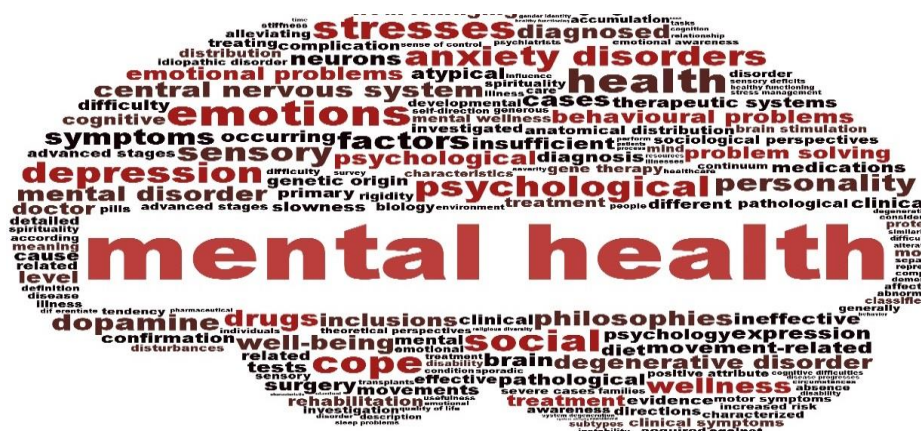


Looking after your Mental Health

A guide to coping during the Coronavirus outbreak for
people with learning disabilities and/or autism.



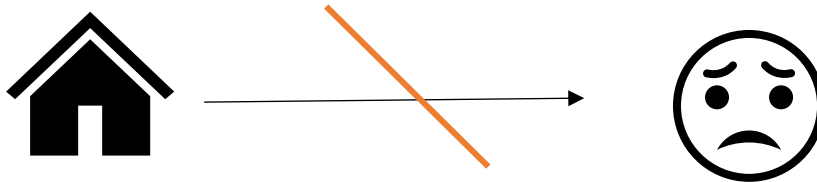
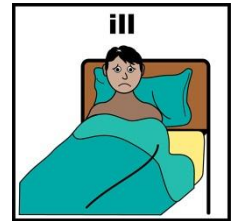
Developed by: Dr Sarah Tomlinson (Clinical Psychologist) and Katie
Morris (Assistant Psychologist), April 2020

What is this booklet for?



Things are **difficult** in the world right now.

You might be worried about how Coronavirus could affect your life, especially as we have been asked to **stay at home** and not be near other people outside of our home.



It is **normal** to feel anxious and/or scared at this time as it is all **new**.

This pack has been made for adults with **learning disabilities/autism** to help people to cope and develop skills to help during this difficult time.

The skills written about here are especially for adults with learning disabilities but may be useful for anyone.

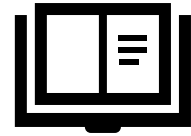
This is **not** a pack about how to keep yourself or others safe from the virus, it is about your **mood**.



If you want to know more about the Coronavirus, you can find this on:

[LD Senate Coronavirus resources for use with people with learning disabilities 30.3.2020.pdf](#)

How to use this pack:



There are two parts to this pack.

Part 1 – Managing your feelings about the Coronavirus outbreak

Part 2 – Practical things you can do to help

Read this pack **slowly** and take as long as you need. You may need to read the pack quite a few times, or in bits.

If possible, have someone to support you in reading it, and ask them about anything you don't understand.

You may find some parts of this pack more useful to you than others: **use the things that work for you** and feel free to leave the rest.

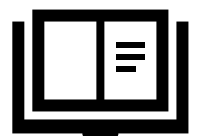


Feel free to **ask questions** about this booklet to people supporting you outside your home, such as someone from the learning disability team or your doctor.

Remember, this difficult time will pass, it is not **forever!**



TOP TIP: Try not to read or talk too much about the virus
(A bit is ok)



It is important to understand how to keep yourself and other people **safe** whilst the Coronavirus is around. Do not avoid learning about it, even if it is hard to do, because safety is very **important**.

- ❖ Remember that there are a lot of things posted about the virus on things like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, but a lot of this information is **wrong** or is '**fake news**'. Don't believe everything you read.

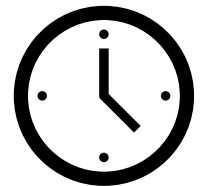


- ❖ If you decide to read about the virus, read proper websites such as the **NHS** one.



<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

- ❖ Try not to read, listen to or talk too much about the virus, because this is likely to get you **more worried** or down than you need to be.



- ❖ Maybe give yourself half an hour each day to read up on the virus or watch the news, and then after that try to think about something else.

