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*Helping You Take Care of Your Mental Health*

# Staying On Track

During the COVID-19 Pandemic















## Staying On Track

This resource pack is designed to accompany the 'Staying On Track' Audio Guide.

Download the 'Staying on Track' Audio Guide



Here you will find the handouts, activities, and exercises mentioned throughout the guide. This pack contains the following resources:

	Seeing Things Clearly	Page 3
	Worry Time Guide	Page 7
	Problem Solving Guide	Page 9
	Calming Your Emotions	Page 13
	Mindful Breathing	Page 21
	Muscle Relaxation	Page 22
	Coping with Grief	Page 23
	What Matters Most	Page 26
	Staying in the Moment	Page 29
	Keep Moving	Page 31
	Activity Ideas Hub	Page 32
	Good Sleep Guide	Page 34

## Seeing Things Clearly

The way we look at situations is very important because it guides how we feel and what we do. Working to see our thoughts more clearly helps us put things into perspective and can reduce worry.

Our thoughts are shaped by our past experiences, our current knowledge about a situation, our values, culture and upbringing. Because of the way our thoughts show up in our minds, they appear very believable, and we often don't question them. This can cause us problems when our thoughts are based more on how we feel rather than actual facts.

This resource will guide you in how to challenge your thoughts. It will help you to consider all the information and possible outcomes so your thoughts are as realistic as possible.

Check out how to challenge your thoughts using the steps below:

- Step 1** Identify (the situation, thoughts and feelings).
- Step 2** Take a step back (look at what unhelpful thinking styles you are getting into).
- Step 3** Put your thinking to the test (challenge your thoughts by asking yourself some helpful questions).
- Step 4** Reconsider (how you can develop new, more helpful ways of looking at the thought/situation).
- Step 5** Move forward (what do you need to do now?).

Use the worksheet on the next page and follow the questions to help you start seeing things more clearly.

## 1. Identify

a) What is the situation that is upsetting you?

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b) What are your **thoughts** about this situation? What is going through your mind?

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c) How are you **feeling**? E.g. angry, sad, scared, ashamed, guilty, anxious, disgusted, annoyed.

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## 2. Take a step back

Look at your thoughts. Can you recognise any ‘thinking traps’ that aren’t helping you see things more clearly? PS: You can find a list of these thinking styles and what they mean at the bottom of this exercise.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Catastrophising             | <input type="checkbox"/> Looking through tinted glasses |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black-and-white thinking    | <input type="checkbox"/> Harsh judgement                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ignoring the positives      | <input type="checkbox"/> Setting unrealistic standards  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mind reading                | <input type="checkbox"/> Taking things personally       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Filtering for the negatives | <input type="checkbox"/> Doubting my ability            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fortune telling             |   |

### 3. Put your thinking to the test

Ask yourself these questions:

- What are the facts?
- What experiences have you had that say this thought is not 100% true?
- Is there any information you don't know right now or aren't considering?
- Are there any positives or things that could help that you are ignoring?
- What would you say to a friend in this situation?
- What is the most realistic outcome?

### 4. Reconsider

Can you create a new, helpful and more accurate way of seeing things about the situation based on the answers to the questions above?

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### 5. Move forward

What can you do now to help yourself?

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## Thinking Traps

**Thinking traps** are common ways of thinking that everyone uses from time-to-time. However, thinking traps can make us feel more anxious, stressed or depressed than we need to. Therefore, it's helpful to notice when we are getting stuck in them.

### Black and white thinking

Seeing things in one of two ways with no in-between. For example, something must be perfect, or it's a failure.

### Catastrophising

Imagining the worst case scenario and worrying that it will happen.

### Ignoring the positives

Ignoring positive experiences as if they "don't count" for some reason or other.

### Looking through tinted glasses

Listening to our feelings more than the facts. Allowing our feelings to cloud our thinking.

### Filtering for the negatives

Focusing only on the negative parts of situations and ignoring anything positive.

### Fortune telling

Getting stuck imagining that events will turn out badly, and thinking your predictions are fact.

### Harsh judgement

Being self-critical and much quicker to judge yourself than you would anyone else.

### Mind reading

Believing that you know what a person thinks when you haven't actually asked them.

### Setting unrealistic standards

Setting very high standards for yourself and other people.

### Taking things personally

Mostly thinking in negative ways towards yourself and others.

### Doubting your ability

Doubting or questioning your ability to cope.

# Worry Time Guide

## About Worry Time

Worry or concern about something is normal and is an important part of the problem solving process.

### Being concerned about something can help:

- **Make us aware** of possible unpleasant future events.
- **Motivate** us to avoid those events.

### But, worry is a problem if you worry about:

- Things you can't change.
- Things that aren't preventable.
- Things you recognise as little or unimportant OR;
- If you have difficulty controlling worry.

For some people, worrying happens so often that it interferes with their ability to do what they need to do to carry on with everyday activities. **Worry Time** is a simple but effective strategy for helping to **manage worry and reduce its impact on your life**. Please remember that **Worry Time** is one of the many skills you can use to cope.

