep quality and sleep hygiene
 - Eat well and have a healthy diet
 - Make sure that you give yourself time for breaks and exercise regularly
 - Have a bit of time-out from your phone and media exposure

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CREATING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY DURING COVID-19 HEALTH & WELLBEING EMPLOYEE TIP SHEETS



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As we navigate through a period of uncertainty due to COVID-19, we are presented with new challenges such as prolonged isolation and changes to the ways in which we work and live. We are experiencing changes to how we support ourselves, as well as our families, friends, and colleagues.

AP Psychology & Consulting Services empowers workplaces to be psychologically safe and thriving, and we are committed to supporting organisations and their employees during this challenging period with the psychological safety and wellbeing of their people.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

This booklet of tip sheets has been designed to provide you with a practical resource on supporting yourself and those around you, during a period of uncertainty and prolonged isolation. The booklet covers a range of situations which can be challenging during this time and provide practical suggestions on how to manage these situations

Please see the contents page for a comprehensive list of topics that will be covered.

For further information on how to best use this booklet, please refer to the appropriate contact person within your organisation.

Disclaimer

This information contained in this booklet is for educational purposes only. The content is not intended to be a substitute for professional advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always seek advice from a qualified health professional with any questions you may have regarding mental health conditions.

As we navigate through an uncharted and challenging period of uncertainty, people will experience a range of feelings related to anxiety, fear and worry. This is quite a normal response to what is a very challenging time for many.

There are ways we can manage our own feelings of anxiety, worry and fear. Coping with these feelings will help you manage your mental health and help you when you are supporting other people you care about.

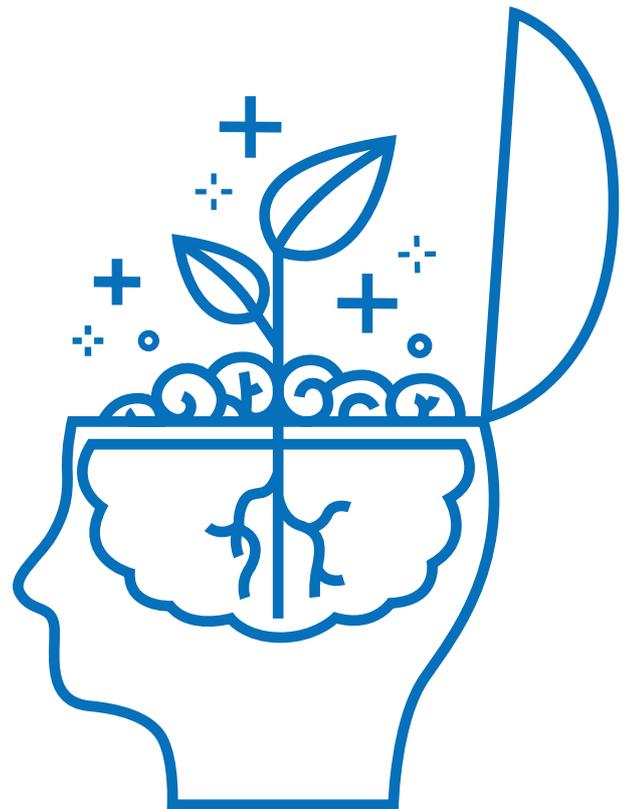
This tip sheet provides information and practical suggestions to help you cope with feelings of anxiety and worry during a challenging period of uncertainty, e.g. COVID-19.

Seven practical steps to coping with feelings of anxiety and worry

- 1 **Pause** - Take a moment to pause and breathe. Do this regularly throughout the day.
- 2 **Acknowledge and Accept** - Take notice, acknowledge and accept the thoughts and feelings you are experiencing with curiosity and kindness. Say statements like “I’m noticing that I am feeling worried, and that’s ok”.
- 3 **Letting go** - It can be helpful to actively let go of unpleasant thoughts or feelings that you are experiencing. Some people find it helpful to imagine the emotion washing away like water, or a thought floating away in a bubble or cloud.
- 4 **Anchor yourself to the present** - Tap into your five senses and connect with the ‘here’ by focusing your attention on your five senses:
 - i. Notice five things you can see;
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- 5 **Mindfulness** - Engage in mindfulness and meditation to ground you. Download apps to support you to manage your thoughts and feelings. Examples include the Smiling Mind and Headspace apps.
- 6 **Focus** - Take the time to focus on the ‘here and now’ and what is within your control.
- 7 **Commit** - Commit to doing something positive and with purpose. It may be something to address your worries (for example, making a plan), or something to make you feel better, like engaging in your favourite hobby.

