**Protecting Your Psychological Wellbeing in Challenging & Uncertain Times**

To Our Psychology Student Community,

Hello Everyone,

We hope you and your loved ones are keeping well and safe in these extraordinary and unsettling times.

We know that the current situation following the COVID-19 outbreak can be challenging to emotional wellbeing in all sorts of ways, so we wanted to share some guidance and resources for protecting your mental health that is grounded in psychological research, theory and clinical practice:

**Balancing Attention**

In challenging and uncertain times it is absolutely natural to be anxious and concerned about our own wellbeing as well as for those around us. It is very tempting in this situation to frequently check for updates in the news and social media. However, this tendency may fuel our fears leading us to over-estimate the danger of bad things happening, and to under-estimate our ability to cope. Several research studies have shown people that regularly checking [negative news stories has a negative impact on mood](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/bjop.12389).

The [World Health Organisation](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf?sfvrsn=6d3578af_8%5D%28https%3A%2F%2Fwww.who.int%2Fdocs%2Fdefault-source%2Fcoronaviruse%2Fmental-health-considerations.pdf%3Fsfvrsn%3D6d3578af_8%29&fbclid=IwAR13OZuNHdFXABQxC3KhMb7JpFLTxAMxT7pEJefRCwsqJSPK9iTP6zto_Xg) provides some useful and practical guidance for keeping yourself informed without creating unnecessary worry:

Minimise watching, reading or listening to news that causes you to feel anxious or distressed

Seek information mainly to take practical steps to prepare your plans and protect yourself and loved ones

Seek information updates at specific times during the day, once or twice. Only use trusted sources.

Get the facts; not the rumours and misinformation. Facts can help to minimise fears.

While the present situation is serious, it is important to try and balance out the range of things to which we pay attention. Finding time to retain a focus on our goals and [sense of purpose in life](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Laura_King5/publication/7326319_Positive_affect_and_the_experience_of_meaning_in_life/links/02e7e525ef3a773cbb000000.pdf) allows us to hold onto hope in trying times. Make time for activities that you find engaging, meaningful, rewarding and/or entertaining. Remember: [this too shall pass](https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2020/03/18/mary-e-black-covid-19-this-too-shall-pass/).

If constant thoughts about the situation are making you feel anxious or overwhelmed then there are several online resources, based on [cognitive behaviour therapy](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/cognitive-behavioural-therapy-cbt/about-cbt/), that can help you to manage your anxieties, [here](https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/coronanxiety-support-resources/), [here](https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health/mental-health-self-help-guides/anxiety-self-help-guide), [here](https://www.therapyforyou.co.uk/courses/online/view/24), [here](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/moodzone-mental-wellbeing-audio-guides/) and [here](https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/APPLE2.pdf).

In addition, the [University Counselling & Mental Health team](https://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/support/counselling-and-mental-health) are available via telephone. If you would like to speak to someone about your anxieties you can complete the “call back request” form found on the [CMH Unihub page](https://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/support/counselling-and-mental-health) and send it to [cmh@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:cmh@mdx.ac.uk). Please write CALLBACK in the subject line of your email and include your contact number.

You can also [Text Shout](https://www.giveusashout.org/volunteer-with-us/) to 85258 (free) or call The [Samaritans](https://www.samaritans.org/) on 116 123 (free) for support if you are in the UK. Both are available 24/7.

[Fika](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Funihub.mdx.ac.uk%2Fsupport%2Ffika&data=02%7C01%7CM.Mclaren%40mdx.ac.uk%7C0434e22e39bf4c65066708d7c684ba6d%7C38e37b88a3a148cf9f056537427fed24%7C0%7C0%7C637196145672673651&sdata=Se5Rd3rd9RQcvEazf3ZaRrdXJkFWJ2u%2FEeo%2BAe%2B2%2Fjg%3D&reserved=0)is an emotional fitness app and is available for free for MDX students.

**Stay Connected to Others**

Maintaining contact with people we trust is important for our psychological wellbeing. Staying at home reduces the opportunity for positive contact with others and therefore it is important that we find ways (phone, Skype/Zoom, WhatsApp, email, social media) to keep in regular contact with the people that are most important to us.  Set aside regular time for connecting with the people that you care about and who care about you. There is some [evidence](https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2013-2-3) that communication via voice and video promotes stronger feelings of connection and psychological wellbeing than exclusively text based methods, but all methods of staying in touch are beneficial.

While social media is a great way to stay in touch with others, you should protect yourself by muting or unfollowing accounts and hashtags that cause you to feel anxious.

**Connecting through Kindness**

Challenging circumstances provide us all with opportunities to show kindness and connect with others.  In our community, we have already seen so many examples of people spontaneously coming together to support each other in the past few weeks. Being kind is not only beneficial to recipients, [there is wealth of research evidence demonstrating that it boosts psychological well-being of the person who provides that kindness](https://tinyurl.com/t6teo9f). Kindness and compassion fuel social connection and this [activates emotional systems that can calm our fear responses](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/bjc.12043?casa_token=gcZ-zaXyZq4AAAAA%3Ah7rDH3Fkf161mC-BxIEelfNc7fyJ3051L4Nv1T-xcBkOeQkPGw8hBK0F87viYI7P6q2nLd4quvb-cQ).

