

Tips to help your mental health

Pandemic Isolation, Covid-19



By Fiona Jeffery

Brightbulb
Design 

Looking after your Mental Health is so vital now more than ever. There is still a huge stigma around mental ill health and too many people suffer in silence because they are ashamed to admit they need help.

As hard as it is, we need to try our best to remain calm and positive. I have two kids so I have turned into a teacher and need to be there for everyone in my household so it is important that I stay positive for them.



Start by writing a list of anything positive that has come out of this situation – here's an example of a few things I have added to mine

- I have been gifted a lot of extra time with my babies. I felt so guilty that I worked so much when they were small, that I am embracing these extra days with them.
- I don't need to worry about how I look and dress as no one will see me! I am still getting showered and dressed and sticking with my daily routine, however I don't have the worry of finding an outfit and spending time getting ready to leave the house.
- All social pressures have been removed. I beat myself up all the time about not seeing friends and family enough, now the guilt has been removed as we all have no choice. Utilising things like FaceTime have been our saviour.
- Though we have lost a few projects at work, we have a fantastic supportive team, and I am so grateful that the government have put options into place if we have to stop working due to not making enough money.
- I'm able to get things done around the house. Like many people, I stay so busy in my day to day life, that I simply cannot find any time to do things at home. Now I will have plenty of time to get them done. I have already started by painting some brickwork in the garden.
- I have time for some self-care. The most important thing during this time will be self-care. Whether it's reading a book, painting, or some pampering. This is something I rarely find time for, but now I will have plenty of time to do these things.

Here are a few scenarios that you might find yourself in and how you can help...



Isolation at home alone

This is a very tough position to be in, you have to stay home, but you live alone. You might be tempted to visit friends or family; however you must follow government advice and stay alone. Use this time to de clutter, clean your home, reorganise your wardrobe and anything else around the home that can be done. When you are able to go out and socialise again, you will look back on this time and wish you had done things, so do it.

Set yourself a daily target. It could be as small as watering the plants, or deep cleaning your bedroom, but either way it will give you a sense of satisfaction and that will feed the positivity.

Use modern technology, a phone, a laptop etc. to contact loved ones. You don't need to just call and catch up, you can simply be on the phone to each other while watching a film, so it feels like you are spending time together. I plan on sharing a glass of wine with friends via FaceTime on Friday evening.

Learn something new! You can use this time to educate yourself on something you have always wanted to learn. The Isle of Wight College have put a post out offering some free online courses and sites like Udemy offer lots too. Online tutorials can be a fantastic way of learning, and when you return to work, you will feel fresh and full of new ideas.



Isolation at home with your family



Some people think this is the best option – however everyone's situation is different, and we all have our challenges. You were a full-time worker and a parent evenings and weekends, and suddenly you have lost your job and are expected to be a full-time teacher and still continue all the housework, washing etc. and somehow stay sane. The most important thing to do in this scenario is find some time for yourself. Don't be ashamed to let the kids have iPads for an hour so you can sit and browse your phone, or do some housework, or just enjoy a cuppa in the garden. If it is something that brings you happiness and relaxation, then it is self-care. You will be a much better parent if you are looking after yourself first.

Don't feel pressured to do every part of the school work your kids have been sent. Some teachers have made it clear there is no pressure, others have put pressure on. Either way, your own and your kids' mental health is a priority and they will need time to adjust to this new routine. Let them guide you. Give them options so they are not overwhelmed with new rules.

Be there for your partner but make sure they are there for you too. They may be working from home and stressed out, but your life has been turned upside down too. If they are not understanding of this, talk to them. Explain when you are feeling pressure, sometimes you just need someone to hear you, take you away from the situation for a while so you can regain focus.

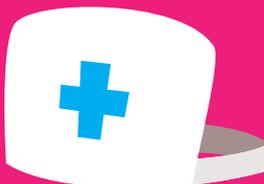


Having to continue working as a key worker

There are pro's and Con's in this situation like there are for everyone. The good thing is that you get to continue with a semi normal routine, you can still go to work, socialise, see people each day. But this comes with HUGE risks. You are quite literally risking your life being around people in this pandemic, so you most likely feel a huge strain.

Some people have had to move out of family homes so they are not putting their loved ones at risk. This is incredible, admirable and you are all hero's. You do not have to accept this burden. If you are struggling, talk with your manager. If you can work together to find a plan that works for all of you, whether it's changing hours, reducing hours, or something more drastic. It will be the right choice for you. You come first, so think about what will make you feel comfortable and make it happen.

I do understand that this is overwhelming and sometimes you don't have a choice, just try and concentrate on the fact that this is not forever. It will be over, we will get through this, and normal life will resume.





