



COVID-19 Mental Health Relief Scheme

SELF-HELP GUIDE

COVID-19 Mental Health Relief Scheme

Self-help Guide

**Looking after your mental health during the pandemic
and whilst in quarantine.**

Thank you to the Covid-19 Mental Health Relief Committee (a group of clinicians in Hong Kong) for volunteering their time and support towards the Covid-19 Mental Health Relief Scheme.

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How to use this booklet

This booklet was designed as a self-help guide that you can read and work through on your own and at your own pace. There may be parts of this that feel very helpful and relevant to you, and other parts that do not apply. We urge you to read through everything, but it may be that there are only some parts you end up using. As you go through the booklet, there are plenty of opportunities for you to complete sections about your own experiences. This will help you to identify the materials that are most useful for you, so you can tailor the guide to your own needs.

What to do in an emergency

There is a list of available community resources at the end of this booklet that offers additional support. However, if you are currently in a crisis and feel that you may act on suicidal thoughts, have seriously harmed yourself, or are in a life-threatening situation, call 999 or go to your nearest emergency room for immediate assistance.

If you are feeling extremely distressed or unsafe or having suicidal thoughts, call the hotlines below at any time to reach trained individuals who can give you the support you need.

Caritas Family Crisis Support Centre

Individuals or families in crisis or distress

24-hour hotline (Cantonese, English and Mandarin): 18288

Sucide Prevention Services

Individuals who are suicidal or in distress


24-hour hotline (Cantonese): 2382 0000

The Samaritans

Individuals who are suicidal or in distress

24-hour hotline (Multilingual): 2896 0000





Section 1: Managing stress during COVID-19 & whilst in quarantine

What are some of the challenges we are facing due to the COVID-19 outbreak?

Although COVID-19 is a physical condition, the outbreak has had huge consequences for mental health and wellbeing on a large scale. We have dealt and are dealing with:

- Worries about catching the virus ourselves or passing it on to loved ones
- Disruption to our routines
- Having to work remotely
- Arranging childcare given school closures & constant changes
- Economic uncertainty and threats to job security/livelihood
- Concerns about clashing opinions or views, relating to the pandemic
- Disconnection from friends and family due to social distancing
- Trying to find reliable information in the age of "fake news"
- Disruption to our communities
- Fear of supplies running low and panic buying
- Stress from the frequent changes in rules and unpredictability regarding travel restrictions
- Prolonged separation from family who live in other countries
- Uncertainty about when the outbreak will end and whether life can go back to normal

Once you have read through the list above, make a cross next to any that you feel have been relevant for you recently.

If there are any additional challenges that you are facing because of the outbreak, that are not listed above, you can write them here:



What are the challenges of being in quarantine, as well as being exposed to prolonged periods of isolation and uncertainty?

One of the measures that many governments are taking is to place people in home quarantine and/or quarantine hotels or facilities to limit disease spread. Although this is seen as a necessary public health measure, it can mean acute stress for the individuals who are placed in quarantine. On top of the challenges we all face in relation to the outbreak, people in quarantine are subject to a set of unique stressors, including:

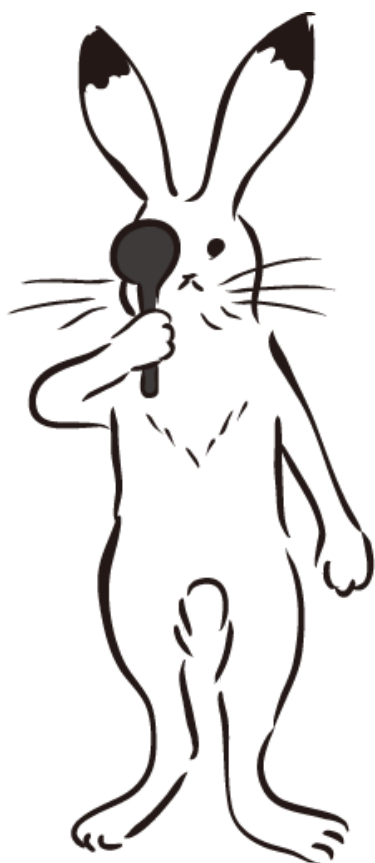
- Being separated from loved ones
- Experiencing stigma or discrimination from others about potentially having the virus
- Being out of your home environment (if sent to a quarantine facility or in a hotel)
- Loneliness & isolation
- Trying to keep up with work or childcare demands from afar
- Limited access to fresh air, space, exercise and fresh fruit and vegetables

Once you have read through the above points, make a cross next to any that you feel have affected you whilst in quarantine.

