Coronavirus – tips to support mental health & wellbeing

There is huge focus on looking after yourselves physically and what preventative measures you can take to protect yourself and your family right now; but there is also a massive fallout on people's mental resilience to cope with constant reports of this pandemic and the worry and anxiety created as a result. This is a hugely stressful time for lots of reasons and it is normal to feel anxious, worried or stressed out about it – particularly if you have vulnerable children or adults at home or nearby and have the added complexities of keeping them safe.

This post is aimed at helping you to create a structure to deal with this global crisis, keep your feet on the ground, keep breathing and put you back in control of yourself:

Be Informed: This means getting news from *reputable and trusted sources*. It may help to focus on publications from groups like this:

- Public Health England https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england
- NHS https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/
- Government https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response

Many people are mistrustful of the government and politicians, but it may be worth remembering that for Coronavirus, they have a team of scientists, medics and experts in pandemic control providing information and feedback on what actions they should take and when

Protect yourself from getting overwhelmed: Check in with news sources at specific times of the day rather than sitting watching a newsfeed on a constant basis. This will need you to be disciplined but giving yourself set times where you will look at your devices and a time limit of when that will stop, may help you not to feel so engulfed with the incessant media coverage. For example, I'll check at 8am for 15 minutes then again at 4pm for 15 minutes. Check-in's whilst you are in bed getting ready for rest are not recommended, if you want to have a final view of what's going on in the world, perhaps giving yourself a time that is a good hour before you want to be aiming for sleep would be an option. Then do something else before going to bed to try and move your mind away from it

Keep it real: Focus on facts. There are many news sources that use very provocative language or sensationalise stories. This taps directly into the underlying anxiety that many people have at present and is not helpful. It is easy to be wound up by things that are not technically fact, but embellishments or even just a journalist voicing an opinion but clothing it as a factual statement. Remember, tens of thousands of people have recovered from Coronavirus, the news reports are focused on those that sadly have died but many more have recovered.

Breaking down worries: There are lots of different things for people to worry about right now, but holding onto every single worry can cause upset tummies, headaches, nausea, sleeplessness, lack of appetite and low mood. Try to put worries into two categories – what you can control and what you can't. Then put your energy into what you can control by putting in place actions to help those feel more manageable. Have a look at these CHIMP articles which might give you some tools to help with this: https://www.clairehouse.org.uk/chimp/hard-to-cope-with-things/ or https://www.clairehouse.org.uk/uncategorised/feeling-calm/

Informing children – Although the Government hasn't issued any formal school closure mandates, many parents are selecting to keep children at home. There is a helpline set up by the Department of

Education who may be able to help answer any other queries or concerns you have: 0800 046 8687 or website DfE.coronavirushelpline@education.gov.uk

Kids will be hearing snippets of adult conversations, may have had assembly in school with details shared and therefore might also be hiding some worries or fears. We would encourage you to talk to them at an age-appropriate level to give them the facts and lots of reassurance that they are **safe**. This is particularly important for children who are being kept off school and who know that their friends are still going in to class. There are some social stories emerging online to help children understand what's happening in simple terms, an example is: https://www.flipsnack.com/KeshetChicago/coronavirus-social-story/full-view.html. It's also good to give them specific things they can do to help, such as handwashing, sneezing or coughing into arms or tissues etc.

If you are keeping children off school, then try as much as possible to still give them a set routine including learning, playing and relaxing. Children need to have clear boundaries and structure (even though they will push against these) and at unsettling times, it can be even more important to have these. You might notice that children are more sensitive or seek contact with you more often disliking being separated from you. These are normal responses to a stressful time of crisis, they will be picking up more than they are perhaps able to verbalise or express. Lots of care and sensitive reassurance, cuddles (if they'll let you) and open communication are good antidotes to these reactions from young people.

Keep connected - If you are in self-isolation, keep as connected as you can on the phone or via instant message, WhatsApp or social media. If you know people who are needing to self-isolate, reach out as much as you are able to ensure they have human contact or a means to getting provisions. Keeping busy and creating a routine for yourself will help too. Try to get some physical exercise if you can, even if it's a walk around the garden or dusting off that old keep fit DVD ☺

There are some insights and ideas in this news article that may be helpful too => https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-51873799