

# Looking After Your Wellbeing During Uncertainty



Most people are creatures of habit. When things go as planned, we feel in control. But when life throws a curveball, it can leave us feeling anxious and stressed. During times like this it is very normal to feel levels of uncertainty, and many of those around you will also be feeling the same.

It's not uncommon to have to deal with the unknown in our lives, but sometimes this can be harder than usual. In uncertain and stressful times, it's normal to experience feelings of anxiety and nervousness. Feelings may range from being a bit uneasy to a continuing sense of dread or feeling a bit panicky.

When we spend a lot of time thinking about the uncertainty or worrying it can trigger a stress response, we turn on the stress response with negative thoughts, beliefs or attitudes. However, there are things we can do to cope with uncertainty and reduce the chances of it turning into something that has a negative impact on our lives. In turn, we can ensure we are looking after our wellbeing and that of others.

This document provides some ideas and strategies to help you look after your own wellbeing and that of others including:

- Strategies to look after you
- Looking after children and young people
- Tips if you're self-isolating or working remotely
- Where to find support and how to give it to others

## What uncertainty looks like

Uncertainty can look and feel differently from person to person however some of the more common experiences can include:

- Feeling less confident.
- Having difficulty making decisions.
- Procrastinating by doing other tasks.
- Ruminating on possible negative outcomes before they've happened.

Sometimes living with high levels of uncertainty means it is hard to get on with everyday life. There can be a sense of helplessness and a continual worry about not being able to do 'normal things'. When we are in this way of thinking gloom can set in and it can be hard to lift ourselves out of that. Persistent worry can prevent you from resting or relaxing, both of which are really important for our wellbeing. Finding a few strategies that work for you can make it easier to cope with a situation where there is lots of uncertainty present.



# Strategies to look after you

Below are some suggestions of things that can help looking after your wellbeing, and your families, during times of disruption and potentially needing to work remotely.

## Maintain your routine as much as possible

When you find yourself in a situation with lots of unknowns, maintaining a routine can help reduce stress through providing some stability. Try and maintain habits and activities already in your diary where possible and block out time to do things you enjoy doing as if they were appointments.

## Control what you can

Focus on the things that are within your control, even if it's as simple as weekly meal planning or laying out your clothes the night before a stressful day. Establish routines to give your days and weeks some comforting structure.

## Spend time with others

Many people isolate themselves when they're feeling anxious and worried but connecting with others is a powerful support tool. Spending time with people you trust can help you feel valued and supported, and help you gain a different perspective on certain situations too.

## Talk it out

If you're finding it hard to cope, talking to others can offer a sense of comfort and remind you you're not going through things alone. Identify someone you trust to share with, that could be your partner, a friend, your manager or colleague.

1737 is a free to text and call helpline number for all New Zealanders. You'll find a list of other supports at the back of this resource.

## Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a handy way to create small circuit breakers in your day where you can pause, check-in with how you're feeling or just take a moment to breathe and slow things down. The research says just 15 minutes a day can have a massive impact on your mood and overall wellbeing.

Want to give it a go? Download the Headspace app on your phone/iPad/tablet, it's free.

## Gratitude

The research shows practicing gratitude can help us deal with adversities and bounce back from them with strength and motivation. Practicing gratitude can be as simple as writing down three things you're grateful for each morning and evening or verbalising them with a loved one.

## Keep physically active

Staying active can be another way to support your mood and improve your overall sense of wellbeing. Try to block out space two or three times a week to go for walk, run or hit the gym.

## Limit your media exposure about the COVID-19

Although it's important to keep up to date with developments and any important information, try and limit your media exposure to a few key sources. Your employer and the Ministry of Health are good places to start.

# Looking after children and young people

Children and young people benefit most from factual, age appropriate information as it can often prevent their worries and concerns from becoming overwhelming. Letting a child/young person's questions guide the information you give can be a handy tool.

## Reassure

Children can often be pondering big questions when there is uncertainty present, they may ask "will I get sick? Will granny/grandad die?". Reassuring them that everyone is working hard to make sure people throughout the country stay healthy is important.

## Give honest and accurate information

Letting a child or young person's questions guide what you share is a good place to start but regardless of their age, giving clear, accurate information is important. Explain that not everyone will get the virus and the vast majority who do will recover fully.

## Make yourself available

Children may need extra attention from you at the moment and may want to talk about their fear and worries. Let them know you love them and show them plenty of affection. Keep an eye out for clues they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you cook dinner etc. It is very typical for younger children to ask a few questions, return to playing, then come back and ask more.

## Monitor TV and social media viewing

Try and avoid constantly monitoring or talking about updates of COVID-19 as this can heighten anxiety, Instead, give brief updates where necessary e.g. if there is a change to their school schedule.

## Maintain a normal routine

Try and keep a regular, consistent routine (mealtimes, bedtimes etc.) to help signal that their routines are under control and will continue as normal. Encourage them to keep up with their schoolwork and extracurricular activities where possible.

# If you're self-isolating or working remotely

Healthline 0800 611 116 is the dedicated helpline for those people in self-isolation.

## Keep catch-ups or meetings in the calendar and do them 'together'.

Consider setting up a standing video chat lunch or coffee catch up where you and your team can eat, drink and chat 'together' in front of your laptops.

## Set-up a group text message chat.

Use Whatsapp or Facebook so you can connect with those mates and colleagues outside of your immediate family.

## Try and continue activities you'd normally do but from afar.

E.g. Watch a movie or TV show at the same time—there are tools for **syncing up Netflix across multiple computers** and for streaming the same videos on different screens.

## Consider the type of media you use.

Attention-heavy conversations (like those had in real time over the phone or video chat) can be spaced out but using frequent, lightweight contact in between (like sharing links, memes, or short messages) by text can still foster connection.

## Exercise where you can.

Whilst you can't get to the gym you can still exercise using bodyweight movements such as burpees, squats, lunges and push ups as well as running or cycling (being mindful of your proximity to others).

## Support: where can I find it and how can I give it?

### EAP (Employee Assistance Programme)

EAP is a fully confidential and free service that all NZR/SR/PU staff/contracted players and their immediate family can access to get support for their mental health and wellbeing. It is staffed by trained counsellors and psychologists who will support you with anything from stress, anxiety and depression through to relationship difficulties and grief.

You can arrange an appointment online by visiting [www.instep.nz](http://www.instep.nz) and entering **nzru** as the username and **wellness** as the password or free phone **0800 284 678**.

### GP

If you're noticing that you or someone you know is experiencing stress or distress symptoms that are sticking around over days or weeks, then getting in touch with your GP is a good place to start.

### 1737 helpline

1737 is the national free to call or text helpline number. The service is staffed with fully trained counsellors and is available 24/7 for advice or support on anything to do with mental health and wellbeing.

### Whanau, friends, community

During times of stress and worry, connecting with those existing supports around you is one of the best ways to support both yourself and those you care about. Be proactive in reaching out, creating space to spend time with your loved ones and talking about what you're thinking and feeling.

### Other helpful links:

[www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/ways-to-wellbeing/](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/ways-to-wellbeing/)

[www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Announcements/information-for-schools-preschools-and-third-level-institutions-on-the-coronavirus.html#10](http://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Announcements/information-for-schools-preschools-and-third-level-institutions-on-the-coronavirus.html#10)

[www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus](http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus)

### Want to check-in on someone but not quite sure how?

When we have a gut feeling someone might be struggling the hardest part can sometimes be starting a conversation. Use the ALEC model below to guide you on how to check-in.

**ASK** – Simply asking “are you doing OK” or “how are you coping with things lately?” is a good start.

**LISTEN** – Try using open ended questions like “that sounds really tough, can you tell me more about that?”.

**ENCOURAGE** – Ask questions about what they think might be helpful. It's also ok to not know what to say but let them know you'll help them find the right support.

**CHECK BACK IN** – Make sure you take responsibility to lock-in when you'll catch up next. Be specific about a day and time and avoid saying things like “text me if you need me”.