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**Calming Your Emotions Toolkit**

The current situation with Coronavirus can cause us to feel a range of emotions including confusion, fear, worry, frustration, anger and anxiety. Stress and anxiety is a normal response to a threat like a disease, particularly when you add trying to keep up with school to the mix! Whilst worry is generally a negative feeling, it does actually [serve a purpose](https://kidshelpline.com.au/teens/issues/why-do-i-freak-out-when-i%E2%80%99m-stressed). It’s one of the ways our [brain](https://kidshelpline.com.au/teens/issues/your-brain-when-youre-anxious) tries to help us be more alert, create a plan and respond quickly to a threat.

Have a look at this video to understand more about why our brains work in this way when we become stressed: <https://vimeo.com/296976453>

Rather than trying to get rid of these feelings (which can often make them worse!) a more helpful strategy is to acknowledge our emotions and use mindfulness skills to “anchor” ourselves until the “storm” passes.

This toolkit will help you identify when you experience difficult (but normal) emotions triggered by Coronavirus. It will also assist in making a plan about how you can cope.

 Recognise Your Emotions

The first step to being able to respond to an emotion is to **recognise** that you are feeling it. What do you notice when you are feeling stressed and anxious? Tick the options that apply below or type your own ideas in the blank spaces.

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| POSSIBLE THOUGHTS |
| [ ]  What if I get sick or my family gets sick? | [ ]  What if we don’t have enough money? |
| [ ]  What will the future look like? | [ ]  I’m so behind on school work! How will I ever catch up!? |
| [ ]        | [ ]        |

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| POSSIBLE BEHAVIOURS |
| [ ]  Not motivated | [ ]  Trouble concentrating | [ ]  Easily frustrated |
| [ ]  Difficulty sleeping | [ ]  Eating more or less | [ ]  More withdrawn |
| [ ]  Avoiding doing school work | [ ]  Difficulty problem solving | [ ]        |
| [ ]        | [ ]        | [ ]        |
| [ ]        | [ ]        | [ ]        |

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| POSSIBLE SENSATIONS |
| [ ]  Feeling shaky | [ ]  Feeling tense | [ ]  Aches and Pains |
| [ ]  Feeling restless and agitated | [ ]  Feeling tired easily | [ ]  Nausea and digestive issues |
| [ ]  Tight throat | [ ]  Racing heart | [ ]  Short of breath |
| [ ]        | [ ]        | [ ]        |
| [ ]        | [ ]        | [ ]        |

Try and rate these symptoms in order. The first 2-4 are your early warning signs – take note of these.

Being Mindful of How You Feel

If you begin to recognise that you are experiencing anxiety or stress, take a moment to **STOP.**

**S**top what you are doing and notice that emotions are running high.

**T**ake slow deep breaths.

**O**bserve any physical sensations and acknowledge your thoughts. For example, say to yourself;

“I am noticing the feeling of      . I am thinking / worrying about      . I am noticing       in my body”

**P**ut things in perspective and **P**ractice how to respond.

It is important to understand that you are not your thoughts, you are the ***observer*** of your thoughts. A helpful way to think about this is to imagine sitting at a bus stop and watching buses with large signs drive by. On each bus is a different thought that you may experience.

You have a choice to ‘get on the bus’ and get driven around in circles with a distressing thought, or you can choose ‘watch the bus drive by’ and wait for the next bus with a more helpful thought to get onboard. Try and come up with some helpful thoughts about coronavirus that you can ‘get onboard’ about. Choose from the following or make up your own:

[ ]  Anxiety and stress in this situation is common and normal. It’s understandable that I am having a hard time coping with uncertainty right now.

[ ]  Although these feelings are uncomfortable, they are not dangerous and I can cope.

[ ]  I feel scared and overwhelmed but this doesn’t mean I am not coping.

[ ]  It doesn’t matter how others would feel in my shoes, my feelings are still valid.

[ ]  Even though I cannot control the future, this doesn’t mean I am powerless because I can control what I do next! (coping strategies, social distancing, washing my hands, turning off the news, appreciating the good things in a tricky situation, asking for help and speaking to teachers).

[ ]  Education departments are working hard to ensure exams and assessments are fair and clear for all.

[ ]  The chance of me becoming unwell is low. Young people seem to be infected less often and with fewer symptoms.

[ ]  There are currently 119 vaccines under development and 6 already being trialled.

[ ]

[ ]

Practice How to Respond

Although stress can help to remind us that we need to look after ourselves, it can also cause our bodies to experience uncomfortable sensations. These sensations are related to the body’s impulse to ‘fight or flee’ that is not useful in these circumstances. The good news is that we have the ability to control these sensations using mindfulness and grounding exercises! Try the techniques described below to see what works best for you.

