

# Coronavirus and mental wellbeing – for people with mental illness and/or suicidal thoughts

This guide has been produced to help support you if you are suffering from depression and anxiety through to more severe mental health illness and/or having suicidal thoughts.

Infectious disease outbreaks, like the current Coronavirus (COVID-19), can be scary and can affect our mental wellbeing. While it is important to stay informed, there are also many things you can do to support and manage your wellbeing during such times.

A range of guidance is available if you are suffering from a mental health illness and/or have suicidal thoughts. The following provides a summary of this information and offers some tips to help you, your friends and your family to look after your mental health. This has been adapted from the advice provided by the [Mental Health Foundation](#) and informed by Public Health England guides for [children and young people](#) and [adults](#).



The NHS, social services and other services will continue to support people during the coronavirus crisis, but they might not be able to provide their normal level of support. This means that other means of contact and support from services are in place to help you. It is important to remember that the crisis is temporary and that things should return to normal eventually.

## **Looking after your mental health while you have to stay at home**

The latest guidance on [social distancing](#) or [staying at home](#) might mean that you may not have access to your regular social and physical activities that helps to maintain your mental wellbeing. This doesn't necessarily mean you cannot do the things you enjoy and connect with friends and family. For example, we have provided additional guidance on [five ways to wellbeing](#) that can be carried out in and around your own home. In addition, it will help to try and see it as a different period of time in your life, and not necessarily a bad one, even if you didn't choose it.

Try to think of it as a different approach to your daily living and routines in and around your home. Look after your physical health (e.g. ensuring you have enough prescription medicines you may need) and take time to get in contact with friends and family. Using social media, e-mail or on the phone are still good ways of being close to the people who matter to you. Also, consider possible ways of how you could rest and relax by viewing the situation as a new if unusual experience. Allow time to do the things you enjoy.

## **Try to avoid speculation and look up reputable sources on the outbreak**

There is a lot of information about the virus out there, however reading or listening to false reports can fuel anxiety. Stay on top of what's happening by using the [Government website](#), which is the most up-to-date and reliable source of information. The [NHS common questions](#) about the virus can also be useful if you are worried about symptoms or family members. It can be very hard to know whether or not social media posts are true, so try not to rely on updates from there – reliable reporting can be found on national news sites such as the [BBC News website](#).

## **Try to stay connected**

At times of stress, we work better in company and with support from others. Try and keep in touch with your friends and family, by telephone, email or social media, or contact a helpline for emotional support.

Also remember to regularly assess the amount of time you use social media. Think about whether you need to reduce your social media activity and avoid negative or inaccurate information that may be shared by others. This is important because inaccurate information or false reports may heighten your worry or anxiety. Consider muting or unfollowing accounts or hashtags that cause you to feel anxious.

## **Talk to your family, children and friends**

Involving your family, children and friends in your plans for good health is essential. In addition to your own mental wellbeing, think about how the outbreak has affected your children (if you are a parent). Try to support them without causing alarm'.

If you have children, it is important to minimise the negative impact information about COVID-19 may have on your child and explain the facts to them. Discuss the news with them but try and avoid over-exposure to coverage of the virus. Be as truthful as possible. [Our guides on Coronavirus](#) for children aged under 5 years, primary school children and young people can signpost resources to support with this.

## **Try not to make assumptions**

With increasing awareness about the virus and potential of knowing someone who has been affected, try not to place blame or hold someone else accountable. Don't judge people and avoid jumping to conclusions about who is responsible for the spread of the disease. The Coronavirus can affect anyone, regardless of gender, ethnicity or sex.

## **Try to anticipate distress**

Try to avoid or limit your exposure to things (e.g. hearing or reading too much news about Covid-19) that may cause you distress or heighten your anxiety. This is particularly important if you have a long-term physical health condition and/or have or have experienced trauma for example.

There are now many apps available to help improve your general wellbeing, from meditation/ mindfulness techniques to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, and reducing the urge to self-harm. Take a look at some [NHS apps](#) that may help you with your mental wellbeing.

## Keeping physically well

It's important to acknowledge these feelings and to look after your physical and mental health. Try to avoid or limit habits that may not be helpful in the long term, like smoking and drinking alcohol. Taking the time to relax, eat well, stay hydrated and maintain healthy and active lifestyles that include good quality regular sleeping patterns (e.g. see Every Mind Matters sleep page) will also help you to support your overall wellbeing. There is also lots of helpful advice on our [mental health pages](#) and [five ways to well-being](#).

It can help to have a small first aid kit at home so that you can self-manage any physical health conditions. This may be just a small box containing pain relief, plasters, antihistamines, antacids – whatever you may need to prevent you having to leave your house unnecessarily at this time.

## Safety Planning

A safety plan is for someone to use when they are feeling that their mental health and wellbeing is low, and/or that they are at risk of self-harm or acting on suicidal thoughts – a plan to remind themselves of reasons to live, family and friends they can talk with and things that can make them feel strong and in control of their feelings.