## How to Use Worry Time

**Worry Time** simply involves **setting aside a portion of time** once (e.g., 30 minutes) or twice each day (e.g., 15 minutes) **specifically for worry**. If you have worries outside of this time, you should acknowledge that you need to think them through later on during your **Worry Time**, and keep a mental note or write a reminder to do so.

Once you have made a note of the worry, give yourself permission to get back to whatever you need to do at the time – knowing that you will return to the worry later.

When you come to your Worry Time you can do the following:

- Think through any worries you have had in as much depth as you like.
- You can also think about any other worries you might have.
- **Make notes** about how you can solve those worries, remembering that you might not be able to control all your worries, but you can try and **manage how you react** to those things.
- But once your **Worry Time** is finished you need to start making a note of your worries for your next **Worry Time** - **you should try not to entertain your worries in any depth outside of your Worry Time!**

## What to Do During Worry Time

### Try challenging the worrying thought

Ask yourself: **Is it realistic?** How **likely** is the feared event to happen? If it did happen, how bad would it really be?

### Ask yourself: Does this really matter?

Are you worrying about something that really doesn't matter to you? **Do you really care about this?** Or are just worrying out of habit?

### Consider whether the problem is solvable/preventable

People who struggle with worry often worry about things that are not solvable or worry about things that cannot be prevented. If worries are not solvable or preventable, consider whether or not it is actually helpful to keep worrying about these events and what the costs of doing so will be (e.g., high levels of stress). If the worry is solvable or preventable, then you can use the **Problem Solving** strategy to consider possible solutions to address the problem.

### Use strategies to relieve tension

People who worry a lot often have difficulties with muscle tension, upset stomachs, concentration difficulties, sleep difficulties, etc. It is sometimes important to use a strategy like **mindful breathing or muscle relaxation** and **physical exercise** (e.g., a fast walk) to relieve tension after **Worry Time**. Also, be careful not to set your Worry Time too close to your bed time as you may need some time to relax and switch off before sleeping.

# Problem Solving Guide

**Problem solving** is different to simply thinking about the challenges you're facing.

Worrying and ruminating (i.e., thinking about your problems, how bad/stressful they are, and what consequences they might bring over and over) are passive, unhelpful processes where we continuously shift from one thought to the next, without coming up with a solution or a plan for action.

In contrast, problem solving is when we spend some time thinking about what we can do to solve (or partially solve) a specific problem.

**Structured Problem Solving** is step-by-step strategy that can help you tackle each problem in a way that feels manageable and productive.

## Structured Problem Solving involves 6 key steps:

### 1. Identifying the problem

**Identify one specific problem** that you are finding hard to resolve or that is causing you stress or worry.

- **Clearly define the problem**, as specifically as possible. The more specific, the better.
- **Consider one problem at a time**. If other problems arise, set them aside for a problem solving session in the future.
- Avoid attempting to solve the problem at this stage.

### 2. Generating solutions through brainstorming

**Brainstorm as many solutions as you can.**

- Rather than think of the best solution, **list any ideas that come to mind**, including those which may not be that useful or may even be absurd.
- **Use your imagination!** Even though a solution may seem ridiculous at first, the idea may help to generate better solutions than those that are more immediately obvious.
- At this stage **do no evaluate the solutions**, simply list them.

### 3. Evaluating the solutions

Briefly **consider the advantages and disadvantages** of each solution.

- Quickly run through the list of solutions, noting the advantages and disadvantages of each.
- No solution will be ideal since every good idea will have some faults. The aim is simply to consider the advantages and disadvantages of each option.

### 4. Choosing the optimal solution

**Pick a solution** or a combination of solutions that will solve the problem (or begin to solve the problem).

- It is often helpful to **choose a solution that can be readily applied and will not be too difficult to implement**, even though it may not be the ideal solution.
  - That way you can get started straight away.
  - This approach is preferable to choosing a solution which is doomed to fail because you have been overly ambitious.

### 5. Making a plan

**Plan out step-by-step** how and when you will carry out your solution.

- To help make a plan, consider the following questions:
  - **Do you have all the necessary resources** (e.g., time, skills, information, equipment) or do you need to arrange them?
  - Do you have **cooperation from others** who might be involved in the plan?
  - Do you know exactly **what** needs to be done, and **when** you will do it?
- A detailed plan of action will increase the likelihood that the problem will be solved. Even if your solution is excellent, it will not be of any use if it is not put into practice.

### 6. Reviewing your progress

This stage is an opportunity to **determine what has been achieved and what still needs to be done**. Often, problems are not completely solved after the first round of Structured Problem Solving. Use this step to **reflect on what you have learned, and to make plans for your next solution**. If there is more you need to do or achieve, start the Structured Problem Solving process again.

# Problem Solving Worksheet

## 1. Define the Problem

The more narrowly and specifically you can define it, the better.

## 2. List all possible solutions

Even the 'bad' or less desirable ones. Don't evaluate at this stage.

