

KEEPING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH IN CHECK



2021 EDITION

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A FREE information
booklet from your local
Member of Parliament

Our mental and physical health are just as important as each other.

That's why, particularly at the moment, we need to make sure that we, our friends and our family look after our mental health as much as possible.

I hope that this short guide will give you tips and information on making sure that you look after your mental health at a time that can be scary to lots of people across the country. Remember, it's good to stay connected and informed, but not to the detriment of your mental health.

This year, Mental Health Awareness Week is marked on 10–16 May 2021.

For more information on Mental Health Awareness Week, visit [mentalhealth.org.uk/campaigns/mental-health-awareness-week](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/campaigns/mental-health-awareness-week).

You can find the latest mental health guidance relating to Covid-19 at [gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing), and more general advice surrounding mental health at [nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/](https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/). In the meantime, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me at selaine.saxby.mp@parliament.uk

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UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH

Many of us ignore the signs that we need to look after our own mental health, or that of others around us. We need to be mindful that when we're struggling it's hard to reach out, so we should all be conscious of how those around us might be feeling.

Recognising that we need to talk to someone or change our routine to benefit our mental health is crucial. Here are five signs to look out for:

1. Prolonged sadness or irritability
2. Extremely high and low moods
3. Excessive fear, worrying or anxiety
4. Social withdrawal
5. Dramatic changes in weight or sleeping habits.



STICK TO THE FACTS

It's really easy to become overwhelmed by all of the news surrounding Coronavirus and vaccinations.

So make sure that you can find a credible source that you can trust – such as [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) or the NHS website. And fact-check information that you get from social media and other people. The Government has set up a Coronavirus Information Service on WhatsApp, which covers the most common questions about the coronavirus.

You should also think about how inaccurate information could affect your friends and family too, especially surrounding vaccinations. Try to reassure those around you who are anxious about vaccine misinformation and the return to normality.

It's really important to think about limiting the amount of time that you spend watching, reading or listening to the news, as even though restrictions will be relaxed we will have to continue to live with coronavirus. This is why we need to be aware of vaccine misinformation and current social distancing guidance.

Some people have found it easier to limit themselves to checking the news twice a day. It can be very distressing to have large numbers of breaking-news alerts on your phone during the day.



RETURNING TO A NEW 'NORMAL'

Phone calls and video calls have been a great way for us to keep in touch during lockdowns, but it's not the same as face-to-face time with other people.

If you feel that you're struggling, it's a good idea to interact with a friendly face who is a 'good listener', and who you can talk to regularly. Reaching out is not a sign of weakness, no matter who you are or how you're feeling. If you don't feel that you have anyone to turn to, organisations like Samaritans and Mind are always there to listen.

Even arranging to exercise or run errands with a friend can help. Try to make it a regular get-together. Don't be afraid to reach out to acquaintances. Lots of people feel just as uncomfortable about making new friends- so be the one to break the ice, you'll feel more confident and a sense of achievement in having done so. It's a great idea to interact with your neighbours or to reconnect with old friends.

Whilst being able to communicate virtually is beneficial, it's not the same as seeing people. Although it's easy to shy away from new situations and people when you're anxious or feeling low, don't neglect in-person relationships.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR MENTAL HEALTH WHEN YOU'RE AT HOME

It's really important to make sure that you have a structure to your day when you're at home, so here's a 6-point plan for your day:

1. Plan

Make sure you don't stay in your pyjamas all day – keep a regular routine that will keep your confidence up. And try to start your day at the same time that you usually would, because your body will stay in its natural rhythm.

2. Move

Keeping active and exercising where you are able to is key to reducing stress, increasing energy levels and helps your sleep pattern. And if you're stuck for motivation, there are plenty of exercise routines on YouTube that you could look at!

3. Relax

The NHS website has plenty of relaxation techniques that you could look at. They'll help relieve stress and will help give you a sense of well-being.

4. Connect

Find creative ways to keep in touch with your friends, colleagues, and family. If you're still working from home, continue to have online coffee breaks with colleagues. As restrictions are lifted you can start to meet friends and family outside for socially distanced gatherings. But for friends and family who live further away, online calls are still a great way of keeping in touch. Never hesitate to reach out to those around you by whichever means possible.

5. Reflect

At the end of the day, think about what went well and what you could improve on. What were you grateful for during the day? How can you make tomorrow better? Think about writing down your thoughts so you can go back to them at a later date.