Running a business that is suffering due to the situation



Running a business that is suffering due to the situation. So, I have found myself in this scenario. We have spent years building up a successful Business and the thought that we could lose it so suddenly was heart breaking. The government have come up with some very reassuring Grants, and relief funds to help with this. You can see all the information you need on the government website though a lot of this is still not clear how to apply. You will get help if you need it, and you will get through this. Keep in contact with your team, if you have to furlough them due to a lack of work coming in, then they will understand, and it won't be such a shock if you are keeping them in the loop. Reassure them that after this, you will come back bigger and better and that if you have less work to do, you can use this time to create a new marketing plan and make plans for the future.

TRY NOT TO WORRY – Again, you must try and stay positive. If you had a successful business before this pandemic, there is no reason why you can't have that again. If you are good people, with good ethics, and a loyal client base, you **WILL** bounce back. It won't be easy, but you will do it and one day all this will be a distant memory.



- Every time you think of something you wish you could do, like go to the park, or visit family... write it down. Store them all in a safe place, and when we come out on the other side, you can work your way through the list. Even let the kids pick one each weekend to remind them how lucky they are to have the options again.
- Write a list of everything positive that has come from this. Some will need to look harder than others, but there is always a positive. When you see trauma unfolding in the news, you always see people trying to help. There are positive factors to even the worst situations.
- Make a list of anything that makes you feel good. All self-care activities that you can do while we are going through this.
- AVOID too much media!! Watch the daily updates so you can see where we are at, but try not to scroll through social media and News websites looking for stories. This will make you anxious and it will be harder to pull yourself out of it.
- Connect! Contact friends, family via phone, text, e-mail, FaceTime. Use apps like House Party to do group chats so you can feel like you are all socialising together.
- Exercise. I know some people live in small flats and don't have a garden, but you can go for a walk if you feel the need. You can also follow Joe Wicks PE lessons at gam live on YouTube each day. The kids love them but they are also great for adults. What a fantastic way to start the day.
- Eat well. When you are feeling anxious, it can be very common to skip meals, or binge eat the wrong types of food. Try not to do this as it will only make you feel worse and effect your physical health. Eat a balanced diet and enjoy treats in moderation.
- Mindfulness – a form of meditative practice that teaches you to focus living non judgementally in the present moment. Apps like Calm, or Headspace can help you find ways to relax and calm your emotions when feeling anxious.



A note from Fiona

You might wonder what qualifies me to write this article and to give advice on looking after your Mental Health. I have recently become a Mental Health First Aider which qualifies me to help someone in the first instance when they are suffering with Mental ill health, however I firmly believe that you can give great advice based on your own experiences too.



When I had my second child, I suffered with Post Natal Depression. It was a very dark period of my life and not one I enjoyed. With a series of CBT, counselling, and years of pulling myself out of it, I developed an anxiety disorder. Things would be crippling for me, that were just everyday things to others. I would be shopping at Tesco, and suddenly feel like everyone was looking at me and leave my shopping in the aisle so I could rush to my car and have a panic attack. A huge contribution to this anxiety, was the fact that I worked from home. I had a great job and I was very good at it, however I was lonely, isolated, and this allowed my anxiety to feed on itself and grow. As a young mum of two, with a husband running his own business, the pressure was immense and I felt very ill.

Another year of counselling, medication, and self-care meant that I was starting to find myself again and found some confidence again. I joined Matt at Brightbulb Design in 2017 and quit my job of almost 10 years so that I could get out of the house again. Slowly I started to go networking and meet new people. I remember the first Ladies Lunch I went to, I couldn't find the room, so I stood outside the Garlic Farm in tears, shaking because I was so nervous. I eventually found the room, forced myself to go in, and had a lovely time.

Forcing myself to tackle this anxiety and start rebuilding my life after a very tough few years has taught me a lot. So, from my own experience, and my recent training, I want to share with you some tips while we find ourselves in these strange times...

Resources

Apps – Calm, Headspace, Sleep Time, House Party

Websites for self-help if you think you are suffering with mental ill health-

www.mind.org.uk provide a wide range of services relating to mental health, including information, support as well as research and campaigning work.

www.iapt.nhs.uk (Improving access to Psychological Therapies) is the NHS programme which supports rolling out talking therapies to people experience symptoms of depression and anxiety.

www.samaritans.org Provide emotional support for people 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. They allow people to talk about feelings of distress and despair and are confidential offering non judgemental support.

www.anxietyuk.org.uk is a national charity run by people who have experienced anxiety, and can offer information and support for anyone in need.

www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk are a free independent service set up by the government that can provide information on all money related matters via a helpline, online information, and free web chats.

www.happyhealthyapp.com is a health app linking brief daily reflection exercises to allow people to make more mindful decisions about lifestyle, exercise, nutrition and sleep to manage mental well-being.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19> government support for Businesses affected by Covid-19.

<https://realemploymentlawadvice.co.uk/> Alison and her team can offer a free 30 minute no obligation phone call to discuss any employment law concerns you have.

Brightbulb Design

brightbulbdesign.co.uk | 01983 506505
hello@brightbulbdesign.co.uk

