



FAQs from Mental Health Ask Me Anything session: 27th March 2020

What can I do if I notice that a colleague is struggling with mental health during this lockdown period?

- Be conscious of the fact that the person may not want to discuss the issue with you. Mental Health still has a very significant stigma and this is important to remember. Leave the option to chat open for the future and try again a few days later.
- Listen and do not be judgemental. Whatever the person is feeling is real to them even if it may not seem so to others. Be patient and do not interrupt. Don't be tempted to interject with your own stories or the person may feel they are not being listened to. Be supportive and remind them they are not alone.
- Remember you are not a Mental Health professional. If your organisation has trained Mental Health First Aiders encourage the person to contact them. If not there are online resources – with a DP resources web page being launched shortly.
- For guidance refer to the ALGEE model (Assess, Listen, Give, Encourage, Encourage) of how to listen and support someone with suspected mental health issues.
- Emphasise the confidential nature of the discussion. Unless the person is at risk of harming themselves or someone else then it is up to them to widen the circle of those who know. Offer to talk again in the future if they want to.
- DO NOT take on the burden of someone else's mental health condition at the expense of your own mental health. Refer them to professional help. [Samaritans](#) may be the first port of call.

While it is important to stay on top of the latest developments, the focus on negativity in the news can take a toll on people's mental health. Does the panel have any tips for striking the right balance?

- Hearing and receiving negative information will create fear and you have to limit how much time you spend on researching live updates.
- News doesn't have to be negative: go on twitter or LinkedIn, people are keen to share positive news as opposed to pessimistic updates that we seem to only get from sources like news channels.
- People on twitter share their own personal stories of recovering from the virus or doing acts of good deeds during these challenging times so try to be creative with your sources of information and limit the time you spend on learning and knowing the latest developments because sometimes knowing too much especially if most of the information is negative, will and can impact your mental health.
- It's hard to escape the news given that the coronavirus is the biggest topic of discussion at the moment on social channels but equally amongst peers and family. But be strict with your time, because it is your time at the end of the day.

The matter of social media – another platform where we need to strike the right balance.

- Social sites can have a damaging effect on your mental health if you are already feeling low.
- It's really easy to procrastinate in these times and get distracted. Given that we are all desperate for social interaction, Instagram feeds this desire by showcasing a range of videos and images, some that can help but a lot of it can be damaging when we are already low mentally.

- Try to limit how much time you spend on these social sites. Most of these glamorous images are unrealistic because the entire world is in isolation and most of us are now living in our pyjamas.
- If any of you are feeling down or low please take on board what I've mentioned and log off from the social world and log in to the real world because the real world is the real you and you should be proud of that.

Does the panel have any tips on how to make sure we are “working from home” rather than “living at work?”

- It's critical to have some boundaries
- You might be worried about job security and it IS important to make it clear that you are working hard (and that you deliver!), but also have a routine and to signal to your colleagues the times when you are NOT available.
- This is especially key if you also have childcare responsibilities suddenly alongside 'WFH' duties; it is unrealistic (and will be extremely stressful) to try to do a full day's work AND to home school children, for example.
- Some employers are already helping with this – suggesting for example that meetings aren't set between 12 noon and 2pm so that people can have a break for lunch with their families or get some fresh air and exercise.
- The Diversity Project will be pulling together suggested 'best practice' for employers when it comes to helping working parents through this phase.

Is there any recommendation that can be shared to firms with regards to implementing any ongoing strategy to support employees such as weekly wellbeing checks or sessions on Mental Health?

- There is no monopoly on good ideas – please share experiences with friends and colleagues at other firms
- Circulate an all staff email emphasising the importance of good mental health. Detail who the MHFA trained staff are if the organisation has them. Detail any other internal and external resources that have been made available e.g. [BUPA](#)
- Download the [My Whole Self pdf on 'Supporting your Mental Health](#) while working from home' and circulate to all staff.
- [NHS website has a Mood Self-Assessment tool](#)
- [SAMH.org.uk has a Wellbeing Assessment tool](#)
- Encourage openness in the firm to discuss MH issues and Wellbeing.
- It helps a lot if top management are visibly supportive of MH initiatives. Now is the time for them to step up. as many more people will be affected in the weeks ahead.

