
Coping with self-isolation and shielding during Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Due to Coronavirus many people are self-isolating or shielding in line with government guidance. Self-isolation aims to protect you, your family and your community. This is likely to be a big change to your normal way of life and may be especially difficult to cope with as other people's lives start to return to normality.

If you have cancer or have recently had cancer treatment, then your immune system may be weaker than usual and so protecting yourself is important. Please contact The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline for specialist and personalised advice on how you should respond to guidance on self-isolation over the coming months. **The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week on 020 8915 6899.**

The information below aims to help you to cope with, and adjust to, self-isolation.

Establish a routine

Self-isolation is likely to have caused a big disruption to your usual daily routine. Establishing a new routine can help you gain a sense of control and reduce feelings of uncertainty about what to expect. Setting an alarm to wake up at the same time each morning, making sure you eat regularly and getting dressed into your "day clothes" are all good examples.

If you are working from home it can be helpful to have a designated space where you can work comfortably without distractions (although sometimes this just isn't possible). Spending time in the daylight, whether that means opening all your curtains and sitting by the window, or spending some time outdoors (keeping two metres apart from others) can have important benefits for your sleep and mood.

Managing stress, worry, anxiety

The uncertainty of not knowing what to expect in the coming months might lead you to feel worried, anxious or low in mood. This might be about life in general or your health in particular. Usually when we are worrying we are thinking about the future and it can feel like the worries will never stop. But our thoughts (and feelings) are like the weather, they change over time and your difficult thoughts and feelings will pass (even if they come back again).

A mindfulness exercise can help you to be in the present moment and to let go of some of the worries, even if only for a second or two ([click here for the '3 Minute Mindful Breathing Space'](#)).

It can also help to identify parts of your life that you can control, e.g. your routine (see above), the clothes you wear, books you read and TV programmes you watch. It can be helpful to limit your news exposure, including having a news-free period before going to bed as a way of helping you to relax. Expressing yourself by talking to others or Journaling (on paper or via blogs/ video) or being creative, can help you to process how you are feeling.

Create goals and find a sense of purpose

It is likely that during self-isolation many people will experience a sense of boredom or monotony. Creating small goals to work towards can create a sense of meaning and purpose and give you something to look forward to during your day. Aim to ACE each day by planning activities that give you a sense of Achievement, Connection to others and Enjoyment.

Are there activities that have been on your to-do list for a while? Perhaps you would like



to try out some new cooking recipes or take up a hobby such as yoga or model making... Perhaps you could volunteer to support others using the phone or internet. Whatever your goal, make sure that it is something you want to do and feel confident enough to try, so that you are motivated to do it.

Self-isolation does not mean social-isolation

It can be really hard not seeing our family or friends face to face. However, connecting with people we are emotionally close to is still important. Making time to give your friends/family a call or organising a video chat can be a really nice way to keep in touch and have some social support during self-isolation.

It's ok to set boundaries around when and for how long to speak to people as well as the topics you are comfortable to discuss. Organising an online quiz or board game can provide some fun and entertainment whilst also giving you some escapism from the current situation. Joining a weekly exercise class via video-conferencing is also a great way to meet new people and improve your physical health whilst spending time indoors.

Take care of your relationships

For some of us, living in close proximity to family or friends for long periods of time can be stressful and can increase conflict at home. It can be helpful to speak with each other to acknowledge the difficulties and see if some ground rules can be set to ease tension. Finding ways of 'biting your tongue' in the heat of the moment and stepping back to take some time and space can be helpful. In addition, hold on to compassion for yourselves during difficult times. Exploring how to put fun and intimacy into relationships with partners can also help.

Do I feel safe?

Staying at home may not always feel like a safe place. Remember if you feel unsafe there are services you can contact.

- **Police.** When someone calls **999**, an operator will ask which emergency service is required. If the caller is unable to audibly signal to the operator, the call will be forwarded to an operating system. If **55** is pressed by the caller, the system will detect this. The operator will then transfer the call to the relevant police force as an emergency.
- **Refuge.** For women and children experiencing domestic abuse. Call 24/7 freephone 0808 2000 247 or visit www.refuge.org.uk
- **Respect.** For men experiencing domestic abuse. Call freephone 0808 8010327 Monday to Friday (9am-5pm Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays; 9am-8pm Mondays and Wednesdays. The call will not appear on the bill), or visit www.mensadviceline.org.uk

The above is a short summary of how to cope with self-isolation or shielding during the Coronavirus pandemic. If you would like further advice the following websites offer self-help resources and additional support:

www.copingwithcoronavirus.co.uk

www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-at-home-tips

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Published June 2020
Planned review September 2020

This booklet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this booklet are available on request from:

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No conflicts of interest were declared in the production of this booklet.

The information in this booklet is correct at the time of going to print.