

Looking After Your Mental Health during Uncertain Times

As we enter another full lockdown I have put together some tips for looking after your own mental health, especially if you have to self-isolate.

Remember, solitary confinement and isolation is an effective punishment in many scenarios so we have to make every effort to ensure that our mental health is not negatively affected. You can convince yourself that spending all day in your PJ's watching Netflix and realising that you haven't washed your face because you wouldn't be seeing anyone can feel like a treat on a lazy day but after a few days it will have a negative impact on your mental health.

Here are a few points I would like to draw your attention to; use 1 or 2, use them all, or don't use any but please read them and reflect as the days go by or as your mood changes:

One of the most dangerous things for your mental health is having too much time 'in your own head' we can easily start to overthink and very quickly become self-critical and experience life dissatisfaction as a result so we really need to avoid these negative cognitive spirals. Try to see this as a different period in your life; a chance to use different coping skills and resources and find different ways of 'being'.

- Firstly, if you are finding the constant 24/7 coverage of the coronavirus is impacting on your mental health, particularly on social media then opt out (yes I am banging on about detoxing from social media again..... But not completely this time). Stay connected at set times of the day and be careful where you get news and health information from: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-information-for-the-public> or <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/> are good places to start

- **Think about how you can still connect with people as this is vital!**
 - Call, Skype, Zoom, FaceTime or email your friends and family,
 - Set up WhatsApp groups with family, friends, neighbours and colleagues.
 - If you are worried about running out of things to talk about make a plan with others to watch a particular programme, read a book that you can discuss or even play a card game over Skype! (No cheating!!)
 - Think about writing a letter or send cards to people to cheer them up
 - Set up or join a support group (various mental health charities have them, Mind, Heads Together or Every Mind Matters are always a good place to start).
 - Also think about your immediate surroundings; neighbours who may be in the same boat, post a note through their door giving them ways of contacting you if they need to.
 - Arrange an online quiz (each person / household can set their own round)
 - Send messages to your family and friends starting with the words: "my warmest memory of you is....." Or "my funniest memory of you is....."

- **If you are working from home please be mindful of the following:**
 - Keep to a routine wherever possible, set your alarm to make sure that you are still in the frame of mind and focus for work
 - Make a 'to do' list of things you want to get done that day; it is so easy to procrastinate or get distracted by TV, your pet or even the contents of the fridge (or is that just me!) Which then causes you to feel useless and demotivated when you get to 4pm and have achieved very little
 - However small your flat/house might be, try to keep your work in a contained area wherever possible otherwise you end up sleeping in your workplace, you really need to separate work from home; if you can't use a separate room, try to get a room divider (£30 on amazon but you can probably get them cheaper) or even throw a sheet over the laptop/papers on an evening or weekend as you **must** switch off from work
 - Take regular breaks, eat well, call a friend or colleague,
 - if you are lucky enough to have a garden or outside space, go outside at 'lunchtime'
 - Never use your bedroom to work; when isolating you need to keep your bedroom for sleep only and not spend all day and night in one room.

- **Stay Active**
 - Build physical activity into your daily routine, most of us don't have exercise equipment at home but we can still do simple things to keep us active:
 - Going up and down the stairs
 - Do the cleaning
 - Dancing to music
 - Go online and find some online exercises – Joe Wickes is particularly popular
 - Move around the room regularly, don't sit still for too long
 - If you have a garden or outside space, do some gardening or at least walk around the garden
 - A lot of online classes are becoming really popular, check them out and join in!
 - Use your recommended hour to walk outside and take more time to notice the environment around you (we normally rush around and never see the abundance of nature on our doorsteps)

- **Turn this into a positive and achieve something**
 - Clear out some of your old clothes and give to the charity shop or sell on eBay
 - Sort out your wardrobe and drawers
 - Spring clean a room each day
 - Go through all that admin that has been shoved in a cupboard and shred all your old bills / letters etc.
 - Go online and look for better deals for energy suppliers, phone contracts etc. (when do we normally get time to do that?)
 - Do a digital clear out and delete old files, update all your old passwords or clear out your inboxes
 - Create an action plan of what you want your future to look like

- Groupon, Wowcher and similar apps have really cheap online courses to sign up to – learn a language, skill or even a computer programme

- **Although you can't go out much: bringing nature into our everyday lives can benefit in so many ways both mentally and physically**
 - Try to get as much sunlight as possible, if you have a garden or outside space use it as much as you can otherwise.....
 - Keep your curtains open as much as possible,
 - Have a seat next to the window so that you feel connected to the outside world in some way
 - Take time to pay more attention to the sky, birds, nature etc.
 - Take the time to listen to the birds, rainfall, wind, traffic even
 - You can listen to natural sounds like waterfalls, ocean sounds, rainforests etc. etc. via apps or YouTube
 - Nurture your indoor plants or plant buy some seeds (online) if you have any and put them on the window sill
 - Open your windows and let the fresh air in
 - Look at some of your photos from your holiday destinations
 - Rearrange your room to face the windows rather than a wall

- **Do something different**
 - Arts and crafts are good; drawing, painting, sewing, learn to knit!
 - DIY
 - Play an instrument if you can
 - Take up yoga, mindfulness or meditation
 - Sing your heart out!
 - Dance like you did when you were a teenager!
 - Play games or puzzles
 - Groupon, Wowcher sites are offering on-line courses from creative writing to astronomy
 - Send a card to someone recalling shared memories in it
 - Every day get everyone in the house to express how you feel on paper – this can be painting / drawing / scribble etc then add it to a large board – when this is over you can either frame the collage to remind us of how we got through this together or all take it into the garden to burn it to mark its end.

In addition to all of the above, make sure you eat well, keep moving and most importantly reach out for help if you need to.....

Feel free to email me if I can help at all otherwise here are a few organisations that can be a great support:

Every Mind Matters:

www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/your-mind-plan-quiz/?WT.tsrc=Search&WT.mc_id=Brand&gclid=EAIaIQobChMI99nC5aah6AIVgp3VCh3UdgkIEAAYASAAEqJcpfD_BwE

Mind

www.mind.org.uk/

Samaritans

www.samaritans.org/

SANE

www.sane.org.uk

Refuge

www.refuge.org.uk