GROUNDING

Grounding can help us reconnect with our body in the present moment.

5---4---3---2---1 Exercise

* Notice 5 things you can see (say them out loud or in your head).
* Notice 4 things you can hear.
* Notice 3 things that you can touch around you.
* Notice 2 things you can smell.
* Notice 1 thing that you can taste.

Have a look at the video for an alternate guided version of this meditation:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBYhuhSiO8Q>

MINDFUL BREATHING

1. Sit in a comfortable position with your feet on the ground.
2. Focus your attention to your breath.
3. Place your hand on your belly.
4. Breathe through your nostrils inhaling deeply into your stomach for 4 seconds, pushing out against your hand. Notice the air moving through your nose, down your throat and filling up your belly.
5. Hold for 7 seconds.
6. As you breathe out through your mouth for 8 seconds feel your body relax and notice how it instinctively knows how to start breathing again.

Have a look at the video for an alternate version of this meditation:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEfs5TJZ6Nk>

MINDFULNESS APPS

Apps can also be a useful resource to engage in mindfulness exercises to calm the body when you are feeling stressed. Here are some examples to explore:

* [Headspace App](https://www.headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app)
* [Stop Breathe Think App](https://au.reachout.com/tools-and-apps/stop-breathe-and-think)
* [Smiling Mind App](https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=Smiling+mind&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8)
* [Calm App](https://www.calm.com/)
* [ReachOut Breathe App](https://au.reachout.com/tools-and-apps/reachout-breathe)

TURN OFF AUTOPILOT AND SELF SOOTHE

If meditation isn’t your thing, that’s ok too! Try some of the self-soothing strategies listed below that can help to reconnect with your body and release “feel good hormones”. Note the ones that work best for you!

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| [ ]  Listen to music | [ ]  Cuddle with your pet |
| [ ]  Take a warm bath or shower | [ ]  Bake something |
| [ ]  Have a hot or cold drink | [ ]  Get creative with arts and crafts |
| [ ]  Cuddle up with a hot water bottle | [ ]  Burn essential oils or light a candle |
| [ ]  Write in a journal | [ ]  Knit or crochet |
| [ ]  Go for a walk | [ ]  Dance |
| [ ]  Do an online yoga class | [ ]  Stretch |
| [ ]        | [ ]        |
| [ ]        | [ ]        |

Talk to Someone

Talking to someone can help you to think differently and feel supported to try new strategies. It can also help you feel calm and safe which can reduce your stress and anxiety levels.

Make a plan about who you can talk to. This could be a parent, other adult or someone with the wellbeing team at school

You might also consider using online or phone support available:

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| **Kids Help Line** Phone and real time web-based crisis support for youth (5-25yrs). kidshelpline.com.au1800 55 1800 (Phone: 24hrs)  | page2image2816152896 |
| **eheadspace**Internet chat, email or phone support for young people (12-25yrs) with a range of issues.headspace.org.au 1800 650 890  | page2image2816150560 |
| **Youth Beyond Blue**Information, online and phone counselling for young people (12-25yrs) youthbeyondblue.com 1800 224 636 | page2image2816151808 |
| **QLife**Online ‘chat’ and phone counselling for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people (LGBTI).1800 184 527  | page2image2816153776 |

When I need to talk to someone I will contact:

Phone number:

Keep a Healthy Headspace

Headspace have devised a [toolkit](https://headspace.org.au/tips/) to help create and maintain positive mental health irrespective of whether you have been affected by COVID-19.

When thinking about your own wellbeing, the toolkit has 6 categories to consider:

* Getting into life (doing things you enjoy)
* Creating connections (improving your relationships)
* Eating well (improving your diet)
* Staying active (exercising frequently)
* Getting enough sleep (at least 8 hours!)
* Cutting back on alcohol and other drugs (and finding other ways to cope).

You don’t have to set goals for all of these. Only the ones you consider needing improvement in your life at this time.

**Step 1**.

Use the templates below to brainstorm what you would like to improve and devise a SMART goal – Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time bound.

**Step 2.**If you need support or ideas about responding to the questions, we have some help for you! Click the underlined text (eg: [Get in to life](https://headspace.org.au/tips/get-in-to-life/)) in each section to be directed to the headspace website for that topic. On this webpage you can scroll down slightly until you find a green “get started” button (pictured to the right).

By clicking this button you’ll be taken through an interactive survey with some ideas to consider about the selected topic.

**Step 3.**

After completing the survey, use the answers to help fill out the questions below. Keep this document to remind you of your goals and keep yourself accountable - Easy as!

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| 🚴‍♀️ [Get in to life](https://headspace.org.au/tips/get-in-to-life/) | find things to do that give you a sense of achievement, purpose and confidence. This can also help improve your motivation and energy levels when you are feeling low. |

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| What do you currently do, or use to do, for fun?       |
| Values and strengths can help to motivate use and remind us what we find enjoyment from. What are some of your strengths?      |
| SMART Goal – make a plan to do an activity that you enjoy. Start small, set a time, date and frequency, get support, ask someone to do it with you!      |
| What could get in your way?      |
| How would you know that the things you are doing are making a difference for you?      |

Need more ideas? Consider this information about how to [‘get in to life’](https://headspace.org.au/assets/Uploads/18a-Get-into-life-headspace-fact-sheet-WEB.pdf)

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| 👬 [Create connections](https://headspace.org.au/tips/create-connections/) | Find ways to connect with others to improve your sense of belonging and help you to feel supported. |

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| Who is your ‘go-to support crew’?      |
| What things could make it more difficult to connect with others?      |
| SMART Goal – How can you improve your confidence in building relationships? What can you do now to connect with other people? Who will you reach out to? What activity will you try? When are you going to do this?      |
| How would you know that your changes are making a difference for you?      |

Need more ideas? Consider this information about [‘fostering friendships’](https://kidshelpline.com.au/young-adults/issues/making-friends) or [‘staying socially connected during Coronavirus’](https://au.reachout.com/articles/connecting-during-coronavirus)

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| 🍝 [Eat Well](https://headspace.org.au/tips/eat-well/) | Consider your diet to improve energy levels, concentration, sleep and to reduce your stress levels. Food and mood are closely related. You may find that when you are tired you are more likely to eat processed food, and when you are feeling positive you may find it easier to eat well. Likewise, eating processed food can contribute to a lack of motivation and eating well can help boost energy levels. |

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| What food groups do you consume regularly? What food groups would you like to eat more of?       |
| What are some barriers to eating well?      |
| SMART Goal – What things can you try to improve your diet? What coping skills can you use when you are feeling stressed that may support you to make better food choices? When will you start this? Who can support you?      |
| How would you know that the things you are doing are making a difference for you?      |

Need some ideas for healthy and nutritious meals? Have a look at these [‘recipe cards’](https://headspace.org.au/assets/Uploads/healthy-headspace-recipe-cards.pdf) or this [‘reachout chat forum’](https://forums.au.reachout.com/t5/Everyday-life-stuff/Study-Snacks/m-p/326772#M27031) has lots of ideas!

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| 🏃‍♂️ [Stay active](https://headspace.org.au/tips/stay-active/) | Exercise can improve sleep, concentration, memory and confidence as well as reducing stress and anxiety.  |

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| How many minutes a day are you active? What activities do you currently participate in?       |
| What gets in the way of being more active?      |
| SMART Goal – what can you adjust in your lifestyle to keep active and find enjoyment in movement? How and when will you do this? What support will you get?      |
| How would you know that the things you are doing are making a difference for you? What will motivate you to keep active?      |

Need some more information? Read this factsheet about [‘keeping active’](https://headspace.org.au/assets/Uploads/18g-Stay-active-headspace-fact-sheet-PRINT.pdf)

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| 🛌 [Get enough sleep](https://headspace.org.au/tips/get-enough-sleep/) | Explore ways to improve the length and quality of your sleep. Sleep has been proven to improve our immunity to colds and illness including the flu! |

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| How do you feel after a sleep? How much sleep do you usually get? How quickly do you fall asleep? How often do you wake during the night? How difficult is it for you to get back to sleep?       |
| What factors prevent you from getting enough sleep?      |
| SMART Goal – what will you change to give yourself the best chance of a good night’s sleep? What things can to avoid doing? What can you do to promote sleep?      |
| Why is a good night’s sleep important to you?      |

Want more information? See this ‘[sleep factsheet](https://headspace.org.au/assets/Uploads/18e-Sleep-headspace-fact-sheet-PRINT.pdf)’

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| ☕️ [Cut back on alcohol and other drugs](https://headspace.org.au/tips/cut-back-on-alcohol-and-other-drugs/) | Consider ways to reduce the impact that drugs and alcohol is having on your life. |

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| When are you more likely to use alcohol and other drugs? (Even caffeine).       |
| What parts of your life would you like to pay more attention to or improve?      |
| SMART Goal – what will you choose to do instead of using alcohol or other drugs? What will you do to manage urges to use.      |
| What could be some benefits of reducing your alcohol and drug use?      |

Need more ideas? Read this ‘[factsheet about alcohol and other drugs’](https://headspace.org.au/assets/Uploads/18f-Cut-back-on-alcohol-and-drugs-headspace-fact-sheet-WEB.pdf)