Part One:
**Managing my
feelings during
the
Coronavirus
outbreak**





Understanding Feelings

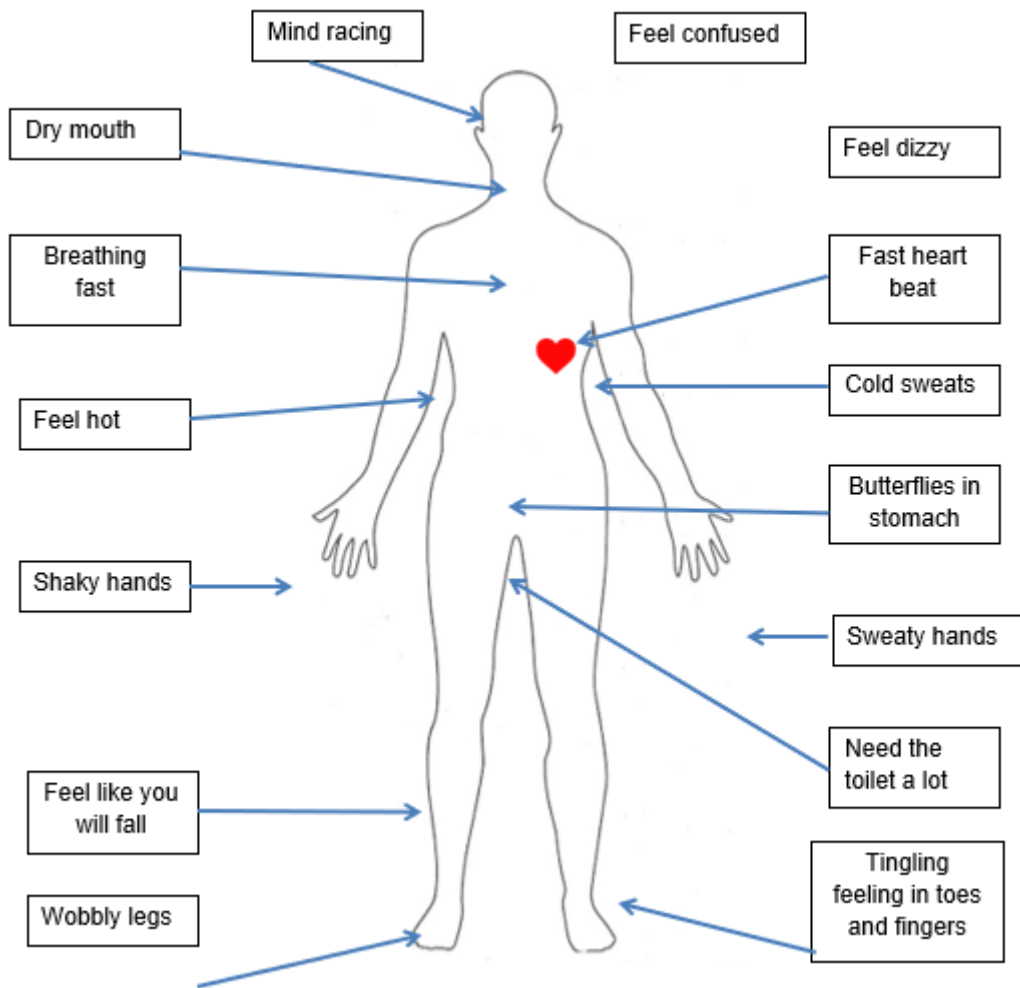


Feelings can be very **confusing**, but here is some information that might help you to understand your feelings better.

These are some of our main feelings, and some different words for them:

<p>Happy</p>  <p>Other words for Happy – Joy, Cheerful, Glad, Pleasure, Proud, Satisfied</p>	<p>Sad</p>  <p>Other words for Sad – Gloomy, Misery, hurt, Upset, Down, Suffering</p>
<p>Angry</p>  <p>Other words for Angry – Frustrated, Annoyed, Stressed out, Cross, Furious, Rage, Irritated</p>	<p>Afraid</p>  <p>Other words for Afraid – Scared, Worried, Fear, Terrified, Anxious, Frightened</p>
<p>Ashamed</p>  <p>Other words for Ashamed – Embarrassed, Guilty, Humiliated</p>	<p>Relaxed</p>  <p>Other words for Relaxed – Chilled, Calm, Content, Peaceful, Comfortable</p>

Our bodies **change** when we have a **strong** emotion. For example, when we are anxious the following things can happen:



This is because when we feel under **threat**, our bodies are made to either **fight, freeze or run away** from danger.

To do this, our body has to make lots of **energy**.

This might be happening at times to you if you are worried about the danger of the virus.

Flight, fight or freeze



Fight

Feeling like you need to argue or hurt somebody



Freeze

Feeling like you do not know what to do



Flight

Feeling like you need to escape or get away

It can be useful to think about what helps you at different levels of feelings.

Number	How does it make me feel?	An example of a time you felt like this	What will calm you?
5			
4			
3			
2			
1			



All feelings are around for a **reason**



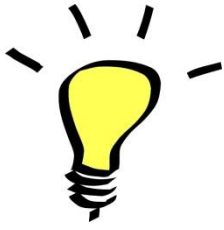
The more you push a feeling away the more it can come back **stronger**



Listen to your feelings - what are they trying to tell you?



Your feelings matter, even if others don't agree



Idea One: Relaxation

Use this exercise to help when you feel **tense and anxious**. You will need to practice it a lot to get the hang of it.

You will be working with most all the major muscle groups in your body, but start from your feet upwards.

Remember the three-steps:

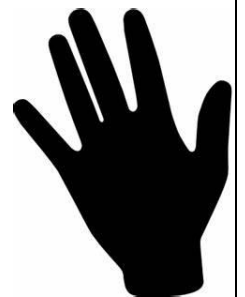
1) **Tension**

Focus your mind on the muscle group; for example, your right hand. Then breathe in and squeeze the muscles as hard as you can for about 8 seconds.



2) **Releasing the Tension**

This is the best part. After the **8 seconds**, quickly and suddenly **let go**. Let all the tightness and pain flow out of the muscles as you **breathe out**.

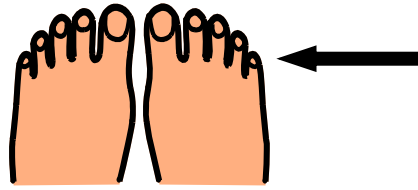


Feel the muscles relax and become loose and limp. Focus on and notice the **difference** between tension and relaxation.

3) **Next muscle group**

Stay relaxed for about **15 seconds**, and then repeat what you did with different body parts.