Additional strategies to help you cope with anxiety and worry

- 
Practice gratitude - Make it a ritual each day to remember the good things you have and are thankful for.
- 
Adopt a growth mindset - When we view the unknown as an opportunity for growth, we are more tolerant to ambiguity. Accept mistakes in yourself and others and consider these as opportunities for collaboration and learning.
- 
Manage feelings - Try to manage how long you sit with fear, anger, anxiety or worry. These are normal human emotions. However, we can set time limits for these feelings and then commit to doing something positive to shift your emotional state.
- 
Letting go of worry - Worry increases during times of uncertainty. To manage your worry, focus on taking active steps towards things in your control, and letting go of things that are out of your control.
- 
Stay connected - Stay in touch with colleagues, friends and family via phone calls, texts, social media, video chat and conferencing. Agree on regular check-in times and actively connect with your social network.
- 
Limit news and social media intake - Stay informed about the situation via reliable sources but limit your news and social media intake to avoid feeling overwhelmed.
- 
Take one day at a time - Try not to project too far into the future.
- 
Be Kind - Be kind to yourself and to others. We are all impacted by stress differently. Look out for your family, friends, and colleagues to ensure you are keeping informed and supported within your personal and work communities.



Maintaining a Healthy Mindset During a Period of Uncertainty and Prolonged Isolation

As more people face the prospect of several weeks of uncertainty, physical distancing, isolation and possibly quarantine, it is more important than ever to establish ways of maintaining a healthy mindset.

This tip sheet provides information and practical suggestions on maintaining a healthy mindset during a challenging period of uncertainty, worry and the possibility of prolonged physical distancing and isolation.

Tips to help you cope better during a period of uncertainty and prolonged isolation

-  **Create a routine** - Change out of your pyjamas, shower and make a to-do list of all the things you want to achieve each day to create a sense of normality, purpose and productivity.
-  **Avoid burnout** - Set work boundaries to avoid becoming overwhelmed and make time to unwind.
-  **Break up your day** - Find tasks to break up your day and, where possible, change your environment for different activities.
-  **Stay connected** - Make the most of technology and set aside time with colleagues, friends and family via phone calls, texts, social media, video chat and conferencing. Agree on regular check-in times and feel connected to the people around you.
-  **Put limits on media intake** - Stay informed about the situation via reliable sources, but limit your news and social media intake to avoid feeling overwhelmed. Receiving nonstop news on your TV, device or phone about COVID-19 will add to your stress.

Maintaining a healthy mindset

-  **Be kind** - Be conscious that challenging times affect people differently. Look out for your family and friends, as well as your colleagues to ensure you are socially connected, informed and supported within your work community.
-  **Manage feelings** - Try to manage how long you sit with fear, anger, anxiety or worry. Set time limits to accept and experience the feelings and then commit to doing something positive to shift your emotional state.
-  **Engage in mindfulness** - Schedule mindfulness and meditation activities to help you cope with challenging thoughts and feelings. This is a proactive step that you can take as an individual or as a group, and this can be done online. There are great apps to support you with this, e.g. Smiling Mind app or virtual meditation rooms.
-  **Help others** - If you are not under strict isolation rules yourself, and you are in a position to do so, find ways to support those in need by offering to run errands and collect supplies for them.
-  **Practice self-care** - Find ways to relax and unwind. If there is a hobby you can do at home, ensure you have the supplies and tools you'll need in advance. Communicate your self-care plan to others in your household.
-  **Practice gratitude** - Make it a ritual each day to remember the good things you have and are thankful for. This is a temporary feeling to a temporary situation. Over time things will get better.

Maintaining a Healthy Mindset During a Period of Uncertainty and Prolonged Isolation

CONTINUED



Adopt a growth mindset - Focus on things that are in your control and encourage a healthy attitude to things. Start the day by listing a positive affirmation, focusing on the positives, and turning failures into lessons.



