



Your TOOLKIT for getting through COVID-19

The current situation worldwide is unprecedented and with that may come an array of difficulties that, when combined, can create extremely stressful situations.

Mental Health Movement is leading the development and maintenance of mentally healthy and supportive workplaces. This TOOLKIT has been designed to assist you to care for yourselves and those around you during this time.

If you or someone you know is in crisis or if you need someone to talk to confidentially, call your company EAP or Lifeline 24/7 on 13 11 14

As we are all aware COVID-19 is now affecting people all across the world. As the World Health Organisation and public health authorities around the world are taking action to contain the outbreak, Mental Health Movement would like to help support you and your workplace if this crisis is generating you stress or mental health struggle.

How full is your Mental Health Cup?

It is important to identify the current contributing factors to your poor mental health and wellbeing and understand that they may have changed during this time. These new changes in your community, workplace or family and the challenges they are presenting may be filling up your Mental Health Cup.

This situation may amplify your usual contributing factors, however taking a proactive approach to checking in with yourself and others will allow you to better manage your mental health and wellbeing during these uncertain times.



“In times like this it’s difficult to see how your life is going to look in a day or in a week’s time. When the uncertainty of life fills up our cup it is easy to feel lost and have no direction or purpose especially when our work and social life is affected. What is important now is to remain connected. Connected to our family and friends and connected to ourselves.”

Brett Connellan

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Pain, diet, sleep, nutrition, poor lifestyle, lack of exercise, illness, disease, overweight

LIFE PRESSURES & EXPECTATIONS

Family, work, partner, personal

STRESS

Deadlines, KPI's, demands, being away from home, missing family events, accidents

ISOLATION

Change in workplace, loss of contact and connection, over thinking, catastrophising, loneliness, lack of motivation, disrupted sleep, fear

GRIEF & LOSS

Loss of loved ones, loss of job or work, loss of identity or purpose, change in routine, loss of finances

RELATIONSHIPS

Kids, partner, infidelity, poor communication, divorce, separation, domestic violence, relationship issues, working relationships, management / supervisors

FINANCIAL ISSUES

Change / loss of income, mortgage, bills, cost of living, spending, debt, credit cards, no financial plan

WORK CHANGES

Work pressures, change in environment, reduced hours, travel, deadlines, unemployment, contractors, work engagement/communication changes

SELF MEDICATION

Drugs, alcohol, food, gambling, anger

NEGATIVE MEDIA

Not knowing what to believe, reading unreliable sources, spending too much time on social media, over stimulation regarding COVID-19



FEAR OR PANIC

Hysteria, conversations you are having adding to panic, panic buying, aggressive behaviours, poor decision making