1) Right foot



2) Right lower leg and foot



The Leg

3) Entire right leg



The Leg

4) Left foot



5) Left lower leg and foot



The Leg

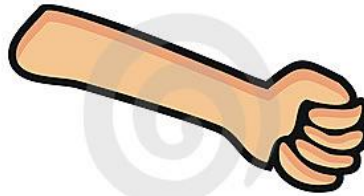
6) Entire left leg



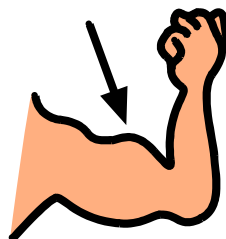
7) Right hand



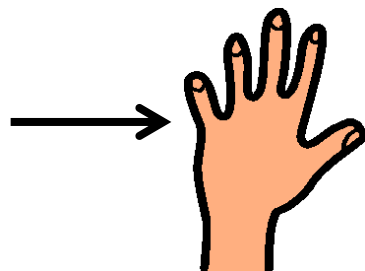
8) Right forearm and hand



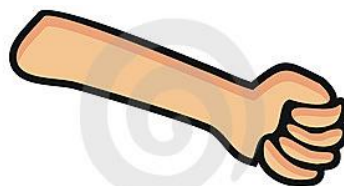
9) Entire right arm



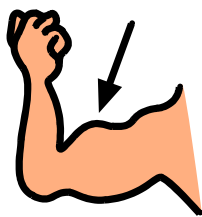
10) Left hand



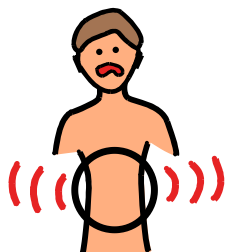
11) Left forearm and hand



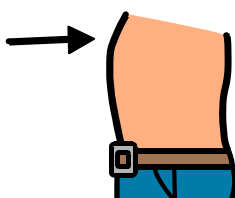
12) Entire left arm



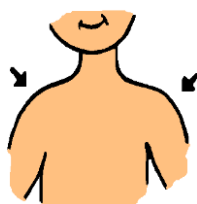
13) Tummy



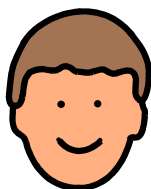
14) Chest



15) Neck and shoulders



16) Face

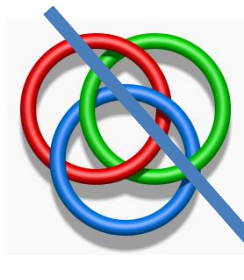




Taking the power out of thoughts



Taking the power from our thoughts means



taking a **step back**, not being linked to our thoughts, and seeing that



they are **JUST** thoughts not facts.



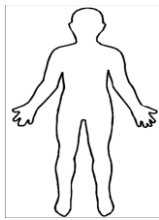
STOP
the thoughts and what's happening).

STEP BACK

LOOK (At



Notice what's happening - our thoughts, what is happening



in our body, our feelings, memories. Notice what we are making of them and what this does to us.



Notice the thoughts that do not help us.



Idea two: Ways to take the power from thoughts:

1. Say the thoughts in a different way:



Say the thought in a light or funny way



Say the thought in a squeaky or comic voice



Sing the thought

Say the thought



slowly



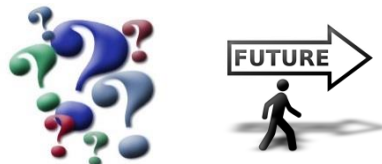
Write the thought down in different ways

2. Notice whether the thought that doesn't help is:

Saying that something or someone (this may be we) is bad



Trying to guess the future



A memory



Mind-reading (thinking we know what others are thinking)



Only noticing the bad stuff



Thinking things like: I feel/think it's bad so it must be bad (believing something is a fact not a thought)

Expecting the worst



Being hard on yourself



3. Use pictures/stories differently. For example:

to try to see things

Passengers on the Bus (type this into Youtube for a great video!)

We can be driving, whilst all the passengers (thoughts) are noisily chatting, being harsh, pointing out mistakes or shouting out directions. We can allow them to shout, but we can keep our mind on the road ahead.



Playground Bully



The playground is fenced in and the children have to learn to live with the bully. This bully uses threats, name calling and being horrid to upset others. We can't stop our thoughts, but perhaps we can deal with them a different way, as these victims show us.

Victim 1 - believes the bully (the thoughts), becomes upset, and reacts. The bully sees this as great fun and will carry on being nasty. This is how we often answer our thoughts.

Victim 2 - challenges the bully, and after a while bully gives up on this victim.

Victim 3 – notices then ignores the bully. They are still there, but the victim keeps busy on other things, and the bully soon gives up.

The River

Things floating down the river - perhaps leaves or bits of mucky stuff (thoughts, feelings, pictures, memories) - instead of struggling to stay above the water, we can stand on the bank watching our thoughts, pictures and feelings go by.



Thought Train

Standing at the train station, sometimes we are told to stand back as a fast train will be passing through. We hear and feel it coming, thundering through with a strong blast of wind. We don't try to jump on the train and let it take us to places we don't want to go to.



We can learn to notice the thoughts and feelings coming, and instead of jumping on that thought train, we can learn to stand on the platform, **let it pass**, and wait for the right train that will take us to where we want to go.

The Mountain

Whatever the weather, or whatever happens on the mountain, and even in it - the mountain stands firm, not changed, and strong. We can be like that mountain, noticing thoughts, feelings and our bodies, and still feel calm or strong

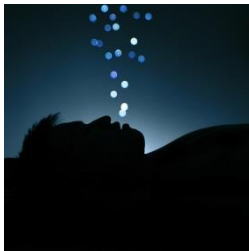


The Weather

We can't control the weather, so we have to learn to live with it. We can put a coat on, but we cannot stop the wind or rain, and it would be silly to try. Whatever we do, the storm will pass.