Take one day at a time - Try not to project too far into the future. Remember that these are temporary changes and that you can take the steps now to plan your support and recovery.



Try not to worry - There is no point in worrying about things that are not true and unlikely to happen. One of the key things you can do is to make sure that the information you are getting is from a legitimate source. Be mindful of discussions that you are involved in which may increase your worry.



Manage boredom - Engage in indoor hobbies and activities you enjoy. Make the most of catching up on learning, reading and exploring projects you have been putting off to manage boredom and stay mentally active.



As we are faced with a period of uncertainty and prolonged isolation, it is important to build and maintain our resilience. Your resilience is related to how you adapt to and overcome challenging, uncertain, and stressful situations.

This tip sheet provides information and practical resources on building and maintaining your resilience during a time of uncertainty, e.g. COVID-19.

Understanding resilience during a period of uncertainty

During a time of uncertainty and stress, it can be easy to get caught up in things that you cannot control. A helpful strategy is to focus on what is within your control and try to limit the energy spent thinking or worrying about things that are out of your control.

For example:

“I can control the amount of media exposure I receive and place limits on this so that I am not overwhelmed.” (e.g. COVID-19)

“I cannot control other people’s choices to have constant exposure to media.”

Four strategies to build and maintain resilience

Self-care is an important part of managing our wellbeing and building our resilience to challenging situations. As we think about the things we can control and how we choose to deal with uncertainty, we can implement some of the elements of these four strategies to build resilience.



Emotional/Social

- Identify/name what you are feeling (e.g. ‘I am feeling anxious’)
- Allow time to spend with people you care about and interacting with peers and colleagues
- Engage in mindfulness-based activities
- Seek support (social or professional) when you feel you need to



Spiritual

- Practice meditation or yoga
- Celebrate the wins, whether these are big or small
- Think about what your values and goals are. Being mindful of these and engaging in actions that align with your goals
- Use positive affirmations
- Connect with yourself, friends and family



Mental

- Self-reflection/reflect on your emotional state
- Accept limitations (e.g. there are certain things that you can control/cannot control)
- Practice gratitude and positive thinking - list two things that you are grateful for and two things that you are looking forward to



Physical

- Have good sleep quality and sleep hygiene
- Eat well and have a healthy diet
- Make sure that you give yourself time for breaks and exercise regularly
- Have a bit of time-out from your phone and media exposure

Maintaining a healthy mindset

When we are faced with uncertainty and worry, it can be challenging to maintain positive thinking and not be overwhelmed by negativity. Thinking about what is within our control is a good starting point for finding strategies that can help us to build optimism when faced with challenging situations.

Practice gratitude - Make it a ritual each day to remember the good things you have and are thankful for. This is a temporary feeling to a temporary situation. Over time, things will get better.

Be kind - Be conscious that challenging times affect people differently. Look out for your family and friends, as well as your colleagues to ensure you are socially connected, informed, and supported within your community.

Try not to worry - There is no point in worrying about things that aren't true and are unlikely to happen. One of the key things you can do is make sure that the information you are getting is from a legitimate source.

Take one day at a time - Try not to project too far into the future. Remember that these are temporary changes and that you can take the steps now to plan how you navigate through this situation.

Five ways to wellbeing

While you are navigating through this challenging time of uncertainty, it can be helpful to keep in mind the following five ways to wellbeing:

-  **Connect** - Talk and listen, be there, feel connected.
-  **Be active** - Do what you can, enjoy what you do, move your mood.
-  **Take notice** - Remember the simple things that give you joy.
-  **Keep learning** - Embrace new experiences, see opportunities, surprise yourself.
-  **Give** - Your time, your words, your presence.



<https://5waystowellbeing.org.au/>

Working Remotely During a Period of Uncertainty and Prolonged Isolation

As we navigate through an uncharted and challenging period of uncertainty, people are being faced with the need to work from home for a prolonged period of time.

There are multiple considerations to take into account when working from home:

- There are operational challenges, with the need to manage the environment that you are working in.
- There are social challenges, with possibly other people using your home for a range of purposes.
- There are isolation challenges we face by being asked to remain at home for the foreseeable future.
- There are also psychological challenges in managing all of this, with no real understanding of the timeframe.

