



Royal Flying Doctor Service
QUEENSLAND SECTION

Managing through COVID-19

An adaption of tips issued by the RFDS

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

APRIL 2020

The original version of this Tip Sheet was prepared by Jonathan McClelland, Senior Mental Health Clinician with the RFDS Outback Mental Health team.

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER

We know that as remote workers we face particularly high risks, stress and overwork during times like these. We also know that some of us will be placed on quarantine or self isolation and that this will cause additional stress and also necessitate support.¹

It is true that our workplaces will be understaffed and some workers will be doing extra shifts, while other workers may become stressed that they aren't able to help.

It is true that separations between team members who are used to working in close contact with each other might add to feelings of isolation on both sides.

For this reason, finding ways to support one another, whether at work or in isolation, is extremely important.

Here are some suggestions:

- Getting on the phone. A quick check-in at the start of the day can mean a lot. It replaces that early morning coffee chat we are often used to.
- At times we will go further. There are times when we do the in-depth check-in of "RUOK?" or "So how's it really going?"
- Don't be afraid to help problem solve or provide practical help - if that's what your colleague would like.
- Sometimes, for our own self-care, we need to let others know about what is going on for ourselves.
- For those that are stuck at home, perhaps we can begin group projects and collaborations. Let's use this opportunity to do things we wouldn't normally think we have time for or to help out in unusual or extraordinary ways. Are there ways those at home can help the others doing their crazy shifts? For example, helping to buy groceries.
- Lets find ways to celebrate some of the moments along the way - make some 'wins' memorable.

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KEY ADVICE SHARED BY WHO, HEADSPACE & BEYOND BLUE:

- > **Normalise feelings** - It's normal to become stressed at times like these.
- > **Share with others** - Talk about how you feel, don't keep it in.
- > **Watch out for others** - Pay special attention to the needs of children or people who may be vulnerable.
- > **Limit the media** - Stick to trusted sources, use time limits.
- > **Stay healthy** - Exercise, diet and rest are very important.
- > **Take time to adjust** - While everything is changing daily, give yourself time to absorb, reflect, adapt.
- > **Mindfulness, kindness** - Although we feel separated, we can reach out and we can reach 'in'.

¹ Source: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140673620304608>

DEALING WITH INFORMATION OVERLOAD

Being overloaded with information (or misinformation) is one of the biggest difficulties for people doing their best to manage this current outbreak.

The information war about Coronavirus can seem like an onslaught - creating massive stress, for little benefit.

How many people have found themselves listening to hours upon hours of 'updates' from hundreds of points of view and places around the world and yet find very little that contributes concretely as information that they can act upon in their lives?

No wonder people go out and buy toilet paper. Under the weight of all this information and misinformation, it feels like there's little we can do, and yet such a high importance in acting.

According to The Conversation, people living in this time of Coronavirus need some strategies to limit the harm caused by this news-storm.

5 WAYS TO MANAGE YOUR NEWS CONSUMPTION IN TIMES OF CRISIS - THE CONVERSATION¹

1. Deliberately turn on the news to get the key information. Stay clear of long rambling reports or "the vortex of click bait".
2. Dive deep - which means look for 'in depth' articles about topics you want to know more on (they suggest ABC's, AM or 7.30 Report or Channel 10's, The Project).
3. Connect - use social media, but wisely (avoiding being sucked into sponsored ads or feeds and focus on making connections with people you care about).
4. Interrogate - in other words, make sure you are getting news from trustworthy source (for example, the World Health Organisation or Department of Health).
5. Be mindful of children in your household and the possible impact of the news on them.

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MINDFULNESS APPS

OMM

OMM (*One Moment Meditation*) is surprisingly helpful for people who have never meditated before. It guides you through a one minute meditation and provides a five minute instructional video on YouTube to add depth. It has reminders to encourage you to do your brief meditation regularly.

SMILING MIND

Smiling mind is a meditation and a mindfulness app, which has a lot to it. It is both for beginners and for people who meditate regularly. It's simple to get started.

CLEAR FEAR

Clear Fear is an app for anxiety which has a variety of uses, is easy to use and has clear directions and concepts to follow. It is also quite fun!

MEDITATION GAME

The meditation game makes meditation 'fun' (for a minute or two). It isn't a replacement for other meditation, but it does seem to induce relaxation and it's easy. Maybe it's just me, I didn't find it pulled me back after a couple of tries, but it could be a way to 'feel' what meditation is supposed to feel like.

the big story

You need to know

Just reported

Breaking News!

