

Reliving Traumatic Events

There may have been times in the past when you may have felt very vulnerable, helpless or anxious. These are also normal feelings to come to the surface again whilst living through Covid-19. The Covid-19 crisis may be triggering feelings and thoughts which belong in the past. This makes it even harder to cope with the stress of Covid-19 as well.

For those directly experiencing the trauma of Covid-19, families, survivors, health & social care staff and volunteers the reliving of specific parts of the traumatic experiences (flashbacks) e.g. images, sounds, words, feelings, physical sensations, thoughts, smells and tastes is very distressing. Some may feel numb, emotionally disconnected and disorientated.

Quiet times and sleep can be a challenge if reliving events (flashbacks) is disturbing relaxation or sleep.

Grounding & Settling

Trauma and anxiety trigger us to think and feel that we or those around us are not safe. This of course may be our reality, if a loved one is ill in hospital or a nurse at the end of their shift has left their patients.

Grounding and relaxation settle the central nervous system & the flow of stress hormones. Grounding helps the brain to focus on the present, take care of itself and think more clearly. This all helps us to stay as mentally well as possible and safe.

5,4,3,2,1 Strategy

Take a deep breath, notice where you are **now** to create some distance from the trauma & pain.

Notice: 5 things you see around you, 4 things you can touch or feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, 1 thing you can taste.

Try the **Headspace App** to calm the mind.

Anxiety Coping Strategies

- Use your **tried & tested** strategies that have helped you to cope in the past
- Test new strategies using an **Anxiety 0-10 scale** e.g. felt 8 out of 10 before, then tried the Headspace App, anxiety reduced to 7 out of 10, worth using again.
- **Reduce alcohol & drugs**
- **Keep in touch** with friends/family/support
- Make a list of worries, identify any that can be **problem solved** e.g. contact CAB
- Create **worry time**, not close to bedtime, setting a time limit gives you some control
- Try **breathing & mindfulness** to create a space for **relaxation**
- List all the things that give you **comfort** when distressed and work through the list
- **Be Busy**: boredom is Anxiety's best friend
- Life won't always be like this, reach out for urgent help if you feel suicidal. Avoid alcohol to **keep safe** if you have thoughts to harm yourself.

Mental Health Help & Support:

www.nhs.uk NHS 111 or your GP

Local Mental Health Crisis Service

The Samaritans: 116 123



Covid-19: Trauma & Anxiety
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Together we can get through....

Trauma

May be felt directly by the loved ones of those who have experienced significant illness, the bereaved, survivors of illness and the professionals and volunteers who provide care and support to those most unwell. It may also be retriggered for those who have had previous experience of trauma.

Hyperarousal

Emotions sneak up out of what feels like nowhere triggering us to be quick to panic, snap or be angry. Being on edge most of the time impacts on our ability to relax, focus on the things we'd usually enjoy, our relationship with others and our sleep. Emotions can be tricky to keep a lid on making it feel like we have little control & are exhausting.

It may be that other people have noticed we can't relax because we are on edge, thinking or talking about one particular issue most of the time. The emotional reaction may seem out of proportion to the here and now being quick to panic or anger.

Hypervigilance

- Common traumatic response
- Excessive checking for signs of threat
- Heightened awareness of risk
- The more we check for evidence of threat the more we find.
- Constant access to news feeds and social media enable us to confirm our fear and we ignore any evidence which contradicts our fear.
- Filters out good news stories & evidence of safety
- Saps us of the energy needed to be rational, constructive & make a positive difference

Seek help from your GP for distressing symptoms

Our emotional response to Covid-19 is shaped by our:

personality

how we make sense of things

physical & mental health

relationships & connection to others

caring responsibilities

financial stability

culture & spiritual beliefs

past life experiences & events

experience of previous trauma

Some of us will have past experience of coping with trauma and able to use these experiences to help us cope now. For others this may be the first real test of how we cope in traumatic situations.

Feeling overwhelmed by anxiety is distressing and may be triggered by:

- Not trusting in our ability to cope
- Too many worries to deal with all at once
- Alcohol & mood-altering substances
- Sleep deprivation
- Grief
- Psychological distress
- Relapse of mental illness
- Painful emotions and memories belonging to past traumas coming to the surface in the present
- Change in circumstances & activity levels
- Pain



Anxiety comes from a place of threat; fear of something which may happen or something that is happening (or has already happened). Covid-19 has brought us both types of fear.

When a threat is noticed it triggers the early warning system in our brain, the amygdala. It's designed to keep us safe so we can run, fight or hide



from the threat. The release of stress hormones triggers the physical changes in our heart rate,

our breathing, we sweat, have an upset stomach, can't relax and have tension aches. We cannot run away from or fight Covid-19 to make good use of the stress hormones, instead they circulate for longer and make us feel on edge.

Our feelings change, tempers are hotter, we're quick to cry, we feel snappy and anxious. Our behaviours change we go to bed late, we eat more or less, our screen time increases, we become distant, it's hard to concentrate on anything unrelated to the threat.

Covid-19 has indirectly affected us all, even if we and the people who are special to us are currently safe and well. Social isolation, social distancing and lock down have impacted on our lives. Feelings of anxiety, loneliness, vulnerability, guilt, frustration, fear, anger, helplessness and hopelessness are all normal feelings and shared by many.

We all come to the Covid-19 crisis from very different starting points because who we are and our social circumstances are all so different.