Tips to help with depression during the Covid-19 pandemic

We will all be affected by the Covid-19 outbreak in many ways; physically, emotionally, practically and financially. If you were already struggling with feelings of low mood before the outbreak, you may find that you are feeling worse now. Or, this may be the first time that you are seeking help with low mood. Either way we hope that the following tips are useful to you during this time:

- Remind yourself that it is normal for your mood to have been affected by the current situation. It is normal to feel a sense of grief for the loss of 'normal life'. When we are grieving any loss it is normal to experience a range of emotions including sadness, bargaining, denial and anger. Notice how you are feeling but try not to judge your feelings as good or bad. Try to avoid shaming yourself for experiencing these normal feelings. It may be helpful to share your feelings with other people.

- If you are also feeling anxious remind yourself that anxiety is a completely normal response in this abnormal situation. As humans we are biologically programmed to experience anxiety when we feel we are under threat. It can be helpful to acknowledge our anxiety when it shows up and normalise this.

- If you are feeling overwhelmed by feelings of anxiety, it can be helpful to ground yourself and refocus your attention on the present moment. Pause what you are doing, take a breath, and notice what you can see around you. Next, turn your attention to what you can hear, then touch, then smell and then notice whether you can taste anything.

- Keeping to a routine is one of the best things you can do to improve low mood. You may not be able to complete your 'normal' routine, so it is worth developing a new routine during this time. Writing your routine down on a planner or diary can help you to stick with it.
  When creating a new routine try to have consistent sleep/wake times and plan regular meal times.
  Consider what you enjoy doing and what gives you a sense of achievement – rewarding behaviours help improve our mood, so try to schedule some of these activities in throughout your week.
  Schedule activities that are in line with what you value/what is important to you. If you value being creative you could think about different ways that you could be creative at home. If you value looking after others you could consider how to support the people you care about.

- When we are feeling low we often feel less motivated. Because of this it is important to be realistic when developing a routine – only put activities on the planner if you are 80% sure that you will be able to do them. If you aren't 80% sure, think about how you could break this activity down to make it more manageable. Then over the course of several days or weeks you can work towards completing the original activity.

- Get dressed every day, even if you aren't going anywhere. This can help to put us in a more proactive mind-set.

- Stay connected to other people. This could be over the phone, via email or sending messages. Talk through how you are feeling with someone you trust and who you feel has a sensible outlook. Try to talk about other topics too. It is important to maintain connections with people who make you feel good.
  Try to reach out at least once a day. Consider setting specific times for this if you are finding it hard to connect with others.
  If you are finding it overwhelming or tiring to be in contact with others more than usual, consider limiting this time and make sure you also have breaks from this.

- Give yourself permission to limit or end conversations with people who are causing you to feel anxious. It can be useful to have phrases in mind to end conversations that are making you feel worse. This might be a statement such as 'I'm finding that talking about this isn't helpful for me at the moment, can

we talk about something else?'

- When we feel depressed we often have thoughts or images of worse case scenarios. Although this can feel distressing, this is completely normal. We can't force these thoughts or images to stop because that would go against how our mind is programmed. But it can be helpful to notice these thoughts and then try to create a balance.
We can help to create a balance by spending some time considering other, less threatening scenarios. Or, reminding ourselves that we cannot predict the future and do not know this will happen. We can challenge these thoughts with evidence based facts from reliable sources.

- If you find that you are being critical of yourself and what you are achieving during this time, check your expectations. Remember that everything we are doing at the moment we are doing under fear and stress. Lower expectations and practice accepting what you are achieving as 'good enough'. There is no precedent for this, we are all doing the best we can in an incredibly challenging situation.

- In this current situation, as always, there are 1) things within our control, 2) things which we can influence and 3) things that are beyond our control. If you find yourself worrying, try to notice which category your worry falls into. Are you worrying about things that are outside of your control?
It can be helpful to focus on what is within our control and to avoid becoming overly focused on what is outside of our control. For example we are able to control how we follow government advice but cannot control what other people are doing.
When there is a lot of uncertainty and things feel overwhelming it can be helpful to focus on what you <u>can</u> control even when these things feel small.

- Try to be compassionate and don't jump to conclusions. At the moment everyone is experiencing different levels of anxiety and everyone is grieving the loss of their normal life. How this is expressed will look different for different people. The behaviour that you see in others may look different to what you would usually expect as they try to manage their own feelings. Try to be patient and compassionate. Try not to take things personally.

Helping people to be **the best they can be**

- Limit the amount of time spent watching/listening to the news if you notice that this causes you to feel anxious. Although it is important to stay up to date with developments and the latest government advice, checking the news often can lead to anxiety or dwelling on negative thoughts.

  o Try to limit how often you check the news. For example, check a trustworthy news source once or twice a day.

  o Limit the amount of time spent on watching/listening to the news to help stay focused on key facts and relevant updates. For example, allow yourself 15 minutes.

  o Turn off push notifications for the news and try to avoid checking the news before bedtime.

  o When you watch the news, try to look for the positive news stories – notice those who have recovered, the new developments and the progress being made.

- Social media can move us away from the facts. Consider implementing the above steps for use of social media too.

- Remember the basics. When we feel depressed our eating and drinking habits often change. We may notice that we are eating more junk food or drinking more alcohol or caffeine. These things can have a negative impact our mood. Remember to eat a balanced diet and to eat at regular intervals. Limit alcohol, caffeine and nicotine consumption. Stay hydrated.

- Try to find three things each day to be grateful for. Notice any small ways that this experience might change you or society for the good.

- Look for opportunities to be supportive of others. Caring for other people can give us a sense of purpose.

- Exercise can help to improve low mood and is good for both physical and mental health. Try to build some exercise into your day.

- Remind yourself that this is temporary. Remember that although the current situation is difficult, this will pass.

Listed below are some helplines and resources which may be useful to you if you feel you need further support:

Mental Health Crisis Line:

Tel: 0300 3033972
24/7 support for people struggling with their mental health during the Coronavirus outbreak

Cheshire East People Helping People:

Tel: 0300 123 5034
Website: cheshireeast.gov.uk/peoplehelpingpeople
People helping people is a service for people who may need help with shopping, getting medical supplies, meal deliveries, advice and guidance, a friendly phone call or another supportive service

The Help Hub:

Website: www.thehelphub.co.uk

The help hub will offer 20 minute, online (skype, facetime) or phone appointments with qualified therapists to support those in isolation or with reduced social contact

Anxiety UK:

Website: www.anxietyuk.org.uk
Helpline: 03444 775 774   Text Service: 07537 416 905
Mon-Fri 9:30am - 5.30pm, Sat-Sun 10am – 8pm

MIND
Website: www.mind.org.uk
Search 'Coronavirus and your wellbeing'

Mental Health Foundation:
Website: www.mentalhealth.org.uk
Search 'Looking after your mental health during the Coronavirus outbreak'

Rethink:
Website: www.rethink.org
Search 'Managing your mental health during the Coronavirus outbreak'

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