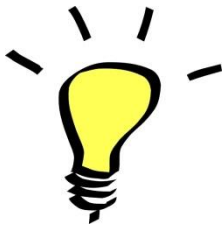
Our thoughts and feelings are like the weather, they come and they go. We can't control or stop them, but we can learn to act differently to them. If we give up the struggle to try and stop or control it, the storm of thoughts and feelings will pass.



We can **reset** by telling ourselves to **STOP** and **breathe** – a little slower, in through the nose, out through the mouth.

In thinking about our breathing, we have kept our minds on this task so the feelings/hard thoughts fade a bit into the back of our minds.

In taking slower deeper breaths, we are **calming** our bodies and our feelings. This can make the feeling less strong to allow our thinking brain to work again, so we can deal with the hard thoughts in a better way.



Idea Three: Mindfulness (noticing or being aware)

Being more aware of our thoughts and feelings can help us to have a bit of distance from them, so they control us less.

When we practice mindfulness regularly, we become less like the person on the left in this picture, and more like the dog on the right!



Why do mindfulness?

- ❖ Doing things in a mindful way (paying attention) can help to stop our minds wandering on to worries about the future, or thoughts about the past.

❖ When we pay more attention to what's going on **right now**, we can enjoy it more (if its enjoyable, like eating a nice meal). If it's not enjoyable, such as having an argument, paying attention to it can help us to decide what to do.



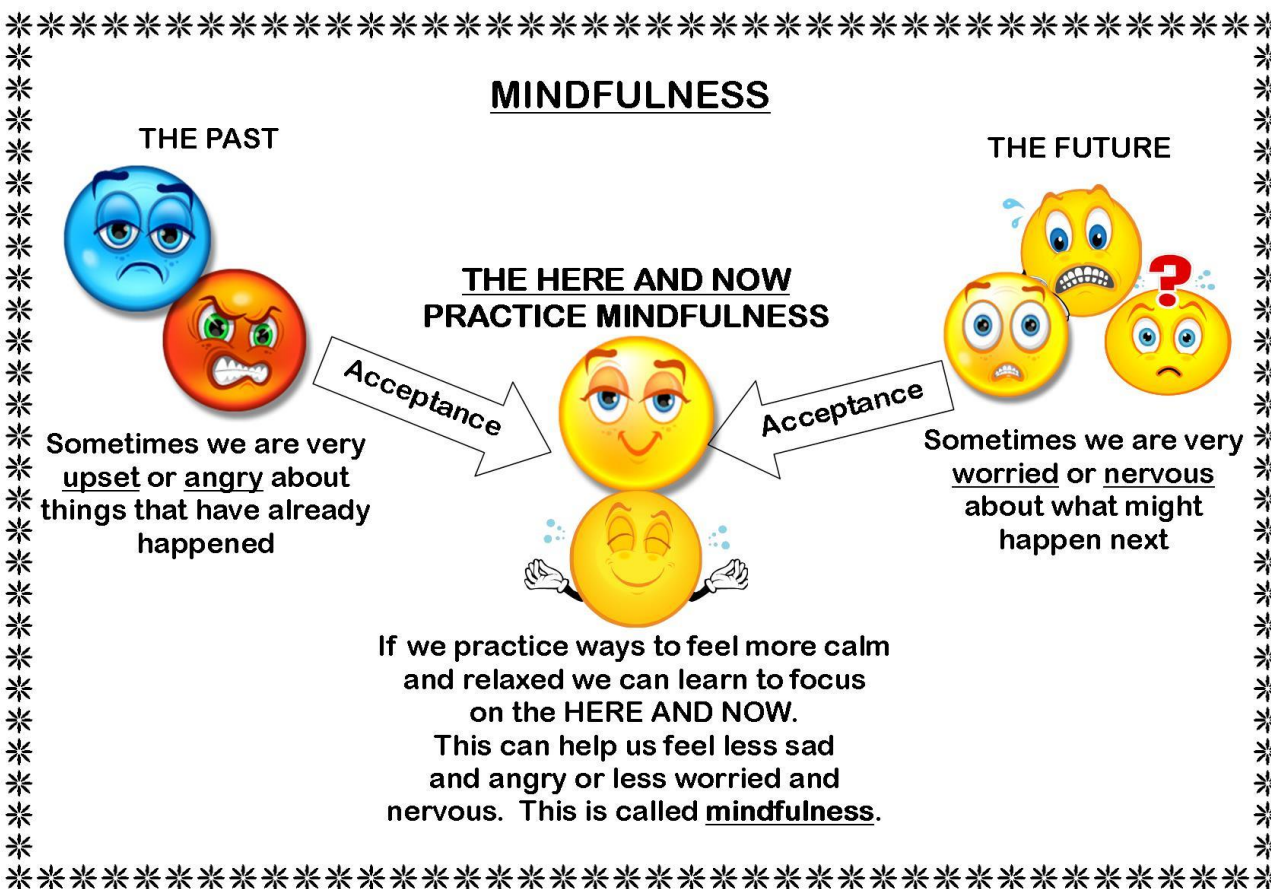
❖ As well as getting the most out of good things, mindfulness can help us to stop avoiding the more difficult things that we might need to face or do something about.

❖ When we shut out difficult feelings these can **build up** inside us, and after a while this can make us feel really **bad**.

❖ We might then feel like **exploding**, a bit like shaking up a bottle of fizzy drink lots of times and then opening the lid. Being aware of our feelings can stop this from happening. This is better for us, and will also help us to get on with others better.



Mindfulness is noticing or paying attention to what is going on, **ON PURPOSE**, sticking with **RIGHT NOW**, and not **JUDGING**.



Any activity can be done in a **mindful way**: when we go for a walk we can **notice** things around us, notice our feet against the floor, notice what we hear.

If we eat a meal, we can notice the **colours, smells and tastes**.