## 3. Evaluate each possible solution

Quickly consider the advantages and disadvantages of each solution.

Pros

Cons

## Problem Solving Worksheet

**4. Choose the best, most practical, or most realistic solution**

**5. Plan how to carry out the best solution**

Make a specific step-by-step plan and schedule it into your calendar.

**6. Review progress**

Check if the problem is solved or if you need to try the next solution on your list.

## Calming Your Emotions

Facing a global pandemic certainly qualifies as a highly stressful situation, and so it is absolutely normal to experience a wide range of emotions.

From confusion, anxiety, fear, and worry to anger, frustration, and a sense of helplessness - all feelings are valid given the circumstances.

This doesn't mean that having these feelings is pleasant, however, and many of us are struggling to find ways to cope.

When it comes to experiencing emotions, how we react and respond to them determines if they ease and go away on their own or become more intense and persistent, making us feel even more stressed.

**Some unhelpful ways of coping with strong feelings include:**

- Trying to ignore, suppress, or avoid experiencing an emotion.
- Using alcohol, drugs, food, sex or other methods to try to numb the emotion.
- Trying to get rid of the emotion by worrying or seeking excessive reassurance.
- Judging or criticising yourself for feeling a certain way.
- Bottling up your emotions and pretending that you don't feel anything.
- Letting your emotions take a hold of you and acting out.

Experiencing emotions is part of being human, but using one of the above ways to cope is likely to cause your emotions to become more intense and last longer.

If you take your emotions out on those around you, especially during a lockdown, it can make life even harder for you and your loved ones.

Instead, you can try some of the strategies we describe below to calm your emotions in a healthy way, so that they don't cause you further distress.

Some important emotion management skills include:

- **Being aware** when you're experiencing an emotion.
- Being able to name or **label the emotion** that you're feeling.
- Being able to **identify the cause or trigger** of the emotion.
- Noticing how an emotion is making you **want to do something**.
- Being able to **pause instead of reacting** on impulse.
- Using your breath to **soothe the physical sensations** of a strong emotion.
- Consider **what would be helpful** to do in the situation, despite how you feel.
- Being able to **sit with difficult emotions** until they pass on their own.
- Being able to **describe how you're feeling** and express what you need to cope.

Let's have a look at a couple of practical strategies you can try to manage your feelings.

## Being Mindful of How You Feel

The first step to being able to respond to an emotion is to **recognise that you're feeling it**. Distressing emotions, such as fear, anxiety, panic or anger are often accompanied by unpleasant physical sensations, such as:

- Nausea
- Sweating
- Feeling tingly
- Dizziness
- Shaking
- Feeling hot
- Muscle tension
- Feeling short of breath

Although these sensations are uncomfortable and can make us feel overwhelmed, they are not dangerous and often can be calmed quickly through specific breathing and relaxation exercises. These exercises can help us to feel more grounded and in control.

Being mindful and aware of your emotions involves:

- **Noticing** when you experience a shift in your mood.
- **Observing** the physical sensations that come on.
- Allowing yourself to **experience this emotion** (and the physical sensations), without judgement.
- **Using your breath** to help you calm the way you feel.
- Asking yourself - 'what's brought this on?' and **checking in with your thoughts**.

## Describing Your Feelings

It can be hard to process our emotions, when we don't really know what we are feeling.

Sometimes, being able to pin point the emotion you are feeling can also help you understand what it is about the situation you are in that you find especially challenging.

This is why a useful strategy for managing emotions is to be able to identify and name them.

We included some emotion words below to help you be as specific as possible in labelling the emotion you're experiencing.

### Anger

Angry	Hateful	Seething	Exasperated
Contempt	Furious	Grouchy	Frustrated
Enraged	Spiteful	Irate	Aggressive
Resentful	Agitated	Vengeful	Disgusted
Irritated	Hostile	Insulted	Annoyed
Aggravated	Jealous	Bitter	Outraged

### Sadness

Sad	Longing	Miserable	Deflated
Depressed	Lonely	Woeful	Empty
Grief	Hopeless	Weary	Despairing
Gloomy	Hurt	Insecure	Sorrowful
Dejected	Disappointed	Rejected	Distraught

### Fear

Afraid	Frightened	Shocked	Unsure
Panicked	Terrified	Insecure	Dread
Uneasy	Bewildered	Worried	Nervous
Scared	Anxious	Concerned	Uncertain
Horrificed	Fearful	Wary	Frozen

### Shame

Shamed	Regretful	Contrite	Mortified
Humiliated	Embarrassed	Guilty	Humbled
	Remorseful	Insulted	

### Love

Loving	Adoring	Tender	Safe
Desire	Passionate	Enamoured	Fond
Infatuated	Enchanted	Sentimental	Affectionate
Exhilarated	Attracted	Aroused	Patient
Warm	Lustful	Compassionate	Secure

### Joy

Happy	Motivated	Excited	Elated
Joyful	Satisfied	Amused	Relieved
Jovial	Optimistic	Glad	Eager
Jubilant	Delighted	Energised	Proud
Hopeful	Exhilarated	Cheerful	Confident

## Being Kind and Gentle with Yourself

Being mindful of your feelings also involves being kind to yourself, not judging the way you feel, and reminding yourself that there is no right or wrong way to feel about what's going on. This is an important step to calming and soothing strong emotions.