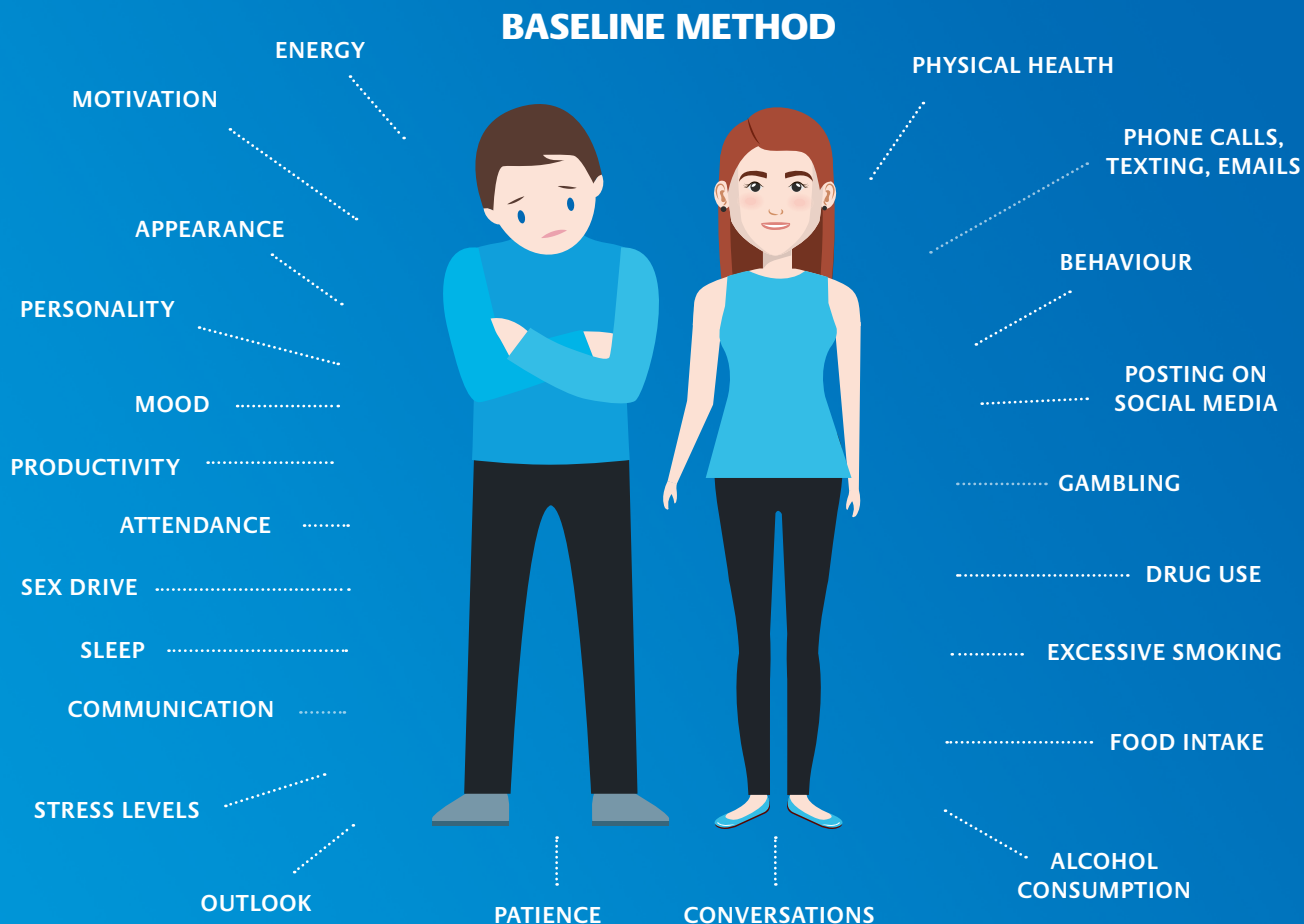
Indicators				
	HEALTHY	SLIDING	STRUGGLING	ILL
Actions				
	HEALTHY	SLIDING	STRUGGLING	ILL
Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usual self confidence • Normal mood fluctuations • Physically & socially active • Achieving goals • Maintaining positive relationships • Limited or no alcohol / gambling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nervousness & irritability • Decreased social activity • Procrastination • Low energy • Trouble sleeping • Regular alcohol user / gambler 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety & other mood fluctuations • Social avoidance / withdrawal • Tardiness • Decreased performance • Fatigue, restlessness • Alcohol / gambling hard to control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive mood fluctuations • Withdrawal & isolation • Absenteeism • Unable to perform duties • Sleeplessness & exhaustion • Physical illness • Alcohol / gambling addictions
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify & manage change, challenge & adversity proactively • Continue actioning positive coping strategies • Maintain self-awareness • Maintain help seeking behaviours • Continue positive self-talk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start to identify changes in Baseline • Action appropriate coping strategies • Seek family / social support • Access relevant mental health resources • Challenge negative self-talk - deal with the facts • Keep perspective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify & understand changes in Baseline • Speak to your support networks • Identify & understand your contributing factors • Consult with appropriate professionals • Evaluate & action positive coping strategies • Don't self-diagnose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You MUST seek support: EAP, GP, Lifeline, psychologists • Avoid drugs & alcohol • Don't keep suicidal thoughts a secret • Seek social / family support immediately & be honest • Don't go off medication without consulting a/your mental health professional

Remember a CHANGE is worth a CHECK IN

The Mental Health Movement Baseline Method allows us to identify the signs and symptoms of a potential mental health struggle within yourself or others.

During this time of global change, it is important to remember what you are usually like, how you think act and feel and your usual behaviours – your baseline. If your baseline has changed it is not a coincidence, something has contributed to this change.