How can this affect our mental health?

When we are faced with difficult and stressful circumstances, our physical health and our mental health can suffer. When our mental health is “good”, we would say that we can¹:

- Feel relatively confident in yourself and have positive self-esteem
- Feel and express a range of emotions
- Build and maintain good relationships with others
- Feel engaged with the world around you
- Live and work productively
- Cope with the stresses of daily life
- Adapt and manage in times of change and uncertainty



When we are exposed to stressful circumstances, it can be hard to maintain good mental health, and we may see changes in the above. We know that it is normal for mental health to fluctuate, and we always need to consider what is going on in the background for us. For someone who is placed in quarantine or is exposed to prolonged periods of isolation and uncertainty, we would expect changes in their mental health during their exposure to these circumstances. However, there comes a point where mental health becomes a problem, and this is something that we need to keep an eye out for.

¹ Definition from Mind UK.

A good way of measuring this is to check in with yourself and ask: "Has my mental health started to get in the way of me being able to..."

- Do what I need to do (e.g. get up, stick to a routine, complete my work and family responsibilities)
- Do what I want to do (e.g. connect with loved ones, engage with hobbies, stay active)

If this is the case, we need to pay closer attention to our mental health and look at putting some coping mechanisms in place.

Pause for a moment and consider these signs of good mental health. How would you rate them over the past week (where 1 = I have not managed to do this at all, 10 = I have managed this perfectly)?

	Rating
Feel relatively confident in yourself and have positive self-esteem	<input type="text"/>
Feel and express a range of emotions	<input type="text"/>
Build and maintain good relationships with others	<input type="text"/>
Feel engaged with the world around you	<input type="text"/>
Live and work productively	<input type="text"/>
Cope with the stresses of daily life	<input type="text"/>
Adapt and manage in times of change and uncertainty	<input type="text"/>

What are the signs that mental health has become a problem?

We are usually good at spotting warning signs when there is something wrong with our physical health, but we may not be as tuned into the ones affecting our mental health.

Some of the signs that our mental health is getting worse include:

- Finding ourselves unable to stop or control worrying
- Not getting pleasure or interest from our regular activities
- Lots of procrastination/opting out of things we would usually do
- Changes in sleep, appetite or energy levels
- Increased use of alcohol or other substances
- Struggling to concentrate
- Increased restlessness or feeling lethargic
- Feeling more irritable or tearful than usual



With these changes, we might start to see symptoms of two common mental health problems: depression and anxiety.

Depression is a low mood that persists for more than a couple of weeks, or keeps coming back again and again.

Anxiety is feeling tense, worried or afraid about things that are about to happen, or things that could happen in the future².

² Definitions adapted Mind UK.



Remember that the context is important - these symptoms are likely reactive (because of the circumstances that you find yourself in) and temporary. However, it is still important to address them.

It is important to mention that if you are someone who has experienced mental health problems in the past, you may be at slightly higher risk of mental health deterioration in the future. This might mean keeping a close eye on these warning signs so that you can catch them early and do something about them.

Read through the above and highlight any of the warning signs you have noticed in yourself.

Tips for managing increased stress in relation to COVID-19, quarantine & prolonged periods of isolation & uncertainty

In this section, we take you through a number of ideas about how to look after your physical and mental health during the outbreak. Some of these might seem pretty basic, but you'd be amazed at how easily they can drop off once we are in a stressful situation, and how much of a difference they can make if we pay them closer attention.

Under each heading, you'll find a section entitled 'what can I do?'. Throughout each section, you will see some text in **bold** which invites you to write some observations, or plan some things that you can try to manage the difficulties.

