Looking After Your Wellbeing in the Covid-19 Pandemic

Peterborough City Council April 2020

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused huge changes to our lives in a short space of time. Our work has become unpredictable; we are working from home as well as providing cover in school or the office, or we or our relatives may be frontline workers in new and unprecedented times. We are caring for our children and vulnerable relatives, whilst coping with lockdown and living in this crisis. Understandably, this is causing enormous stress and anxiety and looking after our mental and emotional wellbeing has never been more important.

This short guide will provide you with some tips, things you can do and details of support services to help keep you and your family mentally healthy during this time.

These tips are based on the NHS 5 ways to wellbeing:

1. **Connecting 2. Being physically active 3. Taking notice**
2. **Learning new skills 5. Giving to others**

These 5 ways can help to support our mental health but it’s also important to remember to:

* **Continue with your daily working routine**; waking and sleeping at the same time. If you are working from home, create a timetable that is varied and includes time for self-care and breaks, and if possible establish a workspace so that you can separate work life from home life.
* **Limit the amount of time spent reading about COVID-19**. The information can cause additional worry and is ever changing. Find a few trusted sources that you can check in with and limit this to perhaps, 2-3 times a day.
* **Give loved ones the benefit of the doubt**. A lot of time indoors together, can bring out both the best and worst in people. People react differently to stress. Try not to engage in every argument.
* **Remind yourself daily that this is a temporary situation** and that you need to be kind to yourself. Now is not the time to be hard on yourself if you didn’t end up doing what you intended to. Every day may feel different and like a challenge so it’s OK to not feel positive or motivated all the time. Also, remember you are part of a team; the school’s response does not rest on you alone.



4. Learning new skills has been shown to also improve your wellbeing by raising self-esteem and building a sense of purpose.

Some things you could try:

* Taking on a new DIY Project
* Taking an online course
* Learning a new language
* Taking up a new hobby/interest
* Writing a blog, short story or poetry
* Learning a new arts/crafts activity
* Colouring in mandala sheets
* Playing instruments, singing and dancing
* Textile activities; sewing, knitting, cross-stitch

**5. Giving to others** and acts of kindness can feel more difficult to do during the lockdown, however these types of acts can help create positive feelings within us.

Ways in which you could do this are:

* Checking in with elderly neighbours from a distance
* Delivering food and medicine to those who live locally to you, to their doorstep, (while keeping to the government guidelines)
* Writing or sharing wellbeing tips with others
* Online or over the phone tutoring for children of friends/family
* Actively listening to others and looking out for them

Notice the good in the world, in your community, in your family and friends. There are stories of people working on the front line, helping, donating, and supporting one another in miraculous ways.

**3. Taking notice or paying attention** to the present moment can improve your mental wellbeing. This includes your thoughts, feelings, your body and the world around you.

This can be achieved through practicing “mindfulness,” where you learn to become aware of your thoughts, feelings and physical sensations as they happen. The goal isn’t to clear your mind or to stop thinking but to be aware of your thoughts and accept them. For example, if you notice a feeling of nervousness, simply state “I notice I am feeling nervous.” There is **no** need to judge or change the feeling.

Some useful mindfulness exercises can be found at: <https://www.mindful.org/how-to-practice-mindfulness/>

*(There are more mindfulness resources on the next page)*

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**2. Being physically active** may feel harder with leisure centres and gyms being closed and having to social distance when outside but being physically active is important to maintain a healthy mind and body.

Here are some ways you can exercise, indoors or whilst outside, where you can still keep safe and children/teenagers can also join with:

* Going for a walk/run/jog/bike rides
* Online workouts on YouTube (e.g. Joe Wicks, NHS Aerobics, Yoga, Pilates, Zumba)
* Instagram Live following fitness instructors in real time (e.g. @aileenmccann\_pt, @starksfitnessgym, @fitnesswithfab)

Finding time to stretch our muscles daily is also important when spending long periods of time at a desk or sitting down. Daily stretching is also a great activity to do with younger children.

Stay hydrated and eat well. This may seem obvious but during stressful times, we can find ourselves over-indulging, forgetting to eat, and avoiding food. Drink plenty of water, eat some healthy and nutritious foods, and challenge yourself and family members to learn how to cook something new.

**1.Connecting** can feel very challenging during these current circumstances. However, we can use technology to keep in contact regularly, socialise with friends and family, and when needed, share our feelings and experiences.

This period of self-isolation can be an opportunity to create virtual group activities such as:

* Meals together
* Quizzes
* Physical activity workouts and yoga
* Book Clubs
* Film nights
* Card Games
* Re-creating famous art work or your own personal photos or memories

If you have children, take the opportunity to spend extra time playing with them. Children will rarely communicate how they are feeling but they can do this through play. Play is cathartic and helpful for children, as it is how they process their world.

# Services to Support your Wellbeing

**Peterborough City Council Employee Assistance Programme (EAP):** Staff employed by Peterborough City Council can access a range of resources, including telephone counselling, online CBT and information on health and wellbeing through the Employee Assistance Programme. The EAP is provided by Health Assured and offers confidential advice 24 hour​​​​​​​s a day, seven-days-a-week, 365 days ​​​​​​​a year.

For more information about the features and benefits available to you, telephone 0800 030 5182 or visit [www.healthassuredeap.co.uk](https://healthassuredeap.co.uk/)

More information including Member Login details can be found under the “Health and Wellbeing” tab on the PCC intranet.

**Able Futures**: This is a free, confidential mental health service for anyone employed or self-employed, delivered by qualified healthcare professionals:

<https://able-futures.co.uk/> email at: hello@able-futures.co.uk

Call Freephone number 0800 321 3137 (8am to 10.30pm, Monday to Friday).

**NHS:**

<https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/mental-health-services/how-to-access-mental-health-services/>

**Samaritans:** Telephone: 116 123

<https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/>

**Women’s Aid**

<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/covid-19-coronavirus-safety-advice-for-survivors/>

***Coronavirus and looking after your mental health:***

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

<https://www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/2020/13-march-coronavirus-self-isolation-how-to-look-after-your-mental-health-and-wellbeing-if-you-re-self-isolating/>

***Mindfulness***

<https://www.bemindfulonline.com/>

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/articles/mindfulness-mindful-breathing/>

**Apps:** Headspace, Smiling Mind, Calm

Teachers and support staff can get a free year's subscription to Headspace: <https://www.headspace.com/educators>

**Books:** Black, A. (2015) – The Little Pocket Book of Mindfulness (CICO Books).

***Bereavement Support***

Sadly, some staff will suffer the loss of a loved one due to coronavirus.

The Cruse Bereavement Care Freephone National Helpline is staffed by trained bereavement volunteers, who offer emotional support to anyone affected by bereavement. Call for free on 0808 808 1677.

They have also put together resources for different situations and emotions bereaved people may have to deal with and includes advice about grieving in isolation.

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief>

***For Children and Families:***

**Peterborough City Council Educational Psychology Service has put together information and activities for children and families to access during this time. They cover a range of topics, including mental health and wellbeing. To access these, please go to:** <https://fis.peterborough.gov.uk/kb5/peterborough/directory/site.page?id=3-CrEQhcFdY> and select “Educational Psychology Services”

We are grateful to Camden Learn, working with Camden Local Authority, for sharing their staff wellbeing resources.