

Covid-19: Wellbeing for Staff



This information sheet pulls together some of the most effective psychological advice for this time.

In this unprecedented situation feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, sadness, worry, anger and confusion are completely normal and are likely to be prevalent at least some of the time.

As humans we are biologically driven to be social and relationships are key to our wellbeing, yet we are being directed to avoid social contact. Our children and young people are no longer able to be physically present to engage with the teaching and learning which it is our job to provide. Some of us may not have had face-to-face contact with anyone for a significant period of time.

In the face of all of this:

- *How do we stay grounded and not get sucked into a social media or internet frenzy?*
- *How do we use our core values to guide how we manage each day?*
- *How do we keep our sense of perspective and achieve a sense of calm when almost everything we've previously experienced about living in the 21st century seems to have been turned on its head?*
- *How do we navigate the plethora of useful advice which is being constantly generated?*
- *What can we personally do that will have a positive impact and provide us with a sense of achievement?*

To help answer and prioritise these questions according to your own situation, we have put together some evidence-based suggestions and organised them under the themes of building wellbeing. We will tweet further information follow us @PerthEPS and use the #buildingwellbeing

Building Blocks of Wellbeing

Kindness and Gratitude

Circle of Influence

Connectedness and Relationships

Enhancing Our Neurotransmitters

Making a Plan

Shaping Our Thinking and Feelings

Kindness and Gratitude

These are uncertain times; we are likely to have limited access to some of our normal coping strategies, physical and leisure activities. There may be additional stressors in our home environments or personal circumstances. We may well get stressed and we may not always manage ourselves in the way we typically function. In the face of adversity, we need to have self-compassion.

Doing things for others makes us feel better but in challenging times, we also need to remember to extend this kindness to ourselves. For example, technology failures can easily make us feel incompetent! It's important to be kind to ourselves, to give ourselves a break and come back refreshed.

Gratitude is a further positive antidote for combatting anxiety and low mood. Reflecting, identifying and naming 3 positive things which happened in a day is a useful health promoting activity.

Circle of Influence

To support good wellbeing we need to identify where we can make a difference and direct our attention, energy and actions to those things. This is our 'circle of influence' and will help give us a sense of purpose and control. There are:

- **things we can control** - often our own behaviours, such as when we go to bed, whether we take exercise, eat healthily, limiting the amount of media;
- **things we can influence** by how we act, behave and respond, which will make a difference - although we currently have to accept homeworking we can help maintain a boundary between work and home, for example by deciding to tidy work things away at the end of our working day;
- **things we just have to accept** that we have very little influence over - government directives, things that we can no longer do anything about because they have happened, such as exam results.

Connectedness and Relationships

Connectedness and a sense of belonging is key to positive wellbeing. In these times of social distancing we need to establish and maintain ways of keeping in touch whilst in physical isolation. Methods include planned video chats over coffee, telephone calls etc. Despite the importance of connectedness there is also a risk of being bombarded however with virtual communication and it's important that we give ourselves permission to be purposeful, selective and to take a break if overwhelmed.

In times of stress when we feel pressured or lacking space from people due to confinement it is normal and understandable for relationships to become strained. It's important to acknowledge disagreement and support repairing the relationship by accepting difference.

Enhancing Our Neurotransmitters

At times there can be a flooding of anxious and difficult feelings. We can influence this by purposefully engaging in activities which increase the four naturally occurring 'feel good' chemicals in our brains:

- Dopamine** *Listening to music, relaxation, mindfulness*
- Serotonin** *Good consistent sleep, being outside, nature, laughter and comedy*
- Oxytocin** *Positive interaction with others, stroking pets*
- Endorphins** *Exercise and dancing*

Keeping ourselves topped up is not only important for our own wellbeing but also aides our capacity to provide responsive support to others.

Making a Plan

Unpredictability can increase anxiety however we can create some predictability by developing simple daily structures and routines. Many of the usual things which provide structure to our day are not available at present and therefore there is even more need to recreate this for ourselves.

When creating your plans remember:

- *Set realistic goals - don't over plan for the day, keep it simple.*
- *Have clear boundaries between work/school and home time.*
- *Set routine times for waking and sleeping - this will help us stay rested and energised.*
- *Schedule pleasant events - eg reading, calling a friend, cooking, bubble bath.*
- *Don't overthink it if those goals aren't achieved - tomorrow's another day.*
- *Be kind to yourself - sometimes life takes over.*

When things are tricky, creating a plan with time spent on identifying obstacles that might get in the way, then reviewing after implementation, is useful - for example, a plan to have a more restful weekend. Using a self-regulation framework with consistent language including language 'tag dichotomies' such as big and little deal can further promote this.

Shaping Our Thinking and Feelings

In light of uncertainty, it is normal to be feeling anxious, scared, unsettled or powerless. Taking time to name and acknowledge these difficult feelings will make it more manageable and help limit the experience of constant anxiety. This can be done by naming feelings ourselves, or discussing them with others. Talking through things with others can act as a buffer, turning toxic stress into tolerable stress. While making plans is helpful it is important to acknowledge that difficult feelings may remain. Furthermore, if thinking about the future is anxiety provoking it is important to return to, appreciate and be present in the current moment.

Another strategy is to monitor pervasive negative thoughts and then to practice replacing with positive thoughts, eg Red (negative, unhelpful) thought, such as 'I am going to catch Covid-19 when I go to the supermarket', catching this and replacing with a Green (helpful) thought, such as 'I can shop taking precautions and completely minimise the risk'.

Revisiting key messages of resilience also help in reframing our thoughts, be optimistic and give hope for the future:

- *This won't last forever; things will get better*
- *Don't be afraid to ask others for help and support*
- *Remember everyone is facing their challenges right now, not just me*
- *Keep things in perspective-this is tough but I can be thankful for the good things in life right now*

The Educational Psychology Team are there to support your and others' wellbeing. Please do not hesitate to get in touch.

We plan to tweet, re-tweet and promote useful research using the **#buildingwellbeing**

Please get in touch with Perth & Kinross Council Educational Psychological Service if you'd like further information:

Tel **01738 476242**

Email **ECSPsychologists@pkc.gov.uk**

Twitter **@PerthEPS**

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