Slowing things down can help us to be more **aware**. If we rush something, for example when eating a meal, it is hard to pay attention to it.

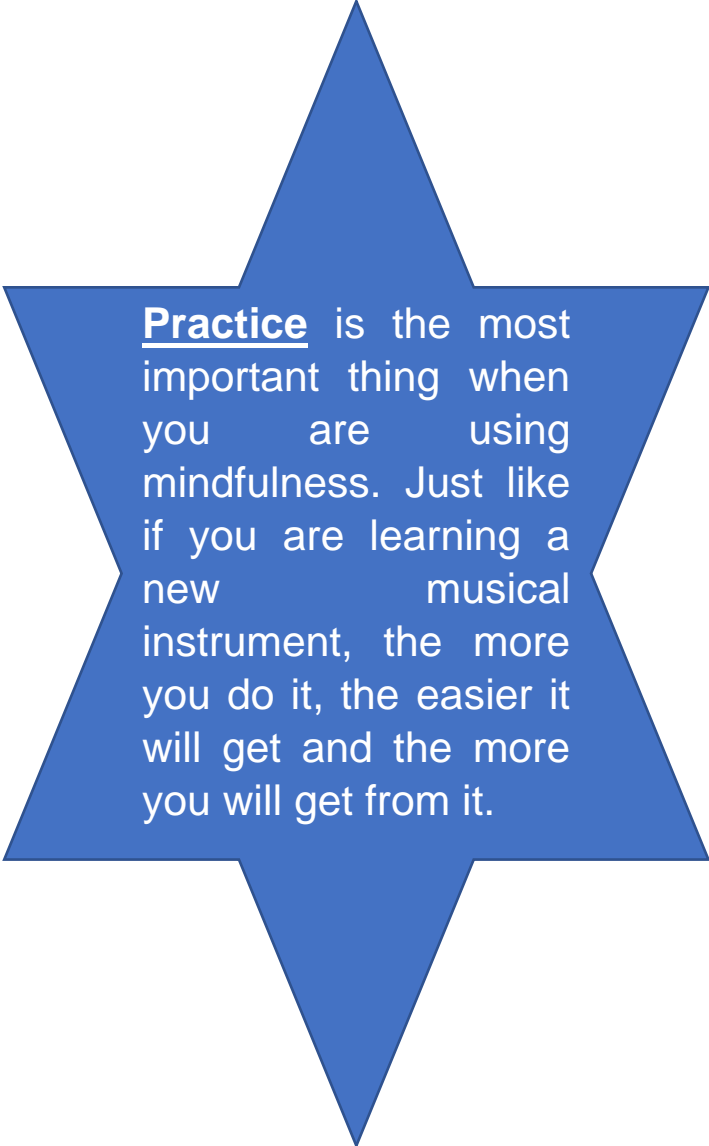
Doing just **one thing at a time** can also help us to be more aware. It is really difficult to pay attention to something if doing

other things too; for example trying to eat a meal when playing a game on your phone.

It can also help to put some time aside each day to do a **mindfulness practice.**

Some good apps for this:

- ❖ **Headspace**
- ❖ **Calm**
- ❖ **Insight Timer**



Practice is the most important thing when you are using mindfulness. Just like if you are learning a new musical instrument, the more you do it, the easier it will get and the more you will get from it.

It is normal if your mind wanders when you are trying to be more aware-be kind to yourself- spot it when it happens and kindly bring your mind back to the thing you are trying to pay attention to.



Soles (bottom) of your feet practice

This is a mindfulness practice that can be very useful to help you if you feel really angry and have the urge to do something that would not be helpful, like hit out, hurt yourself, shout.

When something happens that makes you angry, it is important to control these feelings. We try not to threaten or hurt people when we don't agree with someone.

Steps of the Skill:

1. If you are standing, stand in a natural (relaxed) way not an aggressive (angry) or tense way, with the soles (bottom) of your feet flat on the floor.
2. If you are sitting, sit comfortably with the soles of your feet flat on the floor.
4. Think about something that made you very angry. Stay with the anger.
5. You are feeling angry, and angry thoughts are going through your mind. Let them flow, don't try and stop them. Stay with the anger. Your body may show signs of anger (like fast breathing).
6. Now, move your mind to the soles of your feet.
7. Slowly, move your toes, feel your shoes covering your feet, feel your socks against your feet, the heels of your feet against the back of your shoes. If you do not have shoes on, feel the floor or carpet with the soles of your feet.
8. Keep breathing naturally and focus on the soles of your feet until you feel calm.
9. Practice this mindfulness exercise until you can use it wherever you are and when something happens that makes you feel angry
10. Remember that once you are calm, you can walk away with a smile on your face because you controlled your anger. OR if you need to, you can act with a calm and clear mind without aggression, doing the best thing for you.

Part Two:
Practical things
I can do during
the
Coronavirus
out break



Idea 1: how you spend your time

It is important to keep doing things that keep you **active**, things that you **enjoy**, and things that make you feel like you have done something **useful**.

