

EMOTIONS AND SOCIAL DISTANCING

We wanted to share some advice around coping with some of the emotional challenges that may come up over the next few weeks. Whilst we adjust our emotions may come out in different ways including denial (pretending nothing has happened, carrying on as normal), anger (at people not following social distancing or people hoarding), anxiety and depression.

Remember, everyone copes with these things differently. For example, introverts may be adjusting well to social distancing as they are stimulated by their own thoughts and feelings whereas extroverts may be struggling more as they are fueled by social interactions and their environment. So, check in with your friends, even those who usually cope with stress well!

The British Psychological Society have quickly pulled together some research into how people cope with social isolation and I have pulled together some advice based on these findings:

ADAPTATION

People cope in different ways when faced with large-scale change. Some of you may be in denial and trying to go on as normal. In the current situation we need to accept the 'new normal' as quickly as possible to support the NHS to get on top of this. Establishing a new routine is one of the best ways of adapting to a new set of circumstances so get a weekly planner out and map your week. If you usually visit your parents on a certain day of the week, set up a skype call instead. Usually go to the gym on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays? Get on YouTube for home workout or follow a live workout online.

MANAGING ANXIETY AND UNCERTAINTY

You may be feeling anxious which is completely normal at this time but there are ways that you can help manage these feelings:

- Try to think rationally about the actual threat. The actual threat of the virus is fairly low at an individual level, we just need to do what we can to protect ourselves and others. Avoid reading information from unreliable sources who may exaggerate dangers and cause more anxiety.
- Try to focus on the present and not the end point. This situation WILL end but we don't know when or how yet. Try to focus on daily and weekly tasks rather than dwelling on the long term.

Mindfulness is a great way of staying present and there are some good apps that have mindfulness practices available. 'Headspace' and 'Calm' are my favorites.

- If you are struggling to manage anxiety get help. All IAPT services are still running so look up your local one if you need it. They will be in demand at the moment though so expect a wait. If you need help more quickly you can pay for telephone or online counselling but ensure you use a qualified individual. 'Better help' is a good service that only use appropriately trained practitioners or look at the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) website for a list of registered therapists.
- Try to avoid negative coping strategies. There is a lot of social media at the moment about using alcohol to cope with social distancing and whilst drinking in moderation is ok, alcohol actually increases stress and anxiety the day after we drink so is not recommended as a way of dealing with emotions. And, contrary to some memes I have seen, it will not kill the virus! It actually lowers immunity which is not what we want at the moment.
- Try to focus on the positives- the current situation is bringing out the best in a lot of people- look how communities are pulling together to help our most vulnerable and how the pandemic is showing us what is really important in life.

LACK OF MOTIVATION

Motivation can go out of the window whilst so much is going on in the world. Tasks can either feel insurmountable or insignificant or we may have the sense that there is so much time ahead of us to do all that we need that we put it off indefinitely. One tip would be to make a list of easy tasks that you would like to complete over the coming weeks- things like cleaning out a cupboard, going through your wardrobe, clearing your inbox etc. Have this list handy and when you are feeling particularly lethargic, whip it out and do one task. This can stimulate a sense of achievement and your self-efficacy that can help you go on to do bigger, more challenging projects.

Journaling can also be a good tool to help create a sense of purpose. Write about how you are feeling and acknowledge all you have achieved each day. Don't beat yourself up if you didn't do all you set out to but reflect on why this may be and plan how you are going to overcome barriers.

LIVING IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO OTHERS

Whilst social distancing can feel lonely, paradoxically, if we are at home with our family or flat mates, being with them all day every day can feel suffocating. This can lead to tension, arguments and conflict. There are things you can do to ease this:

- Establish some ground rules- little annoyances like not washing up can be magnified in this situation so get together to make some guidelines you all stick to in order to avoid unnecessary arguments.
- Make some space for yourself. Have a room that you can go to to be alone when things are getting on top of you.

- Practice tolerance. Before criticising others take a breath and ask yourself- 'Does this need to be said? Does this need to be said *now*? Does this need to be said by me?'. We are not good at communicating effectively when we are angry so stepping back and waiting until we are calm and then having an honest, relaxed conversation about our frustrations will be much more effective.

Overall, it is important to remember that it is okay not to feel okay at the moment. If you are feeling emotionally drained, speak to someone. We should not pretend that we are taking this in our stride, it is a completely new situation for us all. Share any tips for coping with the friend and family and make sure you get plenty of rest too.

At MoreLife we are here to help, we too have had to respond quickly to the issues raised by COVID-19 and we have developed new ways of getting support.

1. You can still arrange appointments with our team members for 1:1 phone or skype calls. These can be booked with your usual practitioner (as long as they are not unwell) or call our client services team to help.
2. We are setting up Zoom and Facebook live groups that you can join for support managing your health and wellbeing at this difficult time.
3. Using our website we are setting up online videos, and contents so that you can be supported in your own time. We are working on this now and it should be available soon via a password protected link on our website.

We are all adjusting so please stick with us, and please be assured our teams are working really hard to help you. We also hope you will give us constructive feedback we don't know how long this will last but any feedback that helps us improve the way we support you during this time will be important.