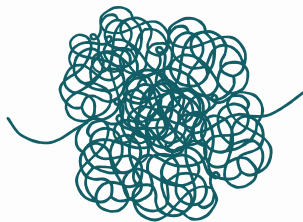
As with other parts of this booklet, we suggest that you read through them all. At the end, we will prompt you to pick out the ones that you think you might find most helpful and plan a time to try them out. Alternatively, you can make some notes as you go through them.



Notice your thoughts and feelings

During stressful times, our thoughts can become very negative. We might also fall into what is known as an unhelpful “thinking trap” which can cause our thoughts to spiral and remain very negative. See if you recognise and relate to any of the following unhelpful thinking traps (on the next page) that we can all commonly fall into at times.

Unhelpful thinking traps



Catastrophising

Seeing the worst possible outcome of a situation, and overestimating the chances of disaster, even though the reality may be that the problem itself is smaller than we are assuming it to be.

e.g. “Things will never get better”



Mental Filter

Having “tunnel vision”, acknowledging only one aspect of a situation and overlooking the rest. Usually involves over-focusing on the negative parts of a situation and ignoring or dismissing what’s positive about a situation.

e.g. “I made a mistake!” (overfocusing on failures, despite having also done things well)



Black & White Thinking/ All-or-Nothing Thinking

Seeing only one extreme or the other. “It is either right or wrong, or good or bad”, and believing that there are no in-betweens or ‘shades of grey’. Thinking in absolutes such as “always”, “never” or “every”.

e.g. “I never do a good job on anything”



High Standards

Believing that things “should” or “must” be done a certain way all the time, and following a strict set of rules, which can place unreasonable demands or pressure onto yourself and others, and also create unrealistic expectations.

e.g. “I should always do things 100%, I must never make mistakes”

Unhelpful thinking traps



Emotional Reasoning / "Feelings as Facts"

Assuming that 'how you feel' (your emotions) reflects the way things are. Interpreting situations and drawing conclusions based on the way you are feeling.

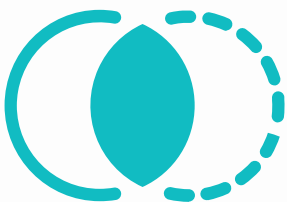
e.g. "everything will turn out badly, because I feel that something bad is going to happen", or "I feel like a bad person, therefore I must be a bad person"



Personalising & Self-Blame

Believing that you're responsible for things that are outside of your control. Taking the blame when things go wrong, even though you may not be entirely responsible, or not responsible at all.

e.g. "It's all my fault, it's all because of me"



Compare and Despair

Seeing only the good and positive aspects in others, and getting upset when comparing ourselves negatively against them.

e.g. "others are doing better than me"



Jumping to Conclusions

When we interpret a situation with little or no evidence, and assume that we know what someone is thinking ('mind reading'), or when we make unhelpful predictions about what is going to happen in the future ('fortune telling'), assuming things will turn out badly.

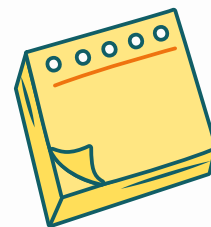
e.g. "they think I did a bad job" or "nothing will go well"



Overgeneralisation

Making broad or sweeping assumptions from a single or few events, or taking one instance in the past or present, and imposing it on all current or future situations.

e.g. "Because I didn't manage to complete that last task, I am not going to be able to complete anything"



Negative Labelling

Making generalised statements about ourselves based on specific situations. Using a 'label' on ourselves even though there might be many examples that don't fit with that label. Having a negative belief about yourself and thinking it applies to everything you do.

e.g. "I am stupid, everything I say is stupid"

We know that unhelpful thinking traps like these can be more common when we are faced with stressful circumstances. **Note down which of these unhelpful thinking traps you¹ find yourself falling into, and see if you can catch them in action.**

When it comes to feelings, we can expect a significant emotional response to the sudden disruption that comes with prolonged periods of isolation and uncertainty. You might find yourself experiencing any of the following:

- Fear (what's going to happen?)
- Worry (what if I lose my job?)
- Shame (I should be handling this better)
- Anger (why is this happening now?)
- Overwhelmed (I can't cope with this)
- Guilt (I should have been more careful/I shouldn't have chosen to travel)


It is important to remember that any of these feelings, or any other emotional fluctuations you might be experiencing, are completely normal and expected during such times of challenge and uncertainty. Our emotions are designed to alert us to problems in our lives, driving us and motivating us to take action. They are an expected by-product of challenging times, and they do not make us defective.