This just in...

latest details

Hot headlines

new information

¹ Source: <https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-5-ways-to-manage-your-news-consumption-in-times-of-crisis-133614>

NORMALISING EMOTIONS: STORIES FROM THE BUSH

Two remote people spoke to me about the impact of Coronavirus on their lives up to this point. Both of them are women with young children, living on remote stations in Northern Queensland.

Both said they felt relatively protected from both the virus and the symptoms of 'panic' that seem to be surrounding it. I was very interested in hearing how they have managed to keep their worries in perspective while still being impacted by the media frenzy this has whipped up.

Here are some of their responses:

"I know that it's happening, and I know that it's big, but I have been able to keep it at bay for myself. It's like it is on the other side of my door, if you know what I mean."

"In a way, it's not that different to my ordinary life. I am a planner, and organiser, and a doer.

That's how life is out here - we get things done. This is just another thing to plan around and not get stressed about. If we had to get stressed about everything, we'd never get out the front door."

"It's a worry, but in another way of thinking, we are used to being isolated - if it comes to that. Being in self-isolation with my family wouldn't be a problem - it's what we're used to anyway. The children do distance ed already. We communicate with family by phone and internet - it's what we do."

"There's way too much about it online right now. I feel like I could easily get swamped in it all. So I just close my phone and ignore it, even when my friends from various places try and bombard me with all these horror stories!"

I tried to understand what was making the most difference here. Is it because people living remote feel like this is something far away, that won't really affect them? One of these people replied to me:

"No, I mean, it's a choice I make. I could let myself get bothered, for sure. I know it could easily come here - all it would take is one of the workers coming in from a local town, or when we go get groceries, we might catch it then. But for me, I choose not to get bothered. It's like when our cattle catch a disease - we just need to factor it in and do what we need to do. That's all."

What made the difference to me, hearing this, was that at that exact time I was in 'self-isolation' because I had an ordinary cold. It was such great advice to me: "being at home - it's just something I have to factor in, not get stressed about." So, I relaxed, and sat down with my computer.



COPING WITH STRESS DURING THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

It is normal to be feeling sad, stressed, confused, scared or angry during a crisis.

Talking to people you trust can help. Contact your friends and family.



Maintain a healthy lifestyle while staying at home.

Maintain a proper diet, sleep, exercise and social contacts with loved ones at home and by email or phone with other family and friends.

Refrain from smoking, alcohol or other drugs to deal with your emotions.

If you feel overwhelmed, talk to a health worker or counsellor. Have a plan, where to go to and how to seek help for physical and mental health needs if required.

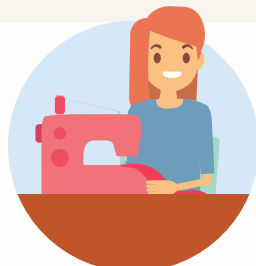


Get the facts.

Gather information that will help you accurately determine your risk so that you can take reasonable precautions. Find a credible source you can trust such as www.health.qld.gov.au or, www.who.int

Limit worry and agitation.

By lessening the time you and your family spend watching or listening to media coverage that you perceive as upsetting.



Draw on skills you have used in the past that have helped you to manage previous life's adversities.

Use those skills to help you manage your emotions during the challenging time of this outbreak.

STAYING CONNECTED WITH OUR CHILDREN

Now is the time to stay close to our children. They need to feel us beside them so they don't feel as worried as they are. We need to be honest with them and let them know that good people from around the world are working very hard to keep them safe and healthy. Our children will believe us, we love them deeply.



HERE ARE SOME WAYS THAT PARENTS AND CARERS CAN SHARE CONNECTION, COMFORT AND CARE WITH THEIR CHILDREN RIGHT NOW.

Be honest

"COVID-19 is a sickness like a cold. Some people will get it. Maybe someone in our family might get sick. We are all a little bit scared. Being scared is a sign that we are concentrating on being safe. There are really good people like doctors who know what to do. They are helping to figure it out."

Acknowledge

day to day disruptions

"Even if school and your after school activities stop for a while, they will start up again. How about we think about some ways of doing versions of these things together at home if we need to?"

Validate their feelings

"I know I might look worried sometimes. Mums or dads get worried too, just like children. I know it can make you feel scared. But I am ok." "It is ok to be feeling scared, or worried, or whatever you are feeling right now. You can share that with me whenever you need to."

Remain available

"You can talk with me whenever you need to. I will answer any questions you have. If I don't know the answers, I will find out and then I will tell you."