Doing things is more difficult at the moment because we have to **stay at home**, but it is still possible to do some things that could help, as doing nothing will make you feel much worse:

Animals



- Play with a pet if you have one
- Watch birds from your window
- Listen to the birds
- Listen to or watch animals on YouTube

Cooking



- Cook a meal for yourself or others in your home
- Bake a cake
- Find a new recipe

The Mind



- Do mindfulness or meditation, especially if your mind starts going all over the place
- Practice Yoga
- Relaxation exercises
- Look at nature
- Do a word puzzle

Look after yourself



Take a bath or shower

Paint your nails

Put nice perfume/after shave on

Have a short nap (set your alarm) if really tired

Eat nice but healthy food



Exercise

Home and online workouts (Youtube, Joe Wicks, Davina McCall)

Cleaning your house or even just a drawer or room

Dancing

Going for a local walk

Shop



Plan meals and shop for them if you are allowed

Shop online if allowed

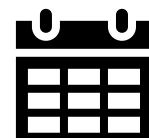
Make something



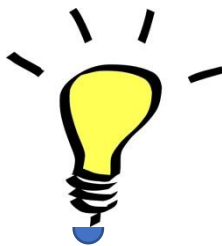
Do something creative like colouring, drawing or painting

Make cards, bracelets etc

- ❖ The important thing is having a **ROUTINE**. Try not to spend all your time on your phone, watching TV or sleeping



- ❖ Having a new routine and structure should help you to feel better. It keeps your mind busy and helps you to feel that you have done something useful.
- ❖ If you find it too hard to plan a new routine, ask somebody to **help** you.
- ❖ You might want to write down or draw your routine so you can see it.



Idea 2: Sleep



- Don't drink tea, coffee or coca-cola in the evenings, or possibly even in late afternoon. These all have something called **caffeine** in, which is drunk to give you energy, the opposite of what you want!
- If you are thirsty, drink water or a calming drink like camomile tea or a milky drink, as long as this won't make you need the toilet a lot.
- Don't go to bed really hungry or having had a big meal late in the evening, as this can affect our stomachs which can affect sleep.
- Try not to drink alcohol, or at least not too much as this means you won't sleep as well as normal.
- Try to do some exercise every day
- Look after your body - eat healthily
- Have a routine at bedtime
- Don't have day time naps, or if you do make sure it is short (set an alarm)
- Try to go to bed and get up at roughly the same time each day



- Do a mindfulness or relaxation exercise
- Try and think about good things if you can. Try to think of five good things that happened that day
- If your mind keeps going to difficult things use mindfulness to notice where it goes and then bring yourself back to the mindfulness exercise. Body scan exercises can be good for this.
- Try not to get **worked up** about sleeping as this can make things worse. Remember you will be ok even if you do feel tired the next day.
- At difficult times like this, people can have more **bad dreams**. If you have a dream/nightmare that you keep having, practice thinking of a different ending to it many times before going to bed. If you wake up from a bad dream, remind yourself you are **safe**, you are at home, and picture your local area like the shops or buses, or people you care about.
- Try splashing your face with water, smelling a nice oil, looking out of your window to get yourself back in the here and now.
- Use ear plugs/an eye mask to block out noise and light
- Try to only use your bed for sleeping
- Try and make sure your bed is comfy
- Don't use your phone or watch TV right before you go to bed, or if you do use your phone/tablet, make sure it is set to a dimmer light at night. Screens have a certain type of light that can affect sleep.



Make your bedroom a nice place to be

- Get a night light
- Keep it clean and tidy

- Have nice smells like lavender oil on your pillow (check with someone if you think you might have/have a health problem such as epilepsy that it is safe for you to use)
- Have nice clean, fresh sheets that smell nice each week -have relaxing pictures or photos around you.



Idea 3: Exercise

Doing exercise can be really **hard**, especially at the moment when we can't go to the gym, swimming pools or classes.

It is really common at times like these to end up not exercising, eating foods that are not healthy and drinking or smoking too much.

BUT if you do this it will affect your **health** and might also affect your **mood**, so it is really important to try not to fall into bad habits.

Why do it?

Exercise gives us **MORE** energy

Start off with small goal, such as exercise for ten minutes a day, and build this up bit by bit

Exercise you can still do:

- Workouts from Youtube
- Dancing
- Local walks (fast walking is better)
- Yoga

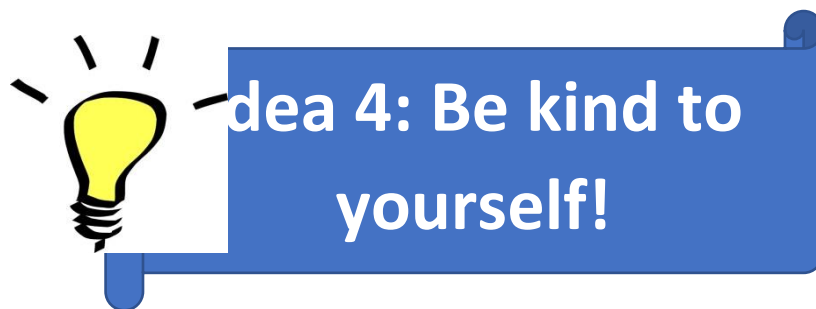


This link takes you to some easy, ten minute work outs:

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/for-your-body/move-more/home-workout-videos/>

The harder you work, the faster your heart rate will go, which is **good** for you!

If you live with or are supported by others, you can ask them to do these things with you



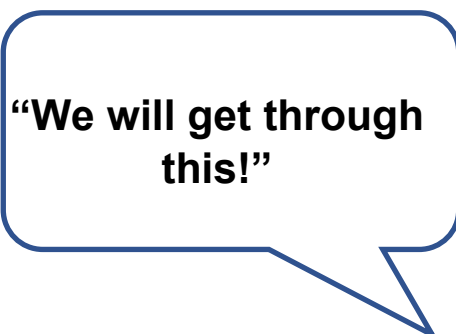
It is important to remember that we are all going something that for most of us is very difficult.

It's **ok** to sometimes feel **confused, scared, angry, sad, panicky**. Don't be hard on yourself if you feel snappier than normal, especially if you really like going out but can't do it anymore, and especially if you are in your house with people you don't get on with.

Don't set yourself huge goals during this time. It is easy to read things on Facebook/Instagram and others that makes you think everyone is using this time in their houses to learn new skills and do lots of jobs.

Doing some of this might be **useful**, but keep your goals small and don't expect too much from yourself at this time.