This tip sheet provides information and practical suggestions to help you cope better with working remotely during a period of uncertainty and prolonged isolation, e.g. COVID-19.

Working remotely during a period of uncertainty and prolonged isolation



Work at home setup - If you can, set aside an area in your home that is separate from the rest of your life. Establishing a physical boundary will also make it easier for you to communicate this boundary to others in your household.



Create a defined workspace - to differentiate between your 'work life' and 'home life' while working from home. This is important even if you do not have others in the household, as it supports you in defining a boundary between work and life.



Set up a daily routine - including things you do before work, your 'setting up for the work day' routine, and your 'end of the work day' routine.



Discuss your working routine - and intentions with other people in your house. If you have children, speak with them about the ways they may be able to recognise when you are 'at work', on a break and when you have finished for the day. It is important to establish a way that a child can connect with you if needed. This may be through an online message or by attaching a post-it note on your desk. This will support you in reinforcing boundaries.



Reach out - to your friends and family to increase your social connectedness through this period. We are social creatures, and we need social connection to thrive.



Rituals - Use things like clothing, times of day, or areas of your house, to symbolise when you are 'working' and when you are 'at home', (e.g. wearing certain shirts or trousers, or sitting in a specific room or chair, may mean that you are 'working').



Set up regular virtual meetings - with your colleagues. If you can use videoconferencing platforms, this can help to foster interpersonal connectedness.



Take regular breaks - away from your work station. If there are others in the household this may be collaborating with them on regular break times.



Speak to your manager - or colleagues about any challenges you are facing as a result of working remotely. This includes operational challenges (e.g. technology), psychological (e.g. focus, distractions at home) and social (e.g. feeling down due to social isolation). In speaking with your manager, ensure that you have both decided on a meeting structure that includes an opportunity to discuss and reflect on your psychological wellbeing during a period of uncertainty.

Additional strategies to help you cope with working remotely

- 
Practice self-care - Find ways to relax and unwind. If there is a hobby you can do at home, make sure you have the supplies and tools you will need in advance. Communicate your self-care plan to others in your household.
- 
Manage boredom - Engage in indoor hobbies and activities you enjoy. Make the most of catching up on learning, reading and exploring projects you have been putting off to manage boredom and stay mentally active.
- 
Take one day at a time - Try not to project too far into the future. Remember that these are temporary changes and you can take the steps now to plan your support and recovery.
- 
Practice gratitude - Make it a ritual each day to remember the good things you have and are thankful for - this is a temporary feeling to a temporary situation and over time things will get better.
- 
Try not to worry - There is no point in worrying about things that are not true and unlikely to happen. One of the key things you can do is to make sure the information you are getting is from a legitimate source. Be mindful of discussions that you may be in which could increase your worry.

Self-Care

- 
Pause - Take a moment to pause and breathe. Do this regularly throughout the day.
- 
Practice good sleep hygiene. For example, try doing something relaxing before bed. Don't watch the news late at night or scroll through social media, and avoid stimulants such as caffeine.
- 
Manage feelings - Try to manage how long you sit with fear, anger, anxiety or worry. While these are normal human emotions, you can set time limits for these feelings and then commit to doing something positive to shift your emotional state.
- 
Acknowledge and Accept - Take notice, acknowledge and accept the thoughts and feelings you are experiencing with curiosity and kindness. Say statements like "I'm noticing that I am feeling worried, and that's ok."
- 
Use relaxation exercises that can be accessed online. For example, you can try yoga or meditation that can be completed in a home environment.
- 
Access support services at work or in the community (e.g. Employee Assistance Program, counselling, Beyond Blue.)

As more people face the prospect of several weeks of uncertainty, physical distancing, isolation and possibly quarantine, it is more important than ever to establish ways of preserving your own mental and physical health, and supporting your colleagues in doing the same.

It is sometimes difficult to know how to approach a colleague who may be struggling; however, with a few simple tips, you can feel more comfortable in letting them know you care and want to support them.

This tip sheet provides information and practical suggestions on how to have a conversation with a colleague you are concerned about.