Acknowledging that it's OK to feel the way you're feeling, instead of judging or criticising yourself is called '**self-validation**'. Self-validation is an important part of coping with difficult situations.

We all have emotions for a reason. Sometimes, people put pressure on themselves to 'be strong' or 'stay positive'. While having a positive attitude can help some people, **it's also okay to feel worried, afraid, angry or frustrated.**

In fact, it makes sense to feel this way when facing change and uncertainty. And, if you put pressure on yourself to feel differently, you might just end up feeling worse.

### Some helpful things you can tell yourself when experiencing strong emotions:

- "It's been a tough few days, I'm allowed to feel upset."
- "I feel scared and overwhelmed, this doesn't mean I'm not coping."
- "It makes sense to feel angry and frustrated, my plans were important to me."
- "It's been full on. It's OK if I don't know how to feel about all of this."
- "What I'm feeling in this moment is OK."
- "Everyone is allowed to feel differently about this situation."
- "Even though I feel powerless, this doesn't mean that I am."
- "I can feel scared and hopeful at the same time."
- "I can feel angry with others and recognise that they could be struggling too."
- "It doesn't matter how others would feel in my shoes, my feelings are valid."
- "Just because awful things are happening to others, doesn't mean I can't feel upset about what's happening to me."
- "Whatever I'm feeling is OK."
- "I can let myself feel X without getting lost in it."
- "I'm feeling X, and that's OK."
- "I'm allowed to feel X."

## Resisting the Urge to React

When we experience distressing emotions, sometimes we also feel an urge to act on these emotions – often in unhelpful ways.

For example, when we feel angry, we might feel an urge to snap at someone; when we feel sad, we might feel an urge to indulge in an excessive amount of food.

Although acting on these urges might give some short-term relief, it often makes us feel worse in the long-term. While it is OK to feel an emotion, it is not OK to take it out on others around you, as this can make things more challenging for everyone involved.

Fortunately, an emotion itself cannot 'make you' do something and these urges to react are temporary. In fact, the way we feel often comes and goes in waves, so if we learn to 'surf' or 'ride out' these emotional waves instead of going under, we'll be much better off in the long run.

## How to 'Surf' the Urge to React

- **Notice** when you are feeling an urge to act on a distressing emotion.
- Before acting on the urge, **pause for a few moments**. Begin to breathe in and out slowly through your nose.
- Take a curious, **non-judgemental approach** to observing your urge (e.g. finish the sentence, "It's interesting that this urge wants me to....").
- **Observe how this urge impacts your body**. Has it triggered any physical sensations (e.g. heat or a tingly sensation)?
- Continue to **breathe in and out slowly** through your nose and notice any changes in your thoughts and physical sensations.
- After a few minutes, **reflect on the strength and quality of your urge**. Has anything changed?

You can also download our resource called '**Knowing What to Say**' for tips on how to express your needs and emotions instead of reacting to them.

Download the '**Knowing What to Say**' Resource



## Learning to Tolerate Unpleasant Feelings

Sometimes, coping with emotions involves **simply allowing them to be there** without doing anything about them.

Many emotions, such as fear, anger, boredom, frustration or hurt feel unpleasant and uncomfortable, and our natural urge is to try to get rid of them as quickly as possible.

Most people tend to do something when feeling a certain way, which is totally normal. Some of these things can be helpful (such as talking to a friend, keeping busy with a hobby), while others are unhelpful (such as drinking alcohol to numb how you feel).

However, sometimes, when we are not used to feeling a certain way, we may be **too quick to react** and do things that can **make these emotions more challenging** in the long run.

For example, if you never allow yourself to feel bored and your main way of coping with boredom is to hang out with your mates, you might find it especially challenging to cope with boredom during self-isolation.

On the other hand, if you build-up tolerance to feeling bored and you are OK with feeling bored every now and then without needing to instantly fill your time or busy your mind with something, chances are you'll feel much better when you can't engage in your usual activities.

If you're not used to tolerating uncertainty and being OK with feeling somewhat anxious, you might be tempted to constantly seek reassurance by binge watching the news or bringing the situation up in every conversation, or engage in certain behaviours (e.g., panic-buying) to try to get rid of anxiety.

You can use a similar analogy with many other emotions.

One of the strategies for calming your emotions is to learn how to **build your tolerance for the uncomfortable emotions**. This is much like resisting an urge to scratching an itch. You can do this by learning to 'sit with' unpleasant feelings.

