Coronavirus (COVID-19): Looking after your Mental Health

TIP SHEET

Many people's lives have been disrupted due to the ever changing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This may be a particularly stressful time for individuals and families, and the importance of self-care to look after your mental health has never been more important.

These strategies below will help you to manage your levels of stress and anxieties in response to the current climate of uncertainty, change and social isolation.

Movement

Due to new restrictions from the COVID-19 crisis Western Australians are more limited than ever in how they can move. Exercise and movement is essential for your physical and mental wellbeing and the endorphins will help keep low moods at bay. If you have time on your hands you might choose to do a short exercise session twice or even three times a day.

Here are three tips for moving during isolation:

- **Move outside** - in a time when we are spending more time at home, it is important we still get outside for some fresh air and to keep in touch with nature while you walk, jog or run in your local neighbourhood. Ensure you get outside once a day for 30 minutes, which can have a positive effect on our mood and help us re-energise.

- **Move at home** – Start the day with some movement. It could be dancing to an upbeat song, engaging in yoga practice, or joining an online exercise routine. Find a form of movement you enjoy that you can do in your backyard or living room.

- **Move online** – support your local gym, dance, yoga or Pilates instructor and sign up for an online class or video to keep moving. There are also many exercise videos available on YouTube for free.

Connection

Connection is essential for mental health. Self-isolation and quarantine measures keep us and our community safe from COVID-19 but they also keep us away from our loved ones. Here are three tips for connecting during isolation:

- **Connect with family** – once a day for at least 30 minutes via phone or video chat (Facetime, Whatsapp or Zoom etc.) It's important to continue connecting to our loved ones during this time.

- **Connect with friends or colleagues** – reach out to your close friends to receive and offer a listening ear in this time of isolation. Also, with so many people losing their jobs or working from home it's easy to lose connection with colleagues. Pick up the phone or organise a video conference to stay connected.

- **Snail Mail!** - If you know someone who doesn't have internet, perhaps send them an old fashioned handwritten letter or card. Receiving mail could make someone's day. Adding a drawing, cutting out some fun pictures from a magazine or simply using different coloured pens could lift their mood too. It will also serve as an activity for you during your day.

Self-Care

Self-care is essential for mental health. We can't look after others or the community if we don't first look after ourselves. Here are three tips for self-care during isolation.

- **Healthy Eating, Hydration and Sleep** – Eating fresh healthy food, drinking enough water and getting at least 7 hours sleep are the most essential forms of self-care. In times of stress it's easy to reach for comfort food, drink alcohol or stay up late but the 'good feels' don't last long. With more time at home try preparing a healthy meal, drinking water and getting a solid night's sleep for self-care.

- **Relaxation** – once a day for at least 30 minutes find time to relax. Some ideas for relaxation include taking a bath, meditating (use a free Australian app like Smiling Mind or Headspace), listening to soothing music, doing an activity like a jigsaw puzzle or just being mindful of nature (breathing in the fresh air from an open window or observing the plants, trees, birds and insects outside or in your garden).

- **Routine** – For most of us this is a time of transition and stress. One way to reduce the stress is to create a routine for your new normal, whether that be working from home, self-isolation or quarantine. It may be helpful to continue personal grooming, showering, getting dressed in nice clothing (especially if working from home), sitting down for dinner with the members of your household, sticking to working hours, having set breaks and going to bed at a reasonable hour.

These practices give us structure and routine in our day and reduce stress.

Bonus tip: Supercharge your mental health by doing an activity which combines movement, connection and self-care. For example: Every second day in the morning (routine) video call your friend or family member (connection) while stretching (movement)!

Keep Perspective

- Limit your exposure to the 'news', including social media pages. Repetitive input of the serious effects of Coronavirus can very easily bring our mood down.

- Consider limiting your viewing to the evening news or listening to ABC News health updates so that you are staying up to date with the facts, and your responsibilities as a citizen, without becoming saturated with some of the negative content. This will support your mental health.

- Remember that although we don't know how long this is going to go for, 'This, too, shall pass' (Eckhart Tolle, A New Earth, (2005). Focus on the fact that this is temporary, and try to notice your thoughts and guide them to the 'precious present' – meaning the focus is on today.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is "the awareness that emerges through having attention to our purpose, and non- judgmentally, to the unfolding of experience moment by moment." It helps us focus on the moment. Ways to do this include:

- **Gratitude** – research indicates that taking time to write down events or situations we are grateful or thankful for can reduce stress and symptoms of depression. So keeping a gratitude diary about things in our lives we are thankful for can help support our mental health and wellbeing. Writing in the diary daily and recording just three things we are thankful for doesn't take a lot of time, and can have a positive impact on our outlook and in turn a positive effect on our emotions.

- **Meditation** - being still and focusing on breathing can help reduce the feeling of stress and anxiety. The internet has several free clips and articles on how to learn to meditate.

- **Awareness** – notice your thoughts and when you see a pattern of negativity creeping in, engage in meditation, gratitude or physical movement to bring you back to the present moment. It is important to learn how to let go of thoughts about what we cannot control, and instead choose to focus on parts of lives we do have control and choice about.

Seeking Help

If you are feeling low in your mood, and you can't shake it off after several days in a row, please seek help.

RAWA is continuing to deliver support services for people across Western Australia during this unprecedented and difficult time and are providing support services over the telephone, video conferencing or online to clients.

If you need immediate support, please contact:

Lifeline on 13 11 14

Suicide Line on 1300 651 251

Mensline on 1300 78 99 78

Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800