**Coping with anxiety about Coronavirus (Covid-19)**

**Is my anxiety normal?**

Whenever there is change and uncertainty it is normal to feel some anxiety, particularly when our day to day lives change and it is unclear what this may mean for you. The situation and guidance has been updated and changing regularly, increasing feelings of uncertainty. In the current situation with coronavirus, there is the added worry about the risk to health for yourselves and people you know, and care about. It is a worrying time for many people, but this is especially difficult if you already suffer from anxiety, panic, health anxiety, or OCD with contamination fears.

**What if my anxiety is too much for me?**

What we know about anxiety is that there are things that can help, but there are also things that can make it worse, things that we all do when we feel worried!

Things that make anxiety worse:

* Spending lots of your time focussing on media reports, checking for updates and news
* Getting updates from unverified and unofficial sources and social media pages
* Repeatedly checking yourself and others for physical health symptoms and signs of illness
* Becoming hypervigilant to your own physical body sensations
* ‘Ruminating’ and ‘catastrophising’ particularly about contamination fears, health and dying
* If you have OCD with contamination fears, or other types of anxiety difficulties, increasing your cleaning and handwashing above the recommended guidance

Our minds will naturally try to gather more information to try and solve the ‘anxiety problem’, but these activities are likely to increase feelings of anxiety, as the more we pay attention to something that is uncertain, the more anxious we feel.

When problem solving efforts don’t soothe our anxiety, and we find ourselves increasing those efforts we can quickly get caught up in an anxiety spiral that can be hard to stop.

**What will help with my anxiety?**

* Rely on official guidance from official websites, such as Public Health Wales and Public Health England, NHS and UK Government websites
* Ensure any other sources are fact checked and reliable
* Keep up to date with information, but try to find out when official updates are scheduled, and limit your checking to around those times
* Follow the official guidance for managing risks to your health
* Focus on the Facts that are known, and be selective about what you pay attention to
* Be mindful of any ‘safety behaviours’ that may start to increase – these create the illusion of making us safer, and so calm anxiety in the short term, but cause more anxiety in the longer term. Try to find other ways to reduce your anxiety, for example by slowing your breathing, relaxing your body, and distracting yourself with something you enjoy.

**What else can help if you are self-isolating and social-distancing?**

* Reach out and stay connected with others over the phone, skype, facetime, etc even though anxiety might make you want to do the opposite
* Look out for vulnerable people in your community or neighbourhood who may need help and support – we often feel better if we can find a way to connect with and support others
* Enjoy the outdoors, go for a walk somewhere quiet, enjoy the garden, even if you are elderly or in a vulnerable category (unless you have specific contrary instructions from your health services/GP) you can be out in the fresh air, as long as you maintain the recommended 2 metre distance from others to protect yourself
* Do what you enjoy at home; music, films, hobbies, books, family activities, exercise, cooking – try to stay focussed on what you are able to do, even though it might be in a different environment to your usual activities
* If you have children, try to focus on making it a fun time for them, and help them make sense of a situation that may be confusing and worrying for them
* Try to create a routine at home that involves different activities through the day to help you keep your mind off your worries
* Explore relaxation, mindfulness and wellbeing information and activities online, including apps that are available to help with anxiety
* Do things that help you feel soothed and cared for, such as having a bath, or wrapping up in a soft blanket or scarf, and watching a favourite film
* Do talk with others about your worries, sharing our thoughts can help
* Be kind to yourself, this is a difficult time, and managing your mental health may be tricky at the moment, but there are numbers you can call if you need support (see below)
* Remember, all the small things can add up make a big difference to how you feel… it is a balance of getting the information you need and taking care of your physical and psychological wellbeing

**Helpful websites:**

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

<https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>

**Helpful Telephone Numbers to support you if you are struggling with your wellbeing:**

Samaritans free phone number - 116123

Call- 0800132737

BCUHB West - Out of Hours mental health emergency - 01248 353551

Other professionals and friends/family that usually support me are:

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