Do you have any tips for things we can do as an extended family to ensure we stay connected at this time even though we can't all see each other in person

- Technology is your best friend! Use Facetime, WhatsApp calling, HouseParty - try a new App with your family and friends.
- Set schedules to call relatives and friends to ensure you connect at a time that works.
- Involve the wider family on these calls, many Apps can host group chats where multiple participants can join.
- For the older generation perhaps write a letter / get the children to do a drawing and post it if you go out and exercise.
- Check online for remote group events (we have seen virtual bars open, online pub quizzes and even virtual dog shows) where groups in different locations can participate.

As a people manager – what is the best way I can support my staff at this time

- It's important to be honest, to be reassuring where you can be but not to claim greater certainty than there is.
- People need to trust you. Be clear about the basics – that salary will be paid, that the benefits are there, that the resources for help around stress and anxiety are also available as usual.

- Most importantly, have the human touch. Don't just send out big group emails thanking everyone; pick up the phone or send a personal message.
- And practice what you preach - make sure that you make it clear that you are practising good home working – you are not working 24 hours a day, you are spending time with your family and ensuring you are looking after your physical and mental health.
- Do make it clear that lunchtimes are not a good time for calls, or that you don't expect anything other than emergency video calls to start before say 8am in the morning.
- Get feedback. Hold your own 'ask me anything' sessions!

Managing remotely – any tips on how this can best work?

- As tempting as it may be, do not micro-manage where it can be avoided.
- Remember that this is the same team now as before we were all working from home. Each will still have the same work ethic and level of commitment.
- Hold regular catch ups with individuals and your full team as well.
- Always ask how everyone is and make sure you are concerned for the welfare and mental health of your team.
- Give regular business updates as appropriate to make everyone feel connected.
- Make yourself available, and be clear on boundaries (when does your day start and finish so your team know when they can reach you).

I am a born worrier and I am concerned that this is being noticed by my kids, who are around all day now, how should I approach this sensitive topic with them?

- Be open with the children and discuss what is going on in language they can relate too. Ensure your children don't end up with worries of their own or about you.
- Try to figure out specifically what is worrying you before having the conversation as they will very likely ask and you need to be able to tell them.
- Recognise you aren't the only person in the world who worries – it is an entirely natural human emotion.
- With that in mind, try to recognise times of the day when you DON'T worry. This is important as there is a risk of identifying as someone who worries as a dominant characteristic which can become self-feeding. It is just one of a range of emotions.
- Encourage the children to be open with you as well about things that may be concerning them. Take them seriously. COMMUNICATE!
- Schools are now actively promoting mental health and wellbeing through their pastoral care. Take advantage of these resources.

I feel scared but I don't like to admit it. What can I do to get my head in a better place?

- It's absolutely normal to be scared, many are scared, worried and anxious about the current circumstances.
- We are all humans, and as humans we do fear the unknown. All of this uncertainty will naturally make us scared and that's okay, because we are all probably sharing the same thoughts and feelings meaning we are not alone.
- The one positive from this situation is that we are not alone – everyone is going through the same daily experience as us, working from home, looking after loved ones, having to reassure friends and family and work but also work colleagues that "I am fine".
- The best thing to do is accept the fear, tell yourself its okay to be scared and I am not alone, I am human and I am allowed to let my guard down and be afraid. So that's step one, step two is feeling at ease with the acceptance, re-assuring yourself that everything will be alright, I've let my guard down but hey it felt good! Thirdly, doing something to distract your mind so it's no longer focused on the fear but instead, something more positive.
- I suggest doing something that makes you happy and something that will get you in a better headspace. Whether that be using a mindful app such as [Calm](#) or [Headspace](#), working out, facetimeing friends or family,

eating chocolate or having a bath. Whatever it may be, do what's right for you but remember you are not alone and its okay to be scared. Rather than keeping it inside, talk to someone or talk to yourself, give yourself the reassurance that you deserve.