### How to sit with unpleasant feelings without reacting to them:

- **Notice any sensations in your body.** Do you feel tension or heaviness anywhere? Do feel nauseous or tired? Does your mouth feel dry? Are you in any physical pain? How quickly is your heart beating?
- **Identify the emotion(s) that you're feeling.** Try to be as accurate as possible (for example, you might be feeling dread rather than anxiety, or you might be feeling a combination of emotions).
- **Notice the intensity of this emotion.** Is it strong, intense, weak, moderate?
- Complete the sentence, "I'm noticing that I'm feeling \_\_\_\_\_".
- Continue to **observe your emotions** for at least a few minutes. **Notice any changes** in the quality or intensity of the emotions you're experiencing.
- Allow yourself to **experience the unpleasant emotion, rather than avoid it.** If you feel an urge to cry, let the tears fall and let the emotion 'wash over' you.
- Use your breath to **'breathe' through areas of tension or pain** and try to soften your muscles around these areas (e.g., you can let tears fall while softening the muscle of your face).

This skill can be challenging at first, so be kind and gentle with yourself as you learn to let yourself feel your emotions without reacting. Over time, it will get easier.

### Summary of Tips for Calming Your Emotions

#### Remind yourself of the following:

- All humans experience unpleasant emotions, especially during tough times.
- You can practise helpful ways of calming or soothing how you feel.
- You can also learn to sit with your emotions without reacting to them.
- It's okay to feel any emotion.
- All emotions will pass with time.

One emotion in particular is likely to be felt by many people facing this time of change and uncertainty. This emotion is **grief**.

We included some additional tips for coping with grief during this difficult time further down in this resource pack under the '**Coping with Grief**' heading.

## Mindful Breathing

### Controlled Breathing

When we feel anxious or stressed, we often start to breathe more quickly and less deeply.

At the extreme end, this is called hyperventilation. Often however, the change in our breathing is so subtle that we might not even notice. But, shallow breathing can send messages back to the brain telling us to be anxious, which keeps anxiety going, which makes our breathing shallow – resulting in a vicious cycle.

A simple strategy for breaking this cycle and easing strong emotions is to **notice and steady your breathing** when you're feeling yourself tense up.

To do this you need to learn to notice and be aware of your breath and then use the controlled breathing technique to slow it down and give it a calm rhythm.

### How to do Controlled Breathing

- Sit or lie down somewhere comfortable, although you can do it standing too.
- Breathe in and out gently through your nose.
- Rest your hands on your stomach to check that you are using your diaphragm to drive your breathing rather than your upper chest (your stomach should rise and fall as you breathe, rather than your chest).
- Breathe **in for 3 seconds** and out for 3 seconds. As you breathe out, relax your body. Do this for at least 3 minutes, or until you feel calmer and more relaxed.

### How to do Mindful Breathing

While **controlled breathing** is a strategy to calm and steady your breath as a way of soothing your emotions, **mindful breathing** is a way of coming back into your body so you can focus on the here-and-now, shift away from worries or negative thoughts, and spend some time staying in the moment and feeling at ease.

Download the Mindful Breathing Audio



## Muscle Relaxation

In addition to learning how to steady your breath, you can also practice **keeping your body relaxed and at ease**, which can really help to combat feelings of tension, stress, and anxiety.

This involves systematically tensing and relaxing your major muscle groups, from your feet upwards. You can do this on your own or listen to our guided Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) Audio below. Over time, you will learn the sequence and won't need to keep listening to the script.

Download the Muscle Relaxatio Audio



### Tips for Practice

Some people feel anxious during relaxation exercises, because they feel they are “wasting time” or because they aren't used to feeling relaxed.

Remember that **relaxation training is a valuable use of time** - it will assist you in managing stress and looking after your physical health. If you're not used to feeling relaxed this is all the more reason to keep practicing!

Practice **regularly**, to get the maximum benefit.

**Don't tense your muscles too tightly**, PMR should not be uncomfortable or painful.

You may want to try PMR in the evening to improve your **sleep**.

Practice in a **quiet space** where you won't be disturbed.

Don't worry if your **mind wanders**, that's normal. Just try to let go of the thought that has distracted you and bring your attention gently back to the exercise.

## Coping with Grief

### What is Grief?

**Grief** is an emotional response to loss. Grief is not just something we experience following the death of a loved one; we can grieve any form of loss, such as lost work, relationships, experiences, opportunities, or freedoms. Throughout this pandemic, many people have lost:

- Resources (e.g., stocks)
- Their source of income
- Freedom to enjoy group activities
- Their normal routines
- Friends and family members
- Important experiences (e.g., weddings, the birth of a new family member)
- Normal ways of coping with stress (e.g. catching up with friends, going shopping)
- Overseas travel experiences

You may not have personally lost these things yourself, but, you can still experience grief, knowing that other people, and humanity as a whole, have been affected.

### Where in your life might you be experiencing a sense of grief right now?

### What Does Grief Feel Like?

When you're grieving, you may experience many or none of the emotions below (and the strength of these emotions can vary from mild to intense).

- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Disbelief
- Numbness
- Helplessness
- Hopelessness
- Confusion
- Despair
- Hurt
- Frustration
- A sense of 'emptiness'

You may also notice the following reactions:

- Getting teary when watching or reading news stories, articles or social media.
- Finding similarities between yourself with those who have died or who have lost loved ones, identifying with their loss and feeling an extra layer of compassion.
- Worrying about your own or loved ones' safety, health, homes or jobs.
- Not wanting to read or watch anymore stories.
- Thinking about your own past experiences of grief and loss more than usual.
- Contemplating bigger issues of life and death.
- Feeling appreciative of the people or things in your life that you value.
- Feeling a sense of injustice or guilt - "why them and not me?"

These reactions don't make you strange, oversensitive or weak. It just means you're human. We are wired to empathise and have compassion toward others. So, it's only natural to feel similar feelings to others who are grieving.

## Working with Grief

If you find yourself experiencing grief reactions, give yourself permission to:

- Feel whatever emotions you are feeling in a non-judgemental way.
- Express your feelings by talking about it with someone you trust or journal it.
- Place sensible boundaries around how much you watch or read if needed.

You can apply any and all of the strategies we discussed in this resource so far to help you calm the feelings of grief.

Another important strategy for coping with grief is to reflect on what's important to you and to connect with that as best as you can. You will find a resource to help you do this under the heading '**What Matters Most**' later on in this pack.

## Meaning Making

When you're grieving, it can be helpful to focus on the things that bring your life meaning. That is, the things that bring you a sense of joy, satisfaction, contentment or pride. The things that bring our life meaning are typically things that align with our values.

For example, if you said 'family' was something you valued, then bringing a family member a cup of tea could be an action that aligns with this value. Although this action might be small, it is meaningful, and could bring you a small measure of contentment or peace to help you cope with any grief or loss you might be experiencing.

When facing difficult situations:

- Take the time to **reflect upon what your values might be**.
- **Brainstorm** things you can do that align with these values.
- At the end of each day, take time out to **reflect upon things you have and things that you have done** that bring your life meaning and satisfaction.

If you are struggling, don't hesitate to reach out to a mental health professional or a helpline so you can speak with someone about how you feel.

Here are some places where you can seek some help and support during this difficult time:

- Lifeline: 13 11 14
- Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636
- Suicide Callback Service: 1300 659 46
- Healthdirect Australia: Ph: 1800 022 222
- Kids Helpline (5-25 years): 1800 551 800
- Headspace: 1800 650 890
- Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia: 1800 424 017

## What Matters Most

When we spend time during our day doing what matters most to us, we feel happier, experience more joy and satisfaction, and have a greater sense of wellbeing.

What's important to you might include the people you love, your life roles (being a friend, parent, partner), the environment, your culture, activities you enjoy, or spiritual/religious beliefs and practices.

Different things matter to different people, but **regularly connecting with what we love and cherish most** has a positive effect on us.

When life gets difficult, we can **slip into survival mode**, where we can get stuck worrying and putting all our energy into avoiding the things we fear, spending less and less time engaging in meaningful activities.

Making sure you stay connected with what matters most to you can help you manage stress during difficult times by taking your mind off things and helping you feel good.

**This worksheet is here to help you identify what matters most right now and find ways to stay connected to these parts of your life.**

- **Start off by working out what matters most to you right now** (see the box on the next page for some ideas).
- Next **consider how well connected you currently feel** to the things that matter to you based on how much time, energy and focus you are putting into them. If it helps, use the rating scale we've provided.
- Try and think about **what is getting in the way** of you being more connected to what matters to you.
- Next think about how you can **put time aside to connect with what matters** to you. How can you make it more of a focus?
- Finally, **plan activities that keep you connected to what matters** to you using the **Staying Active Planner** included below. We suggest including some additional activities that give you a sense of pleasure and achievement here too.

### Examples of things that often matter the most to us

- Family
- Friendships
- Romantic Relationships
- Having fun
- Being in nature
- Being creative
- Career/job
- Spending time with animals
- Protecting our environment
- Being involved in the community
- Looking after physical health
- Individuality (being ourselves)
- Life roles (being a parent, friend, etc.)
- Interests and hobbies
- Religious/spiritual beliefs and activities
- Cultural beliefs and practices

If staying connected to some of these things is difficult right now, try using our **Problem Solving Guide** to help you work out how you might be able to do this.



### Staying connected to what matters most

<b>What matters most to you?</b>  Using the separate columns on this table, list all the things that you have identified to matter most right now.  <b>Tip:</b> The list above may help you get started.	<b>How connected are you right now?</b>  I feel...  3 = very connected 2 = somewhat connected 1 = not connected at all  <b>What is getting in the way?</b>	<b>How can you feel more connected?</b>  Try and think of some ways to connect in daily with what matters most.  <b>Tip:</b> use our <b>Problem Solving Guide</b> if you need help.
Example:  My family.	Example:  2 - somewhat connected  I'm worrying a lot and finding it hard to focus on them.	Example:  Work on reducing the time I'm spending worrying and plan in some nice things to do with them.
Being in nature.	0 - I don't feel connected  I can't get to lots of the places I love.	Spend time in my garden and pay attention to the nature I can see.  Go for a walk every day.