Self-awareness is very important in managing your mental health and being able to identify your contributing factors is essential. We still can just have a bad day or week, but a change is worth a check-in, and prolonged baseline changes (three weeks or longer) is the professional indicator it is time to take action, starting the conversation, making changes and / or seeking appropriate social or professional support. Please remember, you are not alone.



Better managing self-isolation and quarantine

As many of us are forced to hunker down – for an unknown length of time – it is important to find ways to manage our mental health. We know that beyond the general inconvenience of possible working from home for some of us or our families, not being able to go to bars, restaurants or cinemas, experts have found that social isolation can have a profound effect on people's physical, as well as mental health.

Here are a number of ways to support your mental health through self-isolation and quarantine:

- Remind yourself that this is a temporary period of isolation
- Remember that your effort is helping others in the community avoid contracting the virus
- Stay connected and maintain your social networks with friends, family and colleagues via email, social media, video conferencing or telephone e.g. organise a virtual coffee date
- Keep engaging in healthy activities that you enjoy and would normally find relaxing
- Try as much to keep your personal routine like sleep, healthy eating and physical activity
- Establish new or adapted routines as best as possible and try to view this period as a new experience that can bring health benefits
- If you are working from home, try to maintain a healthy balance by allocating specific work hours, taking regular breaks, eating at usual times and, wherever possible, creating a dedicated workspace
- Avoid news and social media if you find it distressing

“This is a unique and unprecedented time for us all. Remember the coping strategies, mindsets and support networks that have worked for you in the past through change, challenge and adversity will benefit you again now. These actions have worked for you in the past so draw upon them now during these uncertain times.”

Dan Hunt

Try to maintain perspective

It is both normal and reasonable to be concerned, try to remember that medical, scientific and public health experts around the world are working hard to contain the virus, treat those affected and develop a vaccine as quickly as possible.

Keep a balance in relation to media coverage

The sudden and near-constant stream of news reports can cause you to feel worried and may heighten feelings of anxiety. While it's important to stay informed, it may be helpful to limit your media intake if it is upsetting you or your family by seeking updates once or twice a day or at specific times.

Access quality information

In order to help you distinguish facts from rumours it is important to get accurate information from credible sources such as the World Health Organisation and the Australian Government. This will help you maintain perspective and feel more in control.

Try to maintain a calm and practical approach

Widespread panic from people can complicate the efforts being made to manage the outbreak effectively. Try to do your best to stay calm and follow official advice, particularly around observing good hygiene habits.





Acknowledge loss and grief

We will all experience some kind of loss in our life, these losses range in significance and impact on us. Prolonged events like those we are experiencing may also bring a range of losses including loss of financial security, expectation, purpose, self-esteem and identity. You may also be worried about vulnerable members of your family or network. It's not surprising that people facing these difficulties experience the fear of and signs of grief.

It is normal and appropriate to feel hopelessness, sadness, shock, depression, denial, helplessness, despair, anxiety, worry guilt and anger.

Some key points to remember while you look after yourself or someone you care about who is grieving:

- Accept grief as a part of life – don't resist, fight or avoid it
- It is normal and healthy to express intense and painful emotions
- Accept that feeling better will take time, be patient with yourself. Make sure your self-expectations are realistic
- Be compassionate and remember each person's experience is unique
- Unexpressed or prolonged emotion may mean professional help is needed
- Keep active and involved in life by doing things you enjoy, even if you don't really feel like doing them

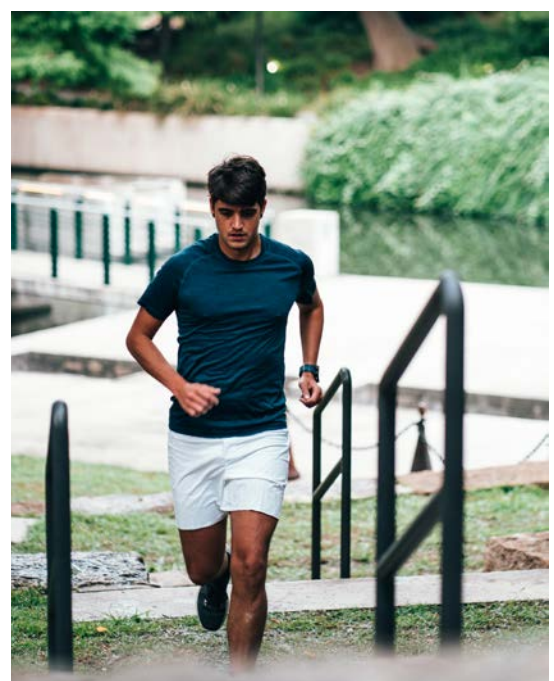
Manage self-medication

Drugs, alcohol and gambling change the way your brain and body work. They change the balance of chemicals that help your brain to think, feel, create and make decisions and in the long term, these can worsen your mental and physical wellbeing.

