

Coping in challenging times

In times of challenge we may notice increased worry or anxiety creep in, along with differences in our thinking patterns and behaviours. We all cope in different ways and all experience challenges differently. However, as we find our way to cope through this pandemic, we may also notice that our shared experiences or fears are echoed by others around us in different ways.

The stress associated with uncertainty or the unexpectedness of a second lockdown may take its toll emotionally. It is important to recognise that we all have mental health, we need to invest in this the same as we invest in our physical health. Self-care is self-respect and taking time to invest in yourself is an investment in your family, your work, and importantly in your own health and wellbeing.

At times we may feel overwhelmed by the uncertainty or 'What If's', others we may feel more confident and settled as we adapt to our 'new normal'. As we seek to find the balance between new roles of home schooling while working from home or employment seeking while balancing home life, our experiences can pose new challenges, provide new triumphs and opportunities.

Following are strategies to help in managing anxiety and worry, to support health and wellbeing.

Looking after our emotional health - Keep things in perspective

In times of stress, when our mood is low or our world uncertain we may need a reminder to maintain perspective. Watch out for unhelpful thinking styles such as these two:

Catastrophising – building things up to the worst possible case scenario in your mind

Future predicting – worrying excessively about outcomes not based upon fact

When we are stressed, it is easy to see things as worse than they may really be. If you find yourself imagining the worst-case scenario and worrying, try asking yourself these questions to help:

- Am I getting ahead of myself, assuming something bad will happen when I really don't know the outcome?
- Am I overestimating how bad the consequences will be?
- Am I underestimating my ability to cope? Try to think about some ways you could cope, even if the worst were to happen, as this can help you put things into perspective.



To cope with uncertainty, lockdown and stress it is helpful to create a coping plan

Things to consider are

- Know 3 people you can phone or videocall to keep connected
- Have a plan of how you can keep connected with the supports and professionals around you (who, how, when and how often)
- Have a plan of ways to keep entertained in your home
- Have ideas for self-care, self-soothing if you feel distressed or need to regulate emotions
- Have a list of activities that spark joy, creativity or a sense of achievement

General strategies to include in your plan may be

- Keep in contact with people who make you feel good,
- Remember the basics of healthy eating, getting sufficient sleep, drinking water and getting rest,
- Maintain a routine and get fresh air and daylight where possible.

Take a moment and write down your coping plan, write your plan on a 'good day' so it's ready for a challenging one, as on those days we need our plan to be ready for action.

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