What can I do?

Try to tune into your thoughts and listen out for thinking traps. Try to take a step back and evaluate your thoughts for how realistic and how helpful they are.

Once you do notice you can relate to a particular thinking trap, it might help to prompt yourself with:

- **Is there any evidence behind what I am thinking?**
- **Is there another way of looking at this?**
- **What would be a more helpful way of thinking about this?**



When it comes to feelings, it can help to increase your self-awareness. When you notice yourself feeling a strong emotion, try to pause, take note of what you are feeling, and ask yourself what your emotion is telling you that you need in this moment. We only experience pain in relation to things we care about; your emotions are a way of alerting you to painful circumstances in your life. When we increase our awareness of our emotions, we can start to use them as information to help us to better understand our needs and take action to help us to feel better.

You might want to use a mood journal to note down some of your difficult thoughts and feelings when they occur, or you could use a monitoring app as an alternative way to become more aware of your feelings each day. There are many apps available for free, or available through subscription. This can highlight patterns in your emotions and help you to identify which emotions you are experiencing and need to address.



If you are experiencing a lot of difficult and overwhelming emotions, learning some simple grounding and self-soothing techniques can be beneficial in helping you to manage your emotions. You may already be practicing some form of self-soothing or grounding without even realising it, but the overall idea is that these exercises can prompt you to tune out from your internal thoughts and feelings, and prompt you to redirect your focus towards an aspect of the physical environment. By doing so, these exercises can help us to calm our bodies and minds, and allow us to feel more in control. See below for some suggestions on specific techniques, but you may also want to come up with some of your own ideas:

5, 4, 3, 2, 1 Grounding Technique

Name 5 things that you can SEE
Name 4 things that you can HEAR
Name 3 things that you can SMELL
Name 2 things that you can TOUCH
Name 1 thing that you can TASTE

Using your 5 senses is a simple and efficient way to refocus your attention away from your difficult thoughts and feelings, and towards the present moment.



Mindful Breathing

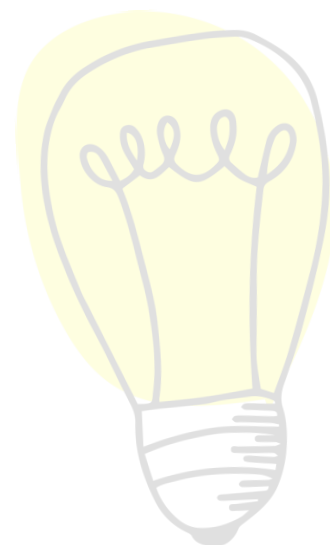
Deliberately slow the pace of your breathing down, focusing your attention towards taking a slow, deep breath through your nose, and paying attention to how your chest rises and expands, before slowly and gently breathing out, whilst being aware of your muscles relaxing. Aim to repeat this for 1-2 minutes, or until you notice feeling physically and mentally calmer and more relaxed.

It's natural for your difficult thoughts and feelings to linger or enter your awareness whilst you're attempting this exercise, and it's okay for your attention to drift. But no matter how many times this happens, just use this as your prompt to bring your attention back to your breathing and focus on how your body feels.

If you are experiencing lots of painful thoughts and feelings, you might also find it useful to read through the tips on self-compassion, which you will find on page 27 and 28.

Write down something you might try to help you with your painful **thoughts**:

Write down something you might try to help you with your painful **feelings**:



Monitor how often you are checking the news and be wary of fake news

It is tempting to want to stay on top of the latest updates, and our news apps are constantly delivering us bulletins detailing the latest case numbers and changes around the world. However, there is a limit to how much constant bombardment with news updates we can take. Such constant exposure can have detrimental effects on our mental health, by keeping us highly aware of the threats we are facing and distracting us from fully engaging in other tasks.