**You can be kind and connect with others by:**

Reaching out to people to offer support to people who are alone, worried and/or upset. Message, phone or email to offer your support.

Sharing positive news and acts of kindness with your community.

Make sure that you only share information from reliable sources (e.g. NHS).

Considering remote (and safe) volunteering opportunities that support vulnerable individuals. You can find a list of opportunities [here](https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/volunteering/coronavirus-volunteering-opportunities#acc-i-60746).

There have been multiple reports of racist and xenophobic behaviour in the UK following the COVID-19 outbreak. Maintaining our kindness, compassion and empathy means that we won't succumb to baseless and prejudiced myths that circulate about COVID-19. The World Health Organisation reminds us that COVID-19 can affect anyone regardless of background, origin, culture, and circumstances:

Avoid depersonalising COVID-19 in a way that creates fear in yourself or others.

Do not refer to people with the disease as “COVID-19 cases”, “victims” “COVID-19 families” etc.

Use the term “people who have COVID-19”, “people who are being treated for COVID- 19”, “people who are recovering from COVID-19”

This [excellent short video by Brené Brown](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw) reminds us that the best way to be kind in troubling times is to stay out of judgement and demonstrate empathy towards others.

**Stay Active**

Our mood and activity levels are [closely linked](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.3109/09638230902968308?casa_token=x--mGwP_YxQAAAAA:zd-wPAmIRzI3KRhvuoBTPwIh7IP2UQCYbSqdzjdjEzqM6tUc3214ANuKJYEdSCj5IqepSU5mga8). At time when we are required to stay at home for most of our time, our activity levels may drop quite drastically as journeys to work and University, going out to socialise and shop are all curtailed. Making sure that we find time to keep our activity levels up is a good way to enhance our psychological wellbeing and well as boost our immune systems. You don't need to become an exercise fanatic to see the benefits of activity to your mood. Going for a long walk can (as long as you follow the latest guidance on social distancing) can provide beneficial exercise. If you would like to follow an exercise routine at home, here are a few resources that will help:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/10-minute-workouts/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-essex-51981210/coronavirus-beat-home-working-fatigue-with-key-exercises>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/av/get-inspired/45245003>

The Science Bit

If you would like to know more about the research on which this advice is based (or if your are skeptical about it), here are some key readings:

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. Psychological Bulletin, 117, 497.

Bodas, M., Siman-Tov, M., Peleg, K., & Solomon, Z. (2015). Anxiety-inducing media: the effect of constant news broadcasting on the well-being of Israeli television viewers.Psychiatry, 78, 265-276.

Christensen, H., Batterham, P., & Calear, A. (2014). Online interventions for anxiety disorders. Current Opinion in Psychiatry, 27, 7-13.

de Hoog, N., & Verboon, P. (2019). Is the news making us unhappy? The influence of daily news exposure on emotional states. British Journal of Psychology. DOI:10.1111/bjop.12389

Gilbert, P. (2014). The origins and nature of compassion focused therapy. British Journal of Clinical Psychology, 53, 6-41.

King, L. A., Hicks, J. A., Krull, J. L., & Del Gaiso, A. K. (2006). Positive affect and the experience of meaning in life. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 90, 179.

Rowland, L., & Curry, O. S. (2019). A range of kindness activities boost happiness. The Journal of Social Psychology, 159, 340-343.

Saxena, S., Van Ommeren, M., Tang, K. C., & Armstrong, T. P. (2005). Mental health benefits of physical activity. Journal of Mental Health, 14, 445-451.

Tyson, P., Wilson, K., Crone, D., Brailsford, R., & Laws, K. (2010). Physical activity andmental health in a student population. Journal of Mental Health, 19, 492-499.

Sherman, L. E., Michikyan, M., & Greenfield, P. M. (2013). The effects of text, audio, video, and in-person communication on bonding between friends. Cyberpsychology:Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace, 7(2), Article 3. <https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2013-2-3>

Other useful resources

Mind: [Coronavirus and your wellbeing](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/?fbclid=IwAR3reZH1x9ZuF5AhnugHrtsVcP7Btvn8uaqUK3mPfIvOtyvD2dOO2zQ3S4U)

Student Minds: [Coronavirus Resources](http://www.studentminds.org.uk/coronavirus.html)

Huffington Post: [Coronavirus Anxiety Is Real – 7 Tips From Therapists On How To Cope](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/coronavirus-anxiety-how-to-cope_uk_5e395713c5b687dacc72dea8?guccounter=1)

BBC: Coronavirus: [How to protect your mental health](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-51873799?fbclid=IwAR28jDACRcubhTdF8G7YBpbQUCCyremOm1CkrYSPiQMZZfqm3YB-HnSqgt8)

5 Ways To Wellbeing: [5 Ways to wellbeing during the age of Covid-19](https://5ways2wellbeing.blog/2020/03/17/5-ways-to-wellbeing-during-the-age-of-covid-19/amp/?__twitter_impression=true)

Take care and stay safe!

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