Look to history

"There have been sicknesses like this before. And they have stopped. Clever people from around the world have worked them out together. The scientists are doing this right now with this one."
Create some quiet time Find a regular time where you can just be still with children. Stroke their hair. Watch a favourite show on TV. Listen to music together. Let them decide if they want to talk. Be present with them. Enjoy it.

Have fun

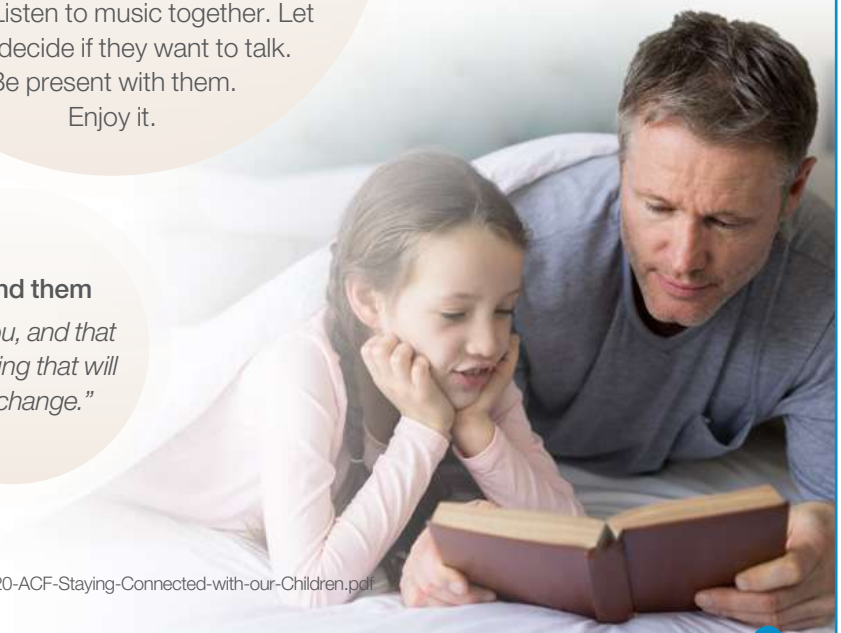
Share some time with your children that is just for them, and let them lead the play. *"Let's do some things that you like to do."*

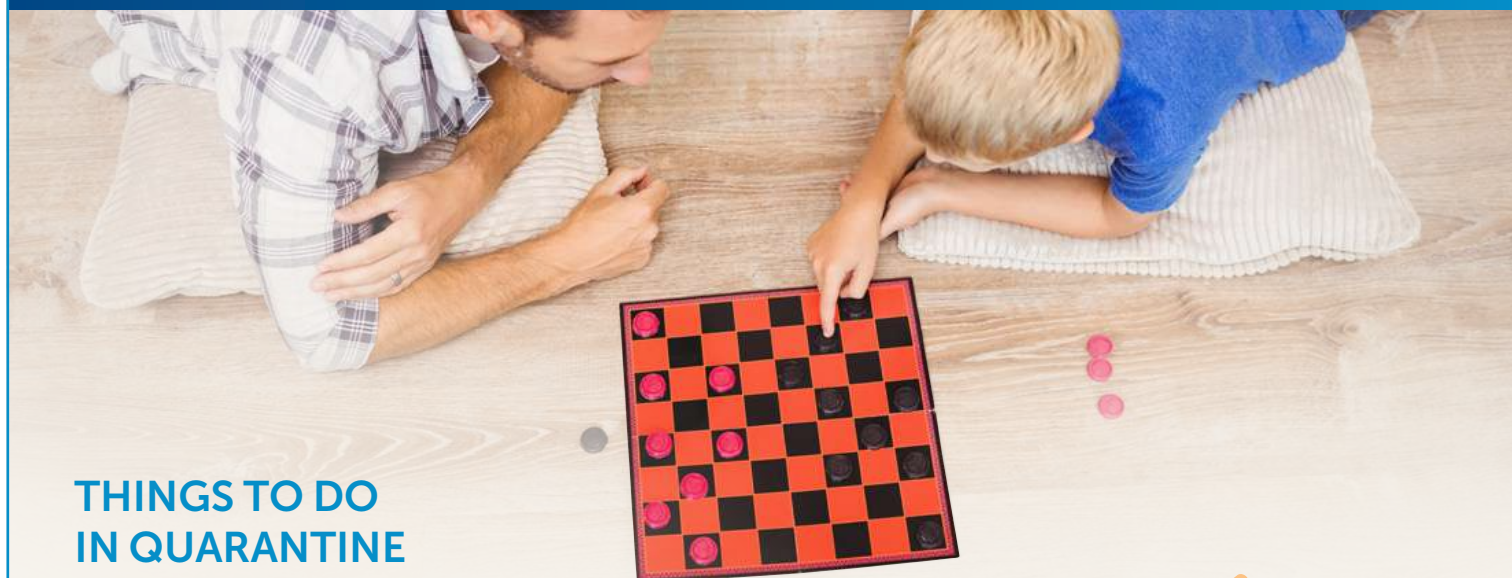
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Find a regular time where you can just be still with children. Stroke their hair. Watch a favourite show on TV. Listen to music together. Let them decide if they want to talk. Be present with them. Enjoy it.

