

Coping with Coronavirus Lockdown When Your Mental Health is Already Not Great

At the risk of sounding repetitive, what's going on currently is unprecedented and we're all having to adapt our lives and mindsets at great speed. There's lots of advice springing up all over the internet about how to look after your mental health and wellbeing in self isolation, but what we're hearing from people we support is that information isn't as useful if you were already struggling with your mental health beforehand and many of the suggestions such as routines and home cooking feel impossible right now.

We don't pretend to have the answers or to be able to cover everything that's coming up for people out there but here are a few thoughts we've put together that we hope are of some use.

Don't underestimate the impact of the situation

When you're struggling daily with things like anxiety, panic, depression, dissociation, self-harm and other issues it may well feel like things are just plain getting worse, when in fact you're dealing with huge levels of anxiety and fear everyone else is dealing with alongside what you usually cope with. Sometimes just acknowledging that can help, although we very much recognise it doesn't change anything.

The impact of past experiences

Living in a time where lives are potentially at threat and we have been forced into social isolation and lockdown is unusual, but it doesn't mean it won't bring up similar feelings or memories of past situations when you have felt trapped, isolated or defeated amongst other feelings. Common issues we're hearing about are remembering times stuck in hospital, being stuck in an abusive situation or unable to leave the house for long periods due to health issues. These experiences in themselves are hard to have and think about, and when present situations remind you of past ones, the same feelings can come up and be hard to deal with. It can also leave you feeling resentful or upset at the fact that you've had these experiences previously that no one seemed to acknowledge, but now it's all anyone is talking about.

The whole country/world is going through a massive period of adjustment

Which means that you don't know what's going on or what to do; and neither do any of the people you'd usually turn to for advice or support. The way support has to be offered is new, and it's just not the same. Information is changing regularly and everyone is feeling the effects of existing in a chronic state of anxiety and confusion – which makes us all more tired, and easily confused and irritated.

Lack of face to face support

Technology can be great at keeping us connected but it's not the same as having personal and face to face contact with people. Even though logically we all know why we can't have face to face appointments or meet with friends; that doesn't take away from how it feels. Using video chat or phone calls for support is hard, as social cues and other information we rely on in conversations can't be picked up on in the same way. It also can be a more difficult space to bring up issues you find hard to talk about, as that sense of connection is missing in some ways.

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So what can you do?

We know that whatever we suggest, lots of it won't apply to everyone or will just not be possible for some people. We also don't want to replicate the type of wellbeing advice that is already out there, that can feel quite irrelevant and missing the point if you were already struggling before this situation. With that in mind here are some of things we have come up with which might be useful:

1 First of all, cut yourself some slack – you're here, reading this and surviving in whatever way you can, and only you know how much effort that took.

2 Try not to beat yourself up if you feel like you're struggling to cope or the situation is impacting negatively on your mental health – this is OK and allowed and completely understandable. Don't worry about wellbeing lists or keeping a routine if you can't manage – just do what you can with what you've got – survival is OK right now.

3 If you can, try to do one thing that soothes or nurtures you in some way – we know it won't solve anything, but you're still worth doing something nice for.

4 If you can, find a way to express yourself – no response or emotion is right or wrong – if you need to scream or batter cushions or write angry letters to people who are not social distancing, then let it out. Your feelings are valid.

5 One of the most common suggestions for helping with memories or flashbacks around traumatic experiences is to try grounding exercises. There are lots out there so even if this hasn't appealed to you before, you might find one that works for you.

6 Remember you are worthy of support and care if you need it, even though health services are focused on the pandemic response, deteriorating mental health is still an urgent need and deserves support. It is still OK to ask for the support you need.

We've also collected some links that you might find useful right now:

[Staying Safe - Resources for dealing with suicidal feelings](#)

[Tips for releasing stress that you can do instantly](#)

[Blog series by people with mental health issues about how they are finding the current situation](#)

[Practical suggestions from the Samaritans for when you're finding things tough](#)

[Grounding techniques for flashbacks](#)