Some practical information and advice for individuals and groups working to reassure others around how to find calm and take care of ourselves – especially if we are worried or isolated – as a result of the COVID-19 Crisis.

COVID-19 has caused us to react in a series of different ways. It can make us feel nervous, anxious, confused or stressed, or perhaps really worried about whether someone we love is in danger. We may also be concerned about self-isolating and the thought of being alone and lonely. On top of this we may also be worried about practical details such as how we will get food delivered. Every single one of these reactions is normal and perfectly understandable.

But we really can support each other during this difficult time and also help each other to manage the feelings of anxiety and worry we may have – even when we feel isolated.

There are a number of practical steps that will help us all to look after our mental, emotional, and spiritual health during this time and, most importantly help us find a sense of calm.

Breathe

If things are difficult or our anxiety and worry levels are high, taking long, deep breaths – breathing slowly in for about 4 seconds, holding that breath for 2 seconds and breathing out as slowly as we can – has a real calming effect. This is because it causes our body's defences to relax and lets our brain release endorphins, which are the natural chemicals that calm us down.

There are other benefits too. When we practice slow deep breathing it decreases stress, relieves pain, increases our energy, lowers our blood pressure, and improves our digestion. There are a range of 'Apps' that you may find useful such as 'Calm' or 'Breathe' which provide you with a way of doing simple meditations. This is also easy for our children to do. Just have them cup their hands like they are a bowl of hot soup, breath in as much air as they can, and slowly blow on the "soup" to cool it down.

Exercise

Regular exercise is very important, especially when self-isolating at home or feeling anxious. It causes chemical changes in our brains that positively alter our mood. And the exercise we do really doesn't have to be anything extreme. It could be doing repeats of stretches, lifting tins of food as if they are weights, or walking up and down the stairs at home for a set number of times. It helps:

- Reduce tension, stress, and frustration
- Increase our focus and mental alertness
- Improve our sleep
- Increase our energy

There are heaps of exercise videos – designed for beginners to Olympic athletes – on YouTube, which you can plug into! Plus, if you can go outside into the garden or onto a balcony – it's amazing what a bit of fresh air and sunshine will do for us.

Connect

One of the very best things we can do to take care of our mental health is to help others. It sounds a bit weird, but actually when we show compassion for others it impacts our wellbeing in a good way as well – we really do need each other to thrive. Community and connection help us feel safe and help us to heal. So, try to find different ways to connect with others. Whether it's making a call, sending a text, putting a note through a neighbour's door, checking on others to see that they have everything they need including food – the best thing we can do is to reach out to each other. If we feel anxious about this, think of five safe people we can connect with regularly. It is the simplest of things that make all the difference – but remember to do them in ways that go along with the guidance we have been given around how to protect ourselves from the virus and the situation we are in.

Switch off

Limit the amount of social media you expose yourself to – it doesn't help to end up worrying about everyone else's amateur opinions of the threat of COVID-19; or about anything else for that matter. The barrage of information, opinion, and 24/7 reporting will only mess with your head and anxiety levels! So, it makes real sense to limit our intake of media, to keep it to a trusted source or two, and sometimes to switch off altogether.

Focus

Our bodies are amazing at keeping us safe without us even doing anything. We can focus to help regulate and calm our bodies' alert systems, helping us to reduce our fear and anxiety. We can focus on how brave and strong we are, and how we have come through difficulties on previous occasions! Thinking of some of those occasions can be really helpful and will lift our spirits. It's also really good to think of all the things we are grateful for – large or small. Gratitude helps us to focus on and celebrate our strength, and to find joy even in the most difficult situations.

Play

Play is something that we normally think of as the domain of children. But play is great for the wellbeing of adults too. When we play it connects us, adds joy to our lives, relieves stress, and helps us focus – which once again is down to the release of those endorphins, the body's natural feel-good chemicals. Play also stimulates our creativity, helps us with problem-solving, and makes us more resistant to illness. So, with all of these benefits, it is probably well worth rediscovering some of the games we used to play when we were kids.

Read

There may be a book that you have been wanting to read for ages. Now is a great chance to do that. Reading is really good for us. It gets our brain working in a different way. It gives it a bit of a mental workout. It helps to improve our memory and reduces our feelings of stress and depression. And when we read before bedtime it helps calm us down preparing us for a good night's sleep. Looking at a screen or device has the opposite affect!

More than that, it's a great way to connect with others, talking online or over the phone about the things we are reading and learning. And imagine the new things you'll be able to talk about when the COVID-19 crisis is over.

Write

Writing down how you feel can also help with finding a sense of calmness. When we write it enables us to process any anxiety we have. We are able to find words that help us make sense of how we are feeling. Plus, the act of writing the words down means that we are better able to view what we are experiencing from a different perspective and process our feelings in a more positive and healthy way.

Listen

Listening to music you enjoy will improve our mood. There's nothing like a great tune for us to dance, hum, pretend to conduct, play, or sing along to. When we feel very anxious, higher frequency music can especially help us feel calmer. So, make sure you're tuned into the radio, or have your favourite playlist at the ready. And even better, make sure that there is lots of your favourite female artists or some classical violin. 'Dance like no-one is watching and sing like no-one is listening.' And perhaps start to think about being part of a local choir once the crisis is over!