Coronavirus – Tips to support mental health & wellbeing #2 – 24th March 2020

We are still at the centre of this Covid-19 cyclone and as we post this article, even stricter measures are being enforced to promote self-isolation with the simple mandate of **'stay home and help save lives'**. We are still being absolutely bombarded in every way possible with news and information about Coronavirus and Covid-19. It's everywhere. Newspapers, magazines, social media, TV programmes and the radio.

We're hearing terms every day many times that create strong emotional reactions. Words like self-distancing, self-isolation, 'moment of national emergency' and 'biggest threat the country has faced for decades'. So, this follow-up article is to remind you of some of the key messages shared before and to offer some other ideas of how to protect your own mental resilience.

This week's article focuses on 3 key areas – Being in the know; self-distancing/self-isolation and relaxation.

Be in the know: It is true to say that we are being flooded with information and data. Where the world finds itself is not in any of our direct control either. However, there are two things you do have direct control of:

→ How often you listen/access information
   o Give yourself specific windows of time in the day when you purposely look at a trusted news source – be as disciplined as you can with this
   o Avoid checking news sources right before bed time – this will not pave the way for a relaxing sleep
   o Use technology to give yourself a break from the endless feeds on social media and people's opinions, you can mute key words and accounts or unfollow on Twitter; on WhatsApp you can mute notifications in groups for up to 1 year and Facebook posts can be changed to 'hide'
   o Notice your thoughts and how your body is feeling as you listen/read or watch information, spot changes in your breathing, fidgets or jumpy limbs, sudden changes in body temperature (feeling cold or goose-pimply or suddenly very hot), becoming very tearful or agitated. These are signs from your brain that you need to **step away** from the news. Take some deep breaths, do some star jumps or find something to totally distract you from Coronavirus
→ Where you get your information from
   o Social media is not the best place to get information, neither are many of the newspapers who are using sensationalistic headlines to bump up their sales
   o Select 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

If you have children or young people in the house be aware of what they are accessing on their devices. If you are feeling overwhelmed and misinformed, then there's a very good chance they will be too. This is a great website with a number of social stories for children to help them understand what's happening => https://www.lgfl.net/covid19socialstories

Self-distancing & Self-isolation: these are strange and alien concepts to us all. Even during World War 2 the British Public was still going about their business to work, school and social activities like the theatre and the cinema. You may have heard stories too from older generations that they took great pride in still being out and about during the peak of WW2 and that the Dunkirk Spirit was so strong, they faced that huge adversity with as little derailment to 'normal' life as possible.

So, this is *unprecedented* (another word we're hearing a lot of). When things are totally new, they create instability, invoke worry and amplify normal feelings to levels of panic and anxiety. We are in a situation with so many unknowns and we are constantly waiting for something (bad) to happen.

It's perhaps important to try and recognise that self-isolation doesn't have to mean loneliness. This is more challenging of course if you live alone, but where social media can cause us difficulties with misinformation and stir up emotions; it can provide a life-line of contact to people.

A big risk of staying at home is boredom; getting yourself a routine will help to give your day structure and meaning. Many people are working from home and many families are now home-schooling so routine is challenging. Planning things in your day that give you variation and some indoor and outdoor time can be helpful.

You can spend time in your garden, on your back or front door step and in public areas providing you follow the Government guidance on self-distance rules. This might be a great time to challenge yourself and your loved ones; why not host an online quiz and pit family members from different homes against each other; if you have a garden, you could have a go at something like the Couch to 5K or set up social media groups where any Coronavirus chat is banned and a forfeit applies to anyone who breaks that; have a virtual game of cards using WhatsApp video or Skype.

Isolating yourself physically does not mean that you have to feel lonely or be alone. This is a really important mind-set change to try and make for yourself. In the Cambridge Dictionary, one of the definitions of Isolation is "the condition of being alone, especially when this makes you feel unhappy"; but we don't have to be alone and we can work hard not to feel unhappy. Unlike those families in WW2, we have technology to support our connectedness, even if that is just using the simple landline (any children reading this will probably wonder what that is!) or mobile phone for calls and texts.

Relaxation: Easier said than done. But, not impossible! Here are some links to sites/apps that you might be find helpful to calm and relax the mind and inject some fun into day to day life ☺

www.calm.com => Calm is a meditation, sleep and relaxation app that helps listeners the amazing benefits of mindfulness. The app includes sleep stories and guided meditations

www.headspace.com => Headspace's mission is to improve the health and happiness of the world. Users will learn the essentials of meditation and mindfulness

https://apps.apple.com/us/app/smiling-mind/id560442518 => Smiling Mind is a free mindfulness meditation app (iPhone/iPad only) developed by psychologists and educators. The programs are designed to assist people in dealing with the pressure, stress, and challenges of daily life.

For children/young people:

www.wakingup.com/children => Check out these guided meditations for children. The recordings are designed for children ages six to ten

https://www.cosmickids.com/ => Yoga, mindfulness and relaxation for kids. Interactive adventures that build strength, balance, and confidence - and get kids into yoga and mindfulness early!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9w7SjHaZmE => The purpose of the mountain meditation is to become grounded and access our inner strength and stability when faced with stressful and challenging circumstances, both internal and external

https://bit.ly/AudioElevenses => David Walliams is releasing an audio story every day for the next 30 days for free

We hope this is helpful to you, keep breathing, keep grounded in what is true and factual and most of all follow the Government guidelines, stay home and keep safe.

The Counselling & Family Support Team: Tash, Catherine, Rach, Frankie and Sarah x