People under stress may also use drugs, alcohol or gambling to 'unwind' or 'drown their sorrows'. It may be tempting during this time to use drugs and alcohol as a coping strategy. However, these are addictive substances and behaviours that can increase feelings of depression and sadness, and overuse can lead to further family and social problems, injuries and serious physical illness.

Some practical strategies include:

- Try not to take drugs, drink or gamble when you are feeling down or anxious
- Avoid keeping drugs or alcohol in the house
- Spend time with friends and family members who do not use drugs, alcohol or gamble
- Try exercise, meditation or doing things you enjoy to tackle stress and anxiety rather than drugs, alcohol or gambling
- Look after your physical health by eating well, drinking water and exercising regularly
- Proactively seek the appropriate professional clinical support regarding the substance use or gambling issue



Improve communication

It is important to remember and recognise people under stress can often communicate in unhelpful ways. Workplaces or families may find themselves increasingly in conflict as stress levels and pressures rise.

We suggest following the below guidelines for effective communication while dealing with sensitive topics including COVID-19:

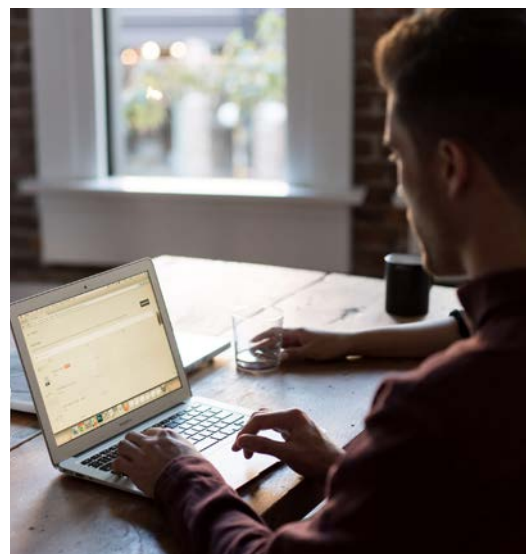
- Treat others with respect when speaking
- Listen carefully
- Pay attention to the other's ideas or concerns and how they feel about them
- Be aware of body language. Avoid crossing arms, rolling eyes, clenching fists
- Maintain eye contact
- Try not to use loaded or accusatory words
- Try not to exaggerate, withhold important information or speak loudly
- Focus on issues rather than personalities by using 'I' statements (I feel upset when...) rather than blaming 'you' messages (You always...)
- Focus on the present and resist the temptation to revisit old hurts
- If the situation becomes negative or hurtful, take time out until everyone has calmed down

Acknowledge changing roles

This current crisis could lead to considerable personal and community upheaval. People may be forced to work in a different way like remotely where you used to work as part of a team, take forced leave – paid or unpaid, leave long-term employment, or become unemployed.

Changing roles can lead to feelings of guilt and embarrassment. When things go wrong, people tend to blame themselves or think they've failed. These feelings are seldom justified and it is important to focus on what is in your control:

- Eliminate distractions at home
- Set up an appropriate environment
- Stick to your tasks / job list
- Take appropriate breaks for meals etc
- Get a buddy system for social support - check in with co-workers. Video call is a great way to remain connected. Do group tasks to help keep each other on track and accountable giving a sense of team environment and achievement. Use tools like Zoom etc. to hold meetings as you would in your normal working day
- Practise self-care, if your gym is closed consider other options that provide you the similar outcomes like body weight exercises at home
- Try re-framing negatives into positives
- Compartmentalise worries and break them down into smaller bite size manageable actions



“The current situation has also caused disturbances to our normal routine and structure so we need to be patient but flexible and increase our self-care.”