By having a safety plan, you're making sure that there are strategies you can use to keep yourself safe, which can help you feel more in control when everything feels out of control. Think of your safety plan as your 'mental health first-aid kit'; it includes different things that will help you through a crisis.

Everyone's plan is personal and different, but it can help by walking someone through their steps to keep them safe. For people who self-harm or feel suicidal it's not designed to be their only support, but can help as part of a wider approach to supporting their wellbeing.

More information about safety plans, signposting to further sources of support, and access to free online suicide prevention and mental wellbeing training can be found on the [Cornwall Council website](#).

## Additional sources of help and support

### NHS 24/7 help line

To talk to someone about your mental wellbeing you can call the 24/7 NHS mental health telephone support, advice and triage help line - **0800 053 3800**. Support is available to anyone, regardless of age, all day every day. If you or someone you know feels they need to access urgent mental health support, they will listen to you and assess how best to help.

### Royal Cornwall Hospitals Trust

Emergency Departments are open 24 hours a day if you need support for a serious and life-threatening injury or illness. The website has information about where the best place is to get treatment [www.royalcornwall.nhs.uk/services/urgent-emergency-care/emergency-department/](http://www.royalcornwall.nhs.uk/services/urgent-emergency-care/emergency-department/) and on waiting times [www.royalcornwall.nhs.uk/services/urgent-emergency-care/minor-injury-wait-times/](http://www.royalcornwall.nhs.uk/services/urgent-emergency-care/minor-injury-wait-times/).

### 999

Call 999 in a medical emergency. This is when someone is seriously ill or injured and their life is at risk. If someone has self-harmed or is having suicidal thoughts that they intend to act on, going to Accident and Emergency (A & E) or calling 999 for help is the right thing to do.

### 111

NHS 111 makes it easier and quicker for patients to get the right advice or treatment they need, for their physical or mental health, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Go online to [www.111.nhs.uk](http://www.111.nhs.uk) (for assessment of people aged 5 and over only) Call **111** for free from a landline or mobile phone.

### Your GP

Please call your GP or visit their website for up to date information on accessing medical advice. You may be able to have a consultation with a GP by phone or online during the COVID19 outbreak.

### Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust – Integrated Community Mental Health Teams

Integrated Cornwall Community Mental Health Teams (ICMHTs) are available Monday to Friday from 8.45am – 5.15pm for advice and signposting.

Call: **0845 207 7711** (calls cost 2p plus your phone company's access charge)

## Crisis Services

### Valued Lives

Crisis service designed to support people who are experiencing mental/emotional distress. [www.valuedlives.co.uk](http://www.valuedlives.co.uk) or call **01209 901438** (7 days a week 5pm-midnight)

### Samaritans

Provides confidential, non-judgemental emotional support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those that could lead to suicide.

Call: **116 123** (24 hours a day, free to call) [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org) Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

### Shout

Shout is a 24/7 text service, free on all major mobile networks, for anyone in crisis anytime, anywhere. It's a place to go if you're struggling to cope and you need immediate help.

Text: shout to **85258**

### ChildLine

ChildLine is a private and confidential service for children and young people up to the age of nineteen. You can contact a ChildLine counsellor for free about anything. Call: **0800 1111**

Website: [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

## Non-crisis Services

### Mind Infoline

Mind provides confidential mental health information services.

Call: **0300 123 3393** (9am-6pm Monday to Friday) or text **86463** Email: [info@mind.org.uk](mailto:info@mind.org.uk) Website: [www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helplines](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helplines)

### Rethink

Rethink Mental Illness offer information and advice, resources and support for people with mental illness. Their website has all you need to know about mental illness, diagnosis, treatment and your rights: [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org)

Email: [advice@rethink.org](mailto:advice@rethink.org) Call: **0300 5000 927**

### Support Matters Cornwall

Out-of-hours helpline (5pm to 9am weekdays and 24 hours a day at weekends and bank holidays). For all patients (aged 16+) under the care of Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust's mental health services (e.g Community Mental Health Team or CAMHS).

Call: **0800 001 4330**, via text **@MHM\_Helpline**, email [info@mhm.org.uk](mailto:info@mhm.org.uk) or web chat [www.mhm.org.uk](http://www.mhm.org.uk)

### Outlook South West

Psychological therapy services for people aged 16 and above in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. The service continues during the COVID-19 outbreak as a phone-based operation and agreed digital platforms for assessment and treatment, and they are continuing to take referrals online.

[www.cornwallft.nhs.uk/outlook-south-west](http://www.cornwallft.nhs.uk/outlook-south-west)

### Pentreath

Promoting good mental health through personal development, education and employment. Continuing to support during the COVID19 outbreak, but not currently taking new referrals:

[info@pentreath.co.uk](mailto:info@pentreath.co.uk) or visit [www.pentreath.co.uk](http://www.pentreath.co.uk)