Try saying some kind things to yourself like:



“It’s ok to have good and bad days.
If I don’t do so well today perhaps
tomorrow will be better”



Idea 5: The three P’s: plan, pace and pick what’s most important

The three P’s: plan, pace and pick what’s most important

Some people feel much better at the moment because they are not having to go to work, to a day centre, or mix much with others. Some people have found that this has made their anxiety go down.

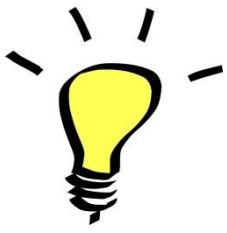
The trouble is, after many weeks without doing much this can turn to **low mood** and not feeling good about ourselves.

Try not to be tempted to just do nothing. Plan what you will do during this time of being in the house, set yourself daily and weekly goals, and tick them off when you have done them. Try and avoid doing loads and getting tired and then doing nothing. Instead, try and do some things each day that will be enough to keep you busy sometimes but not so much that you get over tired.

TOP TIPS: *Take many short breaks *Break jobs up into smaller bits

*Start with jobs that are easier *Reward yourself

*Ask for help if you need it *Remind yourself why you are doing something and tell others about it



Idea 6: Problem solving my worries

Is my problem important?

YES

NO

Can it be sorted out?

NO

YES

USE WORRY TIME (20 minutes allowed!)

Silence your phone, have a set time, somewhere quiet, but NOT before bed)

Use your problem solving skills:

- 1) Write down ALL the possible things you could do
- 2) Write down the good and bad parts to each idea (do you have what's needed? Is it likely to work?)
- 3) Pick an idea
- 4) Plan it out
- 5) Try it!

- ❖ Notice your worry, be kind to yourself, and try and make room for the worry but see it for what it is.
- ❖ Remember you can't control the issue so worrying won't make a difference.
- ❖ Tell someone supporting you if you are struggling.

Get to grips with the problem

When you're feeling stressed or anxious, it can help to use **problem-solving** to work out what to do.

A lot of things about the virus are things we **can't** control, but some things we **can**.

Things that aren't so important	Important and I can do something	Important and I can't do anything
Buying new clothes	Not paid my bills (forgot)	Worried I will lose my boyfriend
Not cleaning my bathroom yesterday	Had an argument with my dad	Worried I might not get my benefits
Ate too much pizza yesterday	Not seeing my friends	Worried my family might get ill

First of all, fill in this list:

Things that aren't so important	Important and I can do something	Important and I can't do anything



Idea 7: Making the most of things!

This is probably a difficult time for you. It's **normal** to feel scared as things are very different, and there are lots of things we don't feel sure about.

It can be useful to think about what **matters** to you, how you want to spend your time during this virus situation, and the type of person you want to be.

You might want to set yourself goals. If you do, make sure they are based on actions, and not too big. You can use the Bulls-eye worksheet on the next page to help.

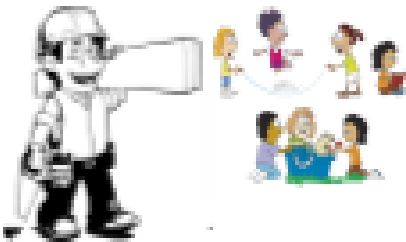
How to use the bulls-eye

1. Think about the things that are important to you in each area about how **YOU** want to be/live...for example, you might think I want to be a **KIND, HELPFUL** and **THOUGHTFUL** friend
2. Rate how much you are living this way-put a cross in the middle if you are living this really well and going further out of the bulls-eye the less you are living this way
3. Think about where you are not living the way you want to, and what goals you could put in to help change this. OR if you are living the way you want to, how you could keep it this way

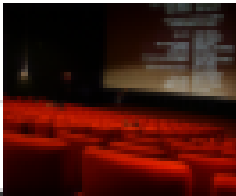
For example, you might think that you want to be a kind and thoughtful friend during this Coronavirus problem, and that so far you haven't been because you have been feeling so worried. You decide to set a goal of calling the friend once a week.