## Staying Connected to What Matters Most



<p><b>What matters most to you?</b></p> <p>Using the separate columns on this table, list all the things that you have identified to matter most right now.</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> The list above may help you get started.</p>	<p><b>How connected are you right now?</b></p> <p>I feel...</p> <p>3 = very connected 2 = somewhat connected 1 = not connected at all</p> <p><b>What is getting in the way?</b></p>	<p><b>How can you feel more connected?</b></p> <p>Try and think of some ways to connect in daily with what matters most.</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> use our <b>Problem Solving Guide</b> if you need help.</p>

## Staying in the Moment

**Staying in the moment** is all about being here-and-now mentally, not miles away in your imagination or memory. It is the opposite of being ‘on autopilot’, day dreaming, rushing or worrying, all of which can distract us from focusing on the important things that are happening right in front of us.

One way to stay connected and not let worry get in the way, is to **practise being mindful and fully focused on what you’re doing**. This may be challenging at first and your mind may wander, but if you repeatedly practise bringing your attention back to the activity you are doing, as often and as persistently as you need to, it will get much easier and more enjoyable over time.

### Staying in the moment by being mindful

See if you can practise being mindful when you engage in your daily activities, such as brushing your teeth, having a shower, or pottering around the house.

Being ‘mindful’ simply means that you **focus on and don’t judge what is happening in the present**. You can ask yourself the following questions when you are trying to fully engage in an activity you are doing:

- **What can I see?** Notice and observe what is happening around you.
- **What can I feel?** Focus on the bodily sensations you can feel.
- **What can I hear?** Notice and listen to what you can hear.
- **What can I smell?** Notice and focus on what you can smell.
- **What can I taste?** Notice and focus on what you can taste.

Being mindful also involves **noticing and letting go of negative or worrying thoughts** that may come to mind. If you notice thinking thoughts such as “I can’t be bothered right now,” “It is too hard,” “This is not what I had planned,” “Why am I not enjoying this as much as I used to?” – try not to engage and dwell on them and instead, bring your attention back to what you were doing, allowing the thoughts to pass by.

We included some examples on when you can practise **staying in the moment** on the next page.

## 50+ Daily Activities to Do Mindfully

1. Brushing your teeth
2. Showering
3. Tying up shoelaces
4. Making a cup of tea/coffee
5. Putting on moisturiser/shaving
6. Washing your hair
7. Walking barefoot
8. Eating
9. Cooking
10. Washing Dishes
11. Making the bed
12. Filling-up a water bottle
13. Walking
14. Hugging a loved one
15. Washing hands
16. Dressing/Undressing
17. Getting into bed
18. Stretching
19. Reading
20. Vacuuming
21. Putting on sunscreen
22. Swimming/bathing
23. Talking with a friend
24. Chewing gum
25. Using the computer
26. Paying
27. Using your phone
28. Writing
29. Folding laundry or ironing
30. Waiting to cross the road
31. Sitting, leaning, lying, standing
32. Being at your workspace
33. Shopping
34. Using public transport
35. Waiting for the microwave to finish
36. Typing
37. Brushing your hair
38. Printing/Photocopying
39. Gardening
40. Being outdoors
41. Smells and sounds of home/office
42. Logging-in to check your e-mail
43. Seeing/watching a loved one
44. Saying good morning/good night
45. Talking on the phone
46. Listening to music
47. Kissing/touching
48. Being clothed/naked
49. Sitting down/standing up/bending
50. Beginning/completing an activity
51. Stroking your pet
52. Chewing and tasting your food
53. Laughing
54. Sitting quietly and/or meditating

**Other activities you can think of:**

## Keep Moving



### 1. Take regular breaks

Take **regular breaks** from sitting or lying in front of the TV or computer. Try getting up every 20-30 minutes and try a walk around your house, go to a balcony for fresh air, walk to the post box and back.

Alternate sitting and standing if you are working/studying from home.



### 2. Find some stairs

You **only need one step** to be able to devise a home step class. It can be as simple as stepping up and down with one leg for 20-30 seconds, then swapping to the other side. Add weights or arm movements to increase difficulty.



### 3. Make use of your body weight

Studies have shown that **exercises that use your body weight** such as wall sits, tricep dips and planks are important for aerobic health.

Schedule in a couple of bodyweight sessions a week involving 2-4 sets of 8-15 repetitions of each exercise. If you experience chronic pain you may want to start off with smaller numbers and pace it up gently.



### 4. Explore slow and gentle movement

Exercise such as **yoga or tai chi** have been shown to help with physical and mental health. You don't need any special equipment and you can adapt the moves to suit you.



### 5. Dance - freestyle or learn a simple routine

Dance is a **great aerobic exercise** and helps with our mood as we all learn to cope with COVID-19. Become your own Dancing Queen in the kitchen!



### 6. Ready... Set... Play!

If you have a pet or young children in your home, spend this time playing with them and think of some fun activities you can **all do together**.