Chris Houston

Conversations with children and young people

Families and caregivers of children and young people should discuss news of the virus with those in their care in an open and honest way. Make sure you relate the facts without causing alarm, and in a way that is appropriate for their age and temperament.

It is important to listen to any questions they may have, to let them know that they are safe and that it's normal to feel concerned. Like yourself, if the media or the news is getting too much for them, limit their exposure.

Maintain familiar routines in daily life as much as possible, especially if children are confined to home and try to provide engaging activities for children. Even if only within the family after advice to restrict social contact, try to encourage children to continue to play and socialise with others.

During times of stress and crisis, it is often common for children to seek more attachment and be more demanding on parents. So be patient and remember children will often observe your behaviours and emotions for cues to manage their own during difficult times.



“Understandably our day to day structure and routine has been thrown into turmoil, but this is a great chance to face adversity in a positive way. Have a look at what changes you can make in your life so you can be the best version of yourself possible.”

Ashton Sims



Don't forget to look after yourself

Continuous exposure to traumatic images can have a negative impact on mental wellbeing. Occasionally stress may result in a physical illness. Be aware of any changes. If you suspect any problem, contact a GP or other health professional.

To cope well in stressful situations, self-care is important. If stress is allowed to accumulate, the body can be affected and health, decision making capacity and relationships may suffer.

Tips for reducing stress through self-care:

- Be aware of your personal stress levels
- Take 'time out' for some enjoyable activities
- Maintain links with family, friends and community even if you can't see them in person
- Stay healthy – eat and sleep well
- Exercise 30 minutes a day to relieve tension
- Don't let the crisis dominate your life completely

“A lot of the things that impact our mental health are out of our control and they impact us all on different levels. It is a very important time to stay connected as much as possible during this time and use technology if need be.”

Chris Houston



Please don't do this alone

In times of crisis and uncertainty, for many of us the natural inclination is to draw back from those around us, but this is one of the worst things to do. This is compounded by our current need to reduce our social contact with people due to the spread of the virus. Social and family support is important because it reduces the sense of isolation, lessens depression and anxiety and provides a network of people who can listen and offer support. During this time, it will be incredibly important to find ways to remain connected to others, especially those who are struggling.

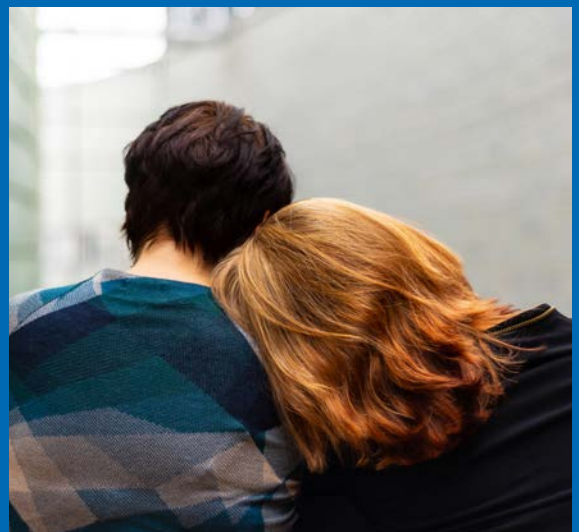
Should confidential support be required, don't forget Lifeline crisis support is open 24/7 on 13 11 14 and the web chat service can be accessed 7pm – midnight, 7 days a week (Sydney time) as well as their text service on 0477 13 11 14 (6pm – midnight) AEST.

Seek support

It is completely normal to feel overwhelmed or stressed by news of the outbreak and we encourage everyone to:

- Start a conversation – seek some support through your personal and social support networks
- Seek support – through your company EAP (Employee Assistance Program)
- Make some changes – to your habits and routines that will assist in correcting your change in normal behaviours
- Seek clinical support – through your GP, psychologist or psychiatrist, telehealth

A full list of available supports is available on our website www.mentalhealthmovement.com.au



PLEASE REMEMBER WHEN IMPLEMENTING ANY OF THE ABOVE TO CHECK AND ADHERE TO THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT RESTRICTIONS AND HEALTH GUIDELINES.



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 [@mental_health_movement](https://www.instagram.com/mental_health_movement)

 Mental Health Movement

www.mentalhealthmovement.com.au

#STARTINGTHECONVERSATION