6. Sleep

In these difficult times, you might have trouble getting a good night's sleep. To improve your sleep, try and stick to your usual bedtime and get up in the morning when you usually would. And try to avoid using your phone, tablet, computer or TV before bedtime.



RETURNING TO SCHOOL AND MENTAL HEALTH

The coronavirus pandemic has been overwhelming for many children and young people. Even though schools have reopened, it's important to make sure that school children and teachers are transitioning back to in-person teaching smoothly. There are loads of great resources that can be used to get both kids and teachers talking about their mental health.

The Mental Health Foundation is part of the national mental health response to the coronavirus outbreak. They suggest keeping in mind that:

- **One size will not fit all.** Everyone's pandemic experiences have been different, so students may need varied support and will have different emotional responses.
- **You are part of a team.** Teachers may feel overwhelmed, but the teaching community and third-party organisations are there to support you too.
- **Learning might have to wait.** Disrupted focus is expected as children are not used to learning at the same pace, they may need extra time or help.
- **Attachment disruption and trauma.** Students may still be struggling with separation from friends and family members or need extra support due to bereavement during the pandemic.

For useful resources visit:

mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/returning-school-after-lockdown/support-pupils-return-to-school

Resources for children and teachers:

youngminds.org.uk/resources/school-resources/

School resources with activities, lessons and assembly guides:

time-to-change.org.uk/take-action/resources-schools



RETURNING TO WORK

Mental health and stress related absence is the most common cause of long-term sickness absence in UK workplaces.

Returning to the office is going to be hard for many employees for many reasons. From adapting back to office working, to coming back from furlough to employees who are still dealing with the bereavement of a loved one in the pandemic. The return to a 'new normal' is going to be different for every organisation.

However, the most important way that we can encourage our employees and colleagues is by maintaining a positive culture where people feel able to talk about their mental health openly.

Mind have produced some resources for employers and employees on returning to work:

mind.org.uk/workplace/coronavirus-and-work



IDEAS FOR GETTING OUT AND ABOUT

- **Talk to a friendly face.** You don't have to talk about your feelings, even just a chat with someone will lift your mood. Arrange to go for a coffee or for lunch.
- **Getting out and about.** The theme for 2021's Mental Health Week is 'nature'. Being out in open and green spaces is great for both your physical and mental health. Take a walk in the park or countryside or join an outdoor exercise class with a friend.
- **Relaxing outside of your home.** You might find it useful to take up a relaxation practice such as yoga. Doing this with other people is a great way to take your worries outside of your home and relax.
- **Doing things for others.** Helping others helps yourself too. Volunteering for a local charity or helping your neighbours boosts your self-esteem and sense of community.



HELPING OTHERS WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Each year, around 1 in 4 people experience mental health problems. Most of us know a family member, colleague or friend who has struggled with their mental health.

According to the **Every Mind Matters** campaign, there are a number of things you can do to help

- **Express concern** by letting someone know you're worried. It's a good way to start a conversation about how they are feeling, and it also shows the person that you care and that you have time for them.
- **Reassure them**, because the first time someone mentions their worries is a huge step. Let them know that you're there for them if and when they need to talk.
- **Be patient** as you won't always know the full story. Just being there for someone can be a huge help if they want to open up to you at a later date.

- **Look after yourself** when looking after others. It can be upsetting to hear someone you care about in distress. Make sure that you take time to yourself so that you can relax and do things that you enjoy, whilst taking into account the Government guidelines on social distancing.
- **Offer some practical help** like an act of kindness. Offer to do some shopping for them or try and find some practical information if they are not in a position to do it themselves.



USEFUL CONTACTS AND WEBSITES

Samaritans

Call: 116 123 Email: jo@samaritans.org

Calls to 116 123 are free and will not appear on itemised phone bills

NHS 111 online: 111.nhs.uk

NHS Every Mind Matters Campaign

nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters

Mental Health Awareness Week

mentalhealth.org.uk/campaigns/mental-health-awareness-week

Mental Health Forum

mentalhealthforum.net

The Mental Health Forums are a place where you can speak openly and anonymously about your mental health experiences, ask questions, or vent your emotions.

Mind – The Mental Health Charity

mind.org.uk/coronavirus-we-are-here-for-you

Call: 0300 123 3393 (open 9am–6pm, Mon–Fri)

gov.uk/coronavirus

gov.uk/find-coronavirus-support



I hope that you found this guide useful, but if you have any other questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

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