### 7. Bring on positive feelings through movement

Any movement is beneficial, as long as it is **regular** and within your normal pace and tolerance.

Choose movement that you enjoy and that relaxes you - the world is providing us with enough to worry about, use movement as a time to relax for a little while.

## Activity Ideas Hub



### Stay Active

[Nike Training Club \(app\)](#)

[Yoga With Adriene](#)

[Fit On \(app\)](#)

[Fitness Blender](#)



### Learn

[Duolingo - Free Foreign Language Courses](#)

[FreeCodeCamp - Free Ivy League Courses](#)

[Aboriginal Sydney - Cultural Competence Course](#)

[Skillshare Free Classes](#)



### Watch

[TED Talks](#)

[SBS On Demand](#)

[DIS - Original Series and Documentaries](#)

[Livestream Music Gigs](#)



### Visit

[Explore the Surface of Mars](#)

[Take a Virtual Walk around the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park](#)

[Visit the Yosemite National Park](#)

[Take a Peak Inside the World-Famous Art Galleries](#)



### Play

[Live Streaming from Melbourne Zoo](#)

[Hy-Vee Quick Kid-Friendly At-Home Workouts](#)

[Colouring-in Book](#)



### Listen

[Ideas at the House - Replays of Live Talks from the Sydney Opera House](#)

['All the Dirt' Gardening Podcast](#)

[Crime Junkie - True Crime Podcast](#)

[99% invisible - Curious Facts Podcast](#)

[Click here for more!](#)

## Activity Planner

Use this planner to help you incorporate some of the activities you listed above into your days. You can also include other simple activities that give you a sense of pleasure and achievement like listening to music while you do the dishes, or giving your family a hug in the morning.

	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

## Good Sleep Guide

Protecting your sleep during times of stress is one of the most important things you can do to look after your mental well-being. We included some common questions about sleep, as well as tips for helping you keep your sleep in check.

### Common questions about sleep:

#### How Much Sleep Do I Need?

Everyone differs in the amount of sleep they need. Sleep research indicates that people differ a lot in the amount of sleep they need and require less sleep as they get older.

#### Is My Lack of Sleep Harmful?

There is no evidence that sleep deprivation causes short- or long-term damage to the brain or body. Sleep deprived people may experience irritability, extreme sleepiness, difficulty concentrating, and reduced motivation; though you cannot die from lack of sleep. Nature has provided us with an inbuilt mechanism that ensures we will fall asleep if we really need to. If your body really needs sleep, you can be sure that almost nothing will be able to stop it.

#### When is Sleeplessness a Problem?

For many, sleeplessness is unpleasant and stressful. This is often due to the fact that people spend much of the time awake at night worrying. So, these people feel tired the next day partly because they slept relatively little, and partly because the worrying has exhausted them. When you can't sleep, lying in bed worrying makes things worse. A more effective option is to get up and do something distracting and relaxing. This way, even if you aren't sleeping, at least you are resting.

#### What is Insomnia?

Insomnia is defined as a chronic inability to sleep. Most people with insomnia do sleep, but feel that they do not get enough sleep, or that their sleep has too many disruptions so they don't feel refreshed in the morning. Often, it's not the lack of sleep that prompts a person to seek help, but how the person feels about and copes with their sleeplessness. [Click here](#) if insomnia is a problem for you.

## Tips for Improving Sleep

- **Create and maintain a regular sleep cycle** - go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time every morning. **Do not sleep late in the mornings trying to make up for lost sleep and do not nap** during the day, no matter how tired you are during the day.
- Try to **reduce noise** levels by closing windows and doors.
- **Avoid caffeine** in the evenings and preferably in the afternoons. **Limit alcohol consumption** to within health guidelines and do not use alcohol to help you sleep.
- **Get out of bed:** If you're lying in bed unable to stop thinking about things, **get up and do something distracting and relaxing** (e.g., read a book, listen to classical music). Don't return to bed until you feel sleepy again. If you return to bed and feel the same way, get out of bed again and do something distracting and relaxing again. You may need to do this a few times before you can get into bed and fall asleep. The whole idea is that you learn to associate bed with sleep.
- Make time for **thinking about your problems and brainstorming solutions during the day**, instead of focusing on them as you're trying to fall asleep.
- **Regular exercise during the day** or early in the evening can improve sleeping patterns (however, don't exercise late in the evening as this may make it more difficult for you to sleep).
- Develop a **short and relaxing evening routine** (including things such as washing your face and cleaning your teeth) to help you to wind down and get in the 'mood' for sleep.
- If you smoke, abstain for at least an hour before going to bed so that the stimulating effects of nicotine can wear off.
- Make sure all your **immediate needs are met** before you get into bed (i.e., make sure you're not hungry or cold).
- If you need to, **speak to your GP** about starting, stopping, or changing any medications for sleep.



To access additional tools for coping with stress and anxiety during the corona virus outbreak, please visit our website.

[www.thiswayup.org.au/coronavirus](http://www.thiswayup.org.au/coronavirus)



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