Simple steps you can take to have a supportive conversation with a colleague

-  **Identify a suitable way to connect** - with your colleague – in times of isolation this may mean via other video conference, phone or text message.
-  **Prepare supports** - Before connecting with your colleague, research support services available, e.g. Employee Assistance Program, Human Resources or other community organisations, such as Beyond Blue.
-  **Plan** - how you will approach the situation. Let your colleague know that you are concerned about them and why. Mention that it is completely normal to experience feelings of anxiety, worry and fear during a challenging period of uncertainty and prolonged isolation. Spend time listening to their experience.
-  **Listen** - Ensure that you are in a position to listen carefully to what they are saying, particularly as you may not be able to rely on interpreting other signals such as body language.
-  **Respect and accept** - their decision if they do not want to discuss the matter; however, inform them that you are available to talk and support them should they change their mind.
-  **Manage privacy** - Reassure them that what they tell you is private. Ask them if they have discussed their situation with others, and if they do or do not want you to mention it to anyone else. Ask them how you could help them talking about their situation and accessing support.
-  **Be supportive** - Talk openly about how the challenging period may impact their mental health and discuss resources available to them through work. Alternatively, you can suggest external forms of support such as their GP, their Employee Assistance Program, or Beyond Blue. Offer to assist them in accessing this support.
-  **Be open** - Allow your colleague the space to share as much or as little as they want. Ask open-ended questions to help you understand what they are going through, but tell them that they don't have to talk about it if it makes them feel uncomfortable.
-  **Follow up** - if you can. Let them know you care and would like to check-in with them, e.g. "How about I give you a call again by the end of the week?"

The Do's and Don'ts when having a conversation with a colleague:

Do:

- ✓ **Set time aside** - to discuss their experiences.
- ✓ **Normalise** - Indicate that it is normal to experience feelings of anxiety, worry and fear during a challenging period.
- ✓ **Listen** - attentively and reflect back what they have said, showing your understanding of their experience.
- ✓ **Be open** - about the impact of challenging periods and that you do not have all the answers.
- ✓ **Link** - a colleague to resources at your organisation such as your Employee Assistance Program or other services.

Don't:

- ✗ **Pressure** - them to 'snap out of it', 'get their act together' or 'cheer up'.
- ✗ **Ignore** - the fact that they might be struggling and assume the problem will go away.
- ✗ **Tell them** - they just need to stay busy, and provide them with solutions without permission.
- ✗ **Keep it to yourself** - If you don't think you can support your colleague, make a plan with them to reach out for assistance.
- ✗ **Judge** - Use words that suggest you are making a judgment, such as good or bad.



IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Remember that speaking openly about the feelings we might be experiencing will reduce stigma and encourage help-seeking behaviour

Supporting Family and Loved Ones Presenting with Mental Health Challenges During a Challenging Period of Uncertainty

During this challenging period of uncertainty and prolonged isolation, your family and loved ones mental health and wellbeing may be impacted. You can be faced with many difficult feelings and issues, and not know where to turn to for support. Helping them through this can be a challenge, and if they are showing real signs of struggle with the unfolding situation, you may feel helpless and wonder what to do.

This tip sheet provides information and practical advice on how to support a family member or loved one experiencing mental health challenges during this challenging period of uncertainty and prolonged isolation.

Look for indications that a family member might struggle to cope

- ✓ Difficulty in adjusting to the new work environment as a result of working from home or prolonged isolation.
- ✓ Excessive reliance on substance use, e.g. drinking more
- ✓ Procrastination, tiredness or a lack of energy.
- ✓ Changes in sleeping patterns, eating and hygiene.
- ✓ Problems with memory and thinking.
- ✓ Frequent mood changes - unusually tearful or emotional.
- ✓ Changes in self-esteem and self-confidence.
- ✓ Communicating thoughts of struggle and suicide.