THE BULLS-EYE

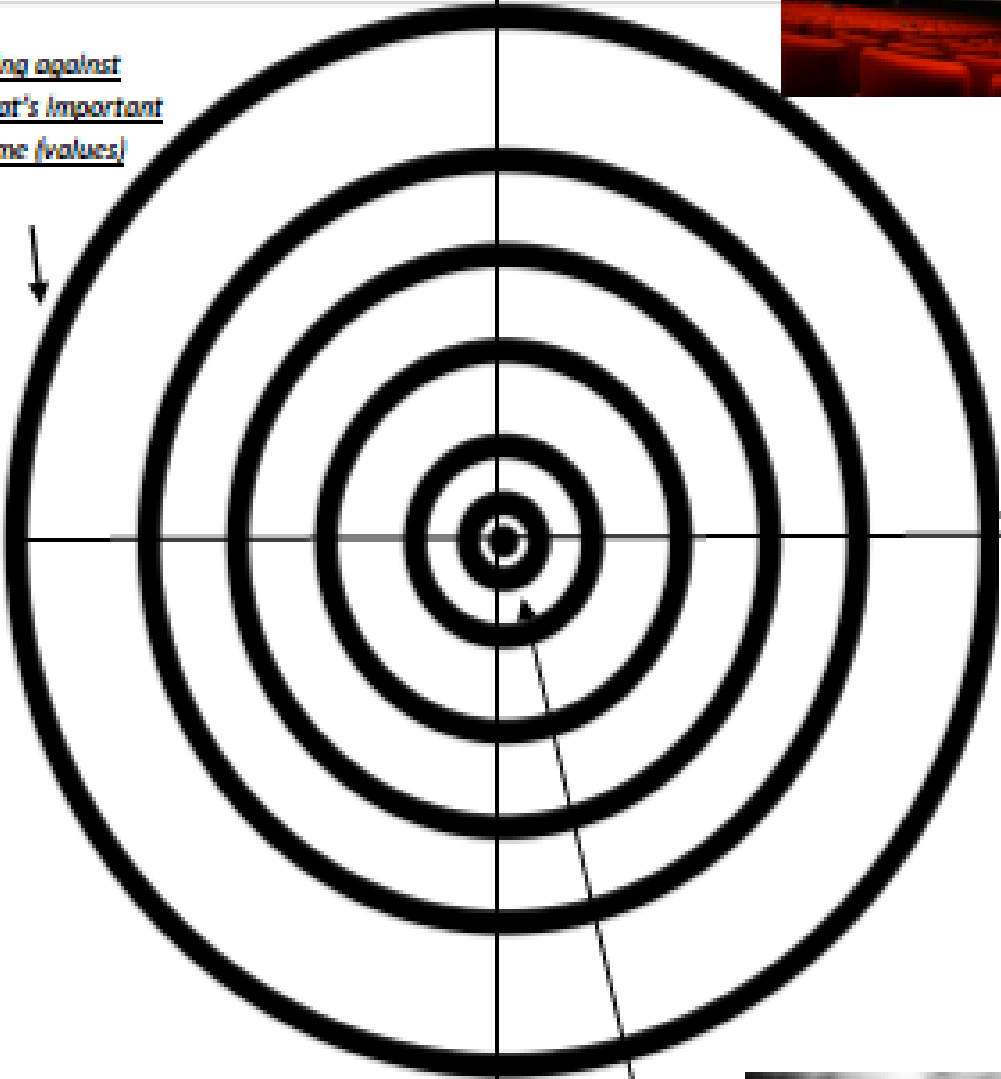
Work and activities



Fun and Hobbies



Going against what's important to me (values)



Family and partners



Friends

Living by what's important to me



Idea 8: Contact with others

Most of us need contact with others to feel good. It is really difficult at the moment because we can't see people outside our homes.

We can still have contact by phone though, or even better, we can videocall (seeing people's faces is much better). You can use things like Facetime, Whatsapp, Zoom and Houseparty apps on your phone or tablet to speak to or do videocalls with other people.



This can help us to talk about our feelings, share experiences, remember that we aren't alone and that others feel the same, problem solve, and ask for help if we need it. If you don't know how to use any of the apps, **ask someone** to set it up for you.



Remember that everyone is feeling a bit more **stressed and worried than normal**. They might snap more, and if people are keeping their distance or not speaking to you, this is probably because of the rules around Coronavirus at the moment rather than something personal.

You might find that people act different during this time.

During this time of being in the house you might need to **ask for help** in some way. To do this you might need to **'speak up for yourself'**.









You might also need to say no to people sometimes, for example if someone asks you to do something that you don't think is safe, like meeting up. Remember to use your standing up for yourself skills here.

COPING IN A CRISIS



If things get really tough, you might need to use strategies just to get through that day/night. Here are some ideas:

Coping in a crisis






Use Distractions

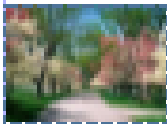




     

Try your mindfulness or relaxation CD



 

Self-soothe with your 5 senses

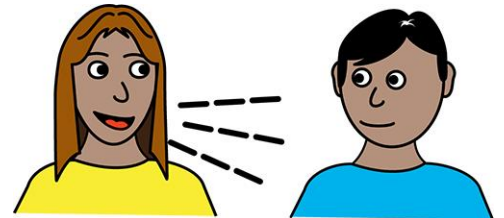
    

Good advice
Think things through + take a step back
What would your friends or people from the group say?

Talk to people

Talk to other people about how you are feeling - this can **help**.



Remember, **NO-ONE** should be going through this alone.

There is nothing to be embarrassed about by saying you are struggling to cope.

If you don't have anyone you can call, try the **helplines** on the next page...



Telephone or internet services

Mencap

Charity working with people with a learning disability, their families and carers.

Phone: 0808 808 1111 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm),

Website: www.mencap.org.uk

Mental Health Foundation

Provides information and support for anyone with mental health problems or learning disabilities.

Website: www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Mind

Promotes the views and needs of people with mental health problems.

Phone: 0300 123 3393 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm)

Website: www.mind.org.uk

NO PANIC

Voluntary charity offering support for sufferers of panic attacks and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). Offers a course to help overcome your phobia or OCD.

Phone: 0844 967 4848 (daily, 10am to 10pm). Calls cost 5p per minute plus your phone provider's Access Charge **Website:** www.nopanic.org.uk

Samaritans

Confidential (private) support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair.

Phone: 116 123 (free 24-hour helpline),

Website: www.samaritans.org.uk

SANE

Emotional support, information and guidance for people affected by mental illness, their families and carers.

SANEline: 0300 304 7000 (daily, 4.30pm to 10.30pm), **Textcare:** comfort and care via text message, sent when the person needs it most:

www.sane.org.uk/textcare

Peer support forum: www.sane.org.uk/supportforum

Website: www.sane.org.uk/support

Mental Health Urgent Response Team: 01942 636 395

This is a telehone number for people living in Wigan. It is for people who are struggling to cope with their mental health and are worried about keeping themselves safe.

Rethink Mental Illness

Support and advice for people living with mental illness.

Phone: 0300 5000 927 (Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 4pm)

Website: www.rethink.org

Anxiety UK

Charity providing support if you have been diagnosed with an anxiety condition.

Phone: 03444 775 774 (Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 10pm; Saturday to Sunday, 10am to 8pm) **Website:** www.anxietyuk.org.uk

With all of these services you might want to tell them that you have learning disabilities and/or autism, as this could help them in how they support you.