**Managing anxiety and worries**

**For: Everyone**

COVID-19 has plunged the world into uncertainty and the constant news about the pandemic can feel relentless. This is bound to have an impact on peoples’ mental health, particularly those already living with conditions like anxiety and OCD. So it’s important that during these extraordinary times, we take extra care to look after our mental health.

How can we do this?

1. Limit your access to the news and be careful what you read. Notice how what you read makes you feel and limit the amount of time you spend reading or watching things that don’t make you feel better. Some people find it helpful to set a specific time when they look at the news. There is also a lot of misinformation flying around – think about the sources of news you trust and stick to them.
2. Do the same for social media. Here you might find it helpful to mute certain words that are triggering, or unfollow accounts that you notice are making you feel more worried or anxious. Think about the type of accounts you access. Are they sensationalising the situation and scaremongering? Or do you feel they are reporting responsibly and with balance?
3. Wash your hands, but not excessively. This can be incredibly difficult advice for people who have OCD and some types of anxiety, because they are being told to do some of the behaviours they have been trying to move away from. Charity OCD Action advises the key is to understand whether you are washing your hands for the recommended time to reduce the risk of spreading the virus, or are you doing it in a ritualistic manner in order to feel “just right”.

Anxiety UK recommends using the APPLE technique to deal with anxiety and worries.

**Acknowledge:** Notice and acknowledge the uncertainty as it comes to mind.

**Pause:** Don’t react as you normally do. Pause and breathe.

**Pull back:** Tell yourself this is just the worry talking. Your thoughts are not facts and they are not always helpful, however real they seem.

**Let go:** Let go of the thought or feeling. All thoughts and feelings are temporary and will pass. You don’t have to respond to them. You might imagine them floating away in a bubble or cloud.

**Explore:** Explore the present moment, because right now that is all that is real. Notice your breathing and the sensations of your breathing. Notice the ground beneath you. Notice what sounds you can hear, right now. Then shift your focus of attention to your next activity.

Mindfulness can also help with worries and anxiety. MoJ are running biweekly dial in sessions during the COVID-19 outbreak.

If you’d like more information on any of the above, you may find these links helpful

[How to cope if you're feeling anxious about the outbreak](https://www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/2020/28-february-coronavirus-anxiety-how-to-cope-if-you-re-feeling-anxious-about-the-outbreak/)

[MIND coronavirus and your wellbeing](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/#collapse0430e)

[Looking after your mental health during the coronavirus outbreak](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak)

And don’t forget our own sources of support. Our [Employee Assistance Programme](https://intranet.justice.gov.uk/guidance/hr/support-and-wellbeing/employee-assistance-programme/) has a helpline open 7 days a week, 24 hours a day and it’s completely confidential. Our [Mental Health Allies](https://intranet.justice.gov.uk/guidance/hr/support-and-wellbeing/mental-wellbeing/mental-health-allies/) are also available to help with confidential support to both staff and managers during office hours. Links to the sites and contact numbers are available in the Staff Support Guide.

**Please note that contact details for PAM Assist and Mental Health Allies are included in the Staff Support Quick guide**