Supporting family and loved ones presenting with mental health challenges

- ✓ **Discuss** - Let them know that you have noticed changes in their behaviour and you are concerned about their wellbeing.
- ✓ **Keep connected** - Maintain regular contact, schedule regular activities and connections with others in the household, and regularly check in with them.
- ✓ **Listen without judgment** - Be open and listen with empathy and understanding. Provide emotional support and spend time talking about their experiences. Let them know that you want to understand how they are feeling.
- ✓ **Help** - Create a low-stress environment and support a healthy lifestyle. Offer to help around the home and encourage physical activities and predictable routines. Break tasks into small steps (where needed) if daily activities become difficult.
- ✓ **Ask** - For permission before offering solutions and suggestions. Encourage them to discuss how they would like to plan support.
- ✓ **Give positive reinforcement** - Remind them about their positive qualities and how much they mean to you and others.
- ✓ **Offer supports** - Prepare and discuss the range of supports that may be of assistance e.g. Beyond Blue, Employee Assistance Program (EAP), GP, or other work support services. Check with your workplace and your EAP Program to determine if your family members can access this program.
- ✓ **Discourage** - Alcohol and drug use.
- ✓ **Prepare questions** - Help them to prepare questions to discuss in the initial appointment.
- ✓ **Encourage** - Sleep, healthy eating and exercise. Do this together where possible to support them.
- ✓ **Support** - Help them to make any appointments they may require. Offer to attend for the first (telehealth or face-to-face) appointment.

Do not:

- ✓ **Make judgments** - or force your opinion on them.
- ✓ **Use words that stigmatise** - like 'you've lost it'.
- ✓ **Get frustrated** - or angry, be aware of your emotional response.
- ✓ **Avoid discussions about suicide** - and self harm. When a person talks about suicide, they are looking for help.
- ✓ **Tell them** - they just need to stay busy.
- ✓ **Make fun** - of their struggles.
- ✓ **Pressure** - them to 'snap out of it', 'get their act together' or 'cheer up'.
- ✓ **Ignore the issue** - or avoid them by isolating them.
- ✓ **Assume the problem will go away** - If you cannot support them, seek external support.

Looking after yourself

- ✓ **Resource yourself** - On mental health, how it affects people and how it can be treated. The more you know, the easier it will be to talk to your family member and help them to seek support.
- ✓ **Take care of yourself** - Supporting a family member can be emotionally tiring.
- ✓ **Be patient** - take things one day at a time. Depending on the circumstances and the individual, symptoms may quickly improve after supports are in place. For others, it may take longer.
- ✓ **Seek professional support** - for yourself where needed, e.g. your Health Practitioner, the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or Beyond Blue.



Supporting Your Children's Mental Health During a Challenging Period of Uncertainty and Prolonged Isolation

Many parents wonder how they should 'talk to' and 'care for' the mental health of their children during this challenging period of uncertainty and prolonged isolation due to the impacts of COVID-19. It is common for parents to think that it is better to avoid talking to their children to protect them from stress and confusion.

Research shows that children cope better when their parents talk openly about what is going on, in language that the child can understand. It can help them make sense of the changes they are experiencing in their day-to-day routine, as well as the potential changes in behaviour they are observing in their parents.

This tip sheet provides information and practical suggestions to help you 'talk to' and 'care for' your children during this challenging period of uncertainty and prolonged isolation.

Practical strategies to help you communicate with children

Preparing to talk

Put on your own oxygen mask before attempting to help others.

Check in with yourself first and make sure you are in a state of mind that will allow you to be calm and patient.

- 
Age-appropriate communication - It is important to think about your child's age and developmental stage in how you tailor your communication. Be sure to share age-appropriate facts.
- 
Speak calmly and openly - Find a balance in what you share and don't share and choose your words carefully. Referring to words like 'disaster', 'pandemic', 'crisis' will not help to calm your child.
- 
Listen without judgement - Spend time talking about their experiences. Let them know that you want to understand how they feel.
- 
Validate feelings - Explain it is normal to experience a range of emotions like 'worry', 'fear', and 'confusion' during this period. Children need to feel seen and heard.
- 
Ask questions - Find out what they are worried about. Reflect back what your child is sharing and work together on creating a coping strategy.
- 
Encourage children to ask questions - This gives them a voice. Don't be afraid to communicate that you do not have all the answers.
- 
Supports - Identify other responsible adults in your child's life that can support them in case you are not available. Put in place some practical strategies for your child to access these supports, e.g. video chat with other family members and friends.
- 
Manage information - Ensure you get the right information from credible sources, e.g. WHO or Department of Health. Restrict, where possible, your child's access to constant streaming of news sources.
- 
Plan - Share what you are doing and planning to do to keep the family safe. Engage your child in this planning, where possible.
- 
Be available - Let them know you are always available to talk about their worries and answer any questions. Plan a time each day where the family can all check in to see how everyone is coping. Children need to feel seen and heard.
- 
Be present - This is the best way to support children during this stressful period.
- 
Communication open - Remember to always keep the lines of communication open. It is better to communicate about the things we do not know or are unsure about, rather than to not communicate at all.

Practical strategies to reduce anxiety, worry and fear

- 
Establish routines - Set up a schedule which works for you and your family. Ensure you have regular meal-times and consistent wake up and bed- time. Breaking up activities into 60-90 minutes chunks can be helpful for children.
- 
Encourage responsibility - Give your child small chores to do so they have a sense of purpose. Simple things like feeding a pet, cleaning out the dishwasher or helping to prepare food will give them a feeling of responsibility.
- 
Establish healthy sleep habits - You can do this by limiting your child's use of screens late in the evening and creating a wind-down routine about an hour before they go to bed. This can help them prepare their body and mind for sleep.
- 
Arrange virtual social interactions - Connect with friends and loved ones via Face Time, Zoom, Skype, etc. Organise virtual playdates and activities.
- 
Manage boredom - Come up with ideas together for indoor activities and hobbies that your child will enjoy, e.g. reading, drawing, making things.
- 
Manage media - Limit unhelpful or excessive media exposure. This can often increase anxiety, worry and confusion.
- 
Be aware of your own behaviours - Children look to their parents for guidance and it is easy to fall into the 'do as I say, don't do as I do' trap. Try and join the fun from time-to-time, rather than telling your children to 'go and have some fun'.
- 
Take care of your own mental health - Emotions are contagious and children take cues from adults. Take the time to process your feelings, talk to others and get your own support. This will help you and your children cope better.
- 
Encourage control - Help your child focus on things that are in their control and encourage healthy attitudes, e.g. ways they can help keep the family safe and healthy. Start the day by listing positive affirmations together.
- 
Practice gratitude together - Make it a ritual each day for you and your child to remember the good things you have and are thankful for. Remind them that this is a temporary situation and over time things will get better.
- 
Compassion - Call out the value of compassion by talking to your child about the importance of care for each other and the broader community during this time.
- 
Be Kind - Try not to put too much pressure on yourself during this challenging time. Slow down and take time as a family to sit with no set plan or activity.

As we navigate through the challenges of COVID-19 and the impact it is having on our communities, people will experience feelings of grief and loss. This is quite a normal response to what is a very challenging time for all.

These challenges and limitations can make it difficult to process grief in the ways that a person normally would. Across governments, these limitations restrict people from connecting with people in mourning.

This tip sheet provides information on coping with Grief and Loss during a challenging period of change and uncertainty, e.g. COVID-19.

Understanding Grief and Loss

People experience grief in response to loss. Often, people think of grief in the context of bereavement, which is when people mourn the loss of a significant figure in their lives. This may be a loved one, family, friend, colleague, mentor, significant figure, or pet.

People can also grieve losses of other kinds. For example, people can grieve the loss of a job, role identity, social liberty, social connection and friendship, secure housing, health, and confidence in the future that they thought would come to pass.

It can be helpful to understand that grief can manifest for a range of different reasons and result in a variety of emotions and physical signs. It can be helpful to reflect on how this might look for you and those around you.

Common signs of Grief and Loss

Grief is emotional suffering and a natural response to loss. Common emotions and physical symptoms that can be present during the grieving process can include:



Emotional Signs

-  Sadness
-  Shock and disbelief
-  Guilt (e.g., unable to attend funerals or be with loved ones)
-  Anger
-  Fear
-  Denial



Physical Signs

-  Fatigue
-  Nausea
-  Lowered immunity
-  Changes in weight
-  Sleep difficulties
-  Aches and pains

Grief is experienced differently by different people. While some people may experience a roller coaster of all these emotions and physical symptoms, other people may experience one or two. Grief is an individual process for each person to work through at their own pace and the experience of grief can fluctuate over time.

How we process grief

People process grief in different ways. Often, people identify with 'emotional' expressions of grief, 'practical' expressions of grief, or a combination of both. There is no right or wrong way to grieve, but it can be helpful to understand that people around you may grieve differently to you.

Emotional grief

-  Crying/Mourning
-  Remembering and sharing (using photos, letters or other memorabilia)
-  Ceremonial recognition of the loss (e.g., funeral, wake)
-  Other expression of emotion (e.g., singing, artwork, etc.)
-  Expressing your feelings and experiences regarding the loss

Practical grief

-  Caring for others
-  Clearing away possessions
-  Organising a funeral or wake
-  Taking care of legal requirements or processes
-  Making plans for the future

Practical strategies to help you cope with grief and loss

Coping with the grieving process can be challenging. An important component of coping with grief can be to connect with other people, but in the context of current limitations, the associated physical distancing requirements can make this even more difficult. The following steps are aimed to guide you through some practical ways to cope with grief during a global crisis.

- 1 Acknowledge your pain** - suffering follows loss.
- 2 Accept that grief can trigger many different and unexpected emotions** - such as anger, sadness and denial and that is 'OK'.
- 3 Understand that your grieving process will be unique to you** - everyone moves through this differently and finding ways to express this can be helpful.
- 4 Seek out support from others** - either with people within your household, or by reaching out to friends, family, faith, support groups or other supports online. This could include holding a private ceremony by yourself or with people you live with.
- 5 Take steps** - to acknowledge, recognize, and mourn your loss, even if you are unable to do this in traditional ways (e.g., attend funerals). During times of physical distancing this could include writing a letter or asking others to share their memories and experiences.
- 6 Take care of your physical wellbeing** - Take the time to focus on the 'here and now' and what is within your control.
- 7 Understand that there may come a time when you could benefit from speaking to a professional** - if the grief does not ease and impacts on your ability to engage in life for a prolonged period of time.



SUPPORT SERVICES AND ORGANISATIONS (AU)

While grief is a normal response to loss, prolonged grief can develop into a mental health illness for some people. If you have concerns for the mental wellbeing of yourself or someone you care about, please seek support.

Bereavement counselling

- Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement
Tel: (03) 9265 2100 or 1800 642 066

Loss and grief telephone counselling service

- GriefLine Community and Family Services Inc
Tel: 1300 845 745
(12 noon to 3 am, 7 days a week)

For 24/7 phone or online suicide and crisis support

- Lifeline - 13 11 14 or www.lifeline.org.au
- SuicideLine Victoria: 1300 651 251 - for counselling, crisis intervention, information and referral

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Emergency Services	Police, Fire or Ambulance - available 24hours	000 or 112 from a mobile
Lifeline	Phone support for those in crisis	13 11 14
Kids Helpline	Confidential telephone counselling for young people aged between 5 and 25	1800 55 1800
Mensline Australia	Telephone and online support, including referral information for men	1300 78 99 78
Suicide Call Back Service	Telephone and online counselling for people affected by suicide	1300 659 467
Beyondblue	Information, online and telephone support for depression and anxiety	Beyondblue.org.au
Black Dog Institute	Information and support for depression and bipolar disorder	Blackdoginstitute.org.au
Carers Australia	Counselling and support for carers and their families	1800 242 636
Crisis Assessment and Transport Team (CATT)	Immediate support in a mental health crisis	Contact your local mental health crisis team
Headspace	Online and phone support services for young people aged between 12 and 25	1800 650 890
Head to Health	Online information and resources	1800 650 890
Mindspot Clinic	Online or telephone support providing free assessment and treatment for adults with anxiety or depression	1800 61 44 34 Mindspot.org.au
National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation	Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and Medical Services in each state and territory	Nacho.org.au
QLife	Online and telephone counselling for LGBTI people	1800 184 527 Qlife.org.au
Relationships Australia	Relationship support services for individuals, families and communities	1300 364 277
SANE Australia	Information on mental illness, treatment and support	1800 18 7263
Support After Suicide	Information, resources and support following suicide	Supportaftersuicide.org.au
My Gov	Access online government services	13 23 07
Services Australia (Centrelink)	Access social, health and childcare support services and payments	servicesaustralia.gov.au
Department of Health	Information and advice to the community on health, ageing and aged care topics	health.gov.au