Remind them

"I love you, and that is one thing that will never change."





THINGS TO DO IN QUARANTINE OR SELF ISOLATION

- ☐ Read a book or magazine
- ☐ Hug or climb a tree
- ☐ Journal or write a letter
- ☐ Use kind and compassionate self-talk
- ☐ Make a collage or scrapbook
- ☐ Rest, nap or take a break
- ☐ Go on a hike, walk or run
- ☐ Take good care of the earth
- ☐ Drink water
- ☐ Play a board game
- ☐ Do something kind
- ☐ Make and play with slime
- ☐ Discover treasures in nature
- ☐ Take a shower or bath
- ☐ Exercise
- ☐ Drink a warm cup of tea
- ☐ Forgive, let go, move on
- ☐ Practice yoga
- ☐ Garden or do yard work
- ☐ Jump on a trampoline
- ☐ Cuddle or play with your pet
- ☐ Practice gratitude
- ☐ Do a puzzle
- ☐ Blow bubbles
- ☐ Ride a bike or skateboard



- ☐ Smile and laugh
- ☐ Create origami
- ☐ Cook or bake
- ☐ Ask for help
- ☐ Weave, knit or crochet
- ☐ Talk to someone you trust
- ☐ Build something
- ☐ Visualize a peaceful place
- ☐ Stretch
- ☐ Make Art
- ☐ Use positive affirmations
- ☐ Take slow, mindful breaths
- ☐ Clean, declutter or organize
- ☐ Use aromatherapy
- ☐ Cry
- ☐ Listen to music
- ☐ Get plenty of sleep
- ☐ Try or learn something new
- ☐ Use a stress ball or other fidget
- ☐ Take or look at photographs
- ☐ Kick, bounce or throw a ball
- ☐ Eat healthy
- ☐ Play outside
- ☐ Sing and/or dance



REACHING OUT

We know that one of the biggest difficulties when something like the Coronavirus comes along is uncertainty.

It can get scary, not knowing what will happen next.

It can get scary, thinking of all the possible impacts on our loved ones and our own lives.

It can get scary when things seem to be happening too fast and the pace has overtaken us.

And it can become worse when people seem to behave in strange ways - probably because they are stressed as well.

At times like these, we need a few things:

- We need support - and we need people around we can rely on.
- We need a way to maintain contact with each other and our humanity.
- And for people living out bush, there is a proud history of helping each other out.

SO WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP EACH OTHER OUT IN THIS CRISIS?

- What we are suggesting is getting together—even if not in person.
- Local groups of neighbours, or putting together online support groups.
- Some of us have more time stuck inside than normal - so let's use it by reaching out to others who are also indoors!

[Some of us have more time stuck inside than normal - so let's use it by reaching out to others who are also indoors!]

HOW TO START A FACEBOOK OR WHATSAPP CORONAVIRUS SUPPORT GROUP

1. Chat with or message 2 or 3 friends - see if they are interested.
2. If so, choose a name for the group (or decide as a group). The name should reflect the people you want to join in. For example, is it a local group, say a neighbourhood? Is it a group that belongs to a workplace or a profession? Or is it just for your family?
3. Decide if you want it to be open, or by invitation only. Either way, you need someone who knows how to be the administrator so they can edit responses or modify membership if someone decides to be too annoying.
4. Think about why you are doing it and what you are trying to achieve. How is this different from just a normal Facebook profile and message interaction? Who do you want this to help and how? Write this up as the first post.
5. Get the ball rolling - bring up a few topics you think would be helpful to discuss and get them going. Make sure you invite responses by asking questions. If you think someone in the group would have a particular interest in a topic, mention them by name (so they will be notified).
6. Maybe start slowly; don't expect too big a response too soon. It might grow on people, but in the meantime it's probably better not to bombard them with posts.

WHAT YOU CAN DO...

- > Be ready to help each other out or give each other some reassurance.
- > Skype or message each other - just to check in.
- > Visit - if someone is in isolation, talk to them through the door or from the verandah.
- > Drop off some goods on the front steps. A fruit pie, toilet paper even.
- > Offer advice and suggestions when problems arise - a time honoured tradition.
- > Figure out if someone needs any extra help - or if someone is doing it tough. If so, it might be time to get others involved or seek external support.



Managing through COVID-19

"CABIN FEVER" AND ONLINE COUNSELLING

'Cabin fever' is a term being used to describe people's negative reactions to being locked in isolation due to the Coronavirus, (says Jennifer Boddy, Associate Professor at Griffith University). This pandemic is causing a huge amount of stress in people's lives, but the effect of quarantine has its own peculiar impacts.

Among these effects, according to Jennifer, are an increase in fear, anxiety, possible rises in alcohol use and domestic violence, loneliness and a range of other stresses. For people who are already disadvantaged, this raises additional issues including lack of food, neglect, or stigma.¹

One story out of Wuhan China describes how these problems were challenged by groups of social workers and volunteers, who set up websites and online groups and then offered textual counselling support to thousands of people undergoing isolation.²

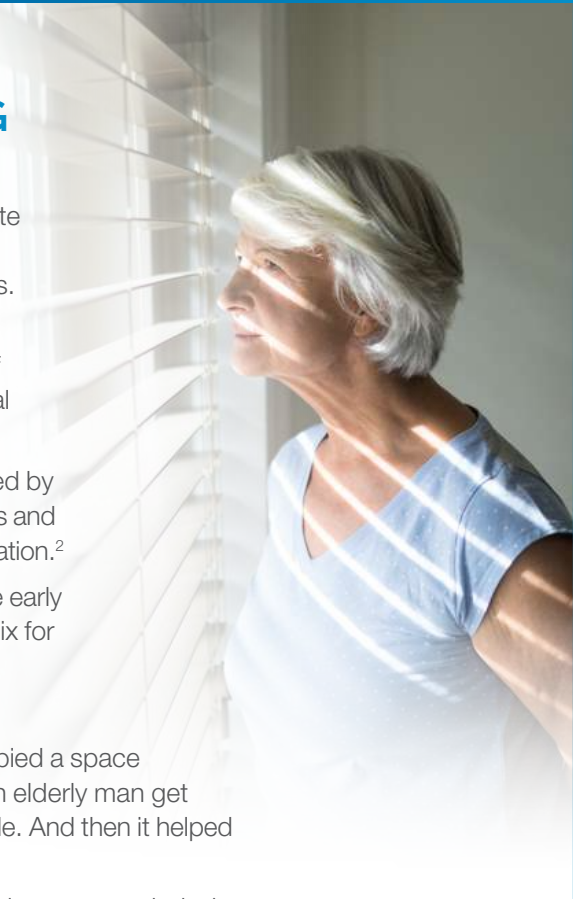
He Huijihan is a social worker who found herself in 14 days of quarantine in the early days of the outbreak. Instead of watching whatever is China's version of Netflix for 14 days, she joined an online network and began counselling people.

She said within 5 hours of inception of the group, there were 300 members.

It was more than just counselling, however. It was a social network that occupied a space in which people couldn't meet face to face. The network managed to help an elderly man get into hospital when he was desperately ill - despite there being no beds available. And then it helped find him a ventilator, when ventilators were in short supply.

From a mental health point of view, the danger of 'cabin fever' is that isolation is compounded when people lose the contact with others that keeps them 'in balance'.

One way of responding to this is to create opportunities to break the isolation - to develop communities that can sustain even if we are inside our four walls.



"FACE COVID"

How to respond effectively to the Coronavirus crisis by Dr Russ Harris, author of The Happiness Trap.

"FACE COVID" is a set of practical steps for responding effectively to the Coronavirus crisis, using the principles of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT).



Read more about FACE COVID [HERE](#).



Watch the video [HERE](#).

Here is a quick summary of the key steps:

- F** - Focus on what's in your control.
- A** - Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings.
- C** - Come back into your body.
- E** - Engage in what you're doing.

- C** - Committed action.
- O** - Opening up.
- V** - Values.
- I** - Identify resources.
- D** - Disinfect and distance.

¹ Source: <https://indaily.com.au/opinion/2020/03/16/cabin-fever-the-psychological-impact-of-quarantine-lockdown/>

² Source: <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1005250/life-on-wuhans-virtual-front-lines>