

SUPPORT FOR SURVIVORS DURING THE CORONAVIRUS EMERGENCY

We are especially aware that Survivors of sexual abuse and violence may have faced times of powerlessness and isolation in the past and the sense of lack of control and loneliness may be even more acute at this extreme and unprecedented time.

We have come up with some ideas for you that we hope could be helpful to you at this very unsettling time.

.....And Breathe

Perhaps the first thing you could do is to take a deep breath. Your brain operates on two levels for making decisions - your rational, problem-solving brain - and a more instinctive, emotional quick decision level brain called the limbic system. You may have heard of the 'fight or flight' system - and when that system is switched on your emotional brain becomes much more powerful. This has two main effects firstly it becomes hard to think, the second impact is that decisions feel much more stark, and options more limited. This means in emotionally intense moments things can feel very bleak. The easiest way to drop your emotional level and bring back your ability to think more clearly is to manage your breathing. Try counting when you breathe, four in and six out. This in itself can help you lower your anxiety.

Keep It In The Day

This is a disease of the body but also the mind. Try to stop yourself catastrophising about the future and aim to stay as much as possible present in the moment taking one day at a time. This could also include not getting caught up in rumours circulating on social media. Try and focus only on things that we have been instructed to do by medical professionals which leads us onto...

Give Media Madness A Miss

Give yourself a break from the media. We need to know what is going on but hoping to get reassurance from the media may not work right now. Stick to one or two news bulletins a day – not per ten minutes! Also remember that journalists have a tough job; but some in the media are trying to sell newspapers and raise viewing figures, not give you a sensible overview of what is happening.

Connect With A Cuppa

You may need to physically isolate but you don't need to become isolated. If you love chatting with your best friend over a coffee then do that but instead of face to face try over Skype, Zoom, Whats App, Facetime etc Also, try not to spend all of your time talking about the virus - broaden your conversation to include other topics that you would normally discuss.

Express Emotions

Remember that managing your emotions isn't about denying them or suppressing them. When you are feeling overwhelmed: try these steps:

Pause to get a moment to breathe: Counting in and out until you feel calmer

Name what you are feeling: if you need help with this try googling 'emotion wheel' and look at the images there are lots of ideas to draw on

Share the emotion: Write it down, message or email someone, or call a good friend to chat about what you are feeling.



Routines Routines Routines

When life is turned upside down finding a routine can help us feel more in control and take away some uncertainty. If you can work at home, plan a schedule of when and how you will be doing this. Consider a timetable! Also, think about breaking periods of work or study with other things e.g. a coffee or watching your favourite TV programme or a specific time for connection with others for a chat. Plan to get outside even if it is just to sit on your step with a tea. If that is safe to do. Also try and keep a routine for sleeping eating and getting dressed as you would have before. These are all part of maintaining emotional health.

Let's Go Outside

There may be periods where you cannot leave the house at all - for example, if you or someone you live with has developed symptoms of infection. However other times most people will be able to get out of the house occasionally either for essential shopping or just to get a little exercise. Just remember you do need to keep a safe distance from others.

Spiritual Sourcing

For some of us drawing on spirituality can offer us hope and strength. There are lots of videos on You Tube to encourage this and some faiths are offering their services on line as well.

Stay Active in Mind and Body

Being in isolation gives a hopeful opportunity to learn new skills; Baking, at home yoga / exercise, being creative, arts and crafts, use Mindfulness/Mediation, cleaning, sorting, organising, gardening, gather interesting topic knowledge.

A good link at this time for apps to help keeping strong mental health:

<https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/category/mental-health/>

If you are feeling desperate and need to talk then please do contact the Samaritans - they are there for 24 hours a day and their number is 116 123 or e-mail them at jo@samaritans.org.

Into The Light provide counselling, support and resources for Survivors of sexual abuse and those that support them. For more information about our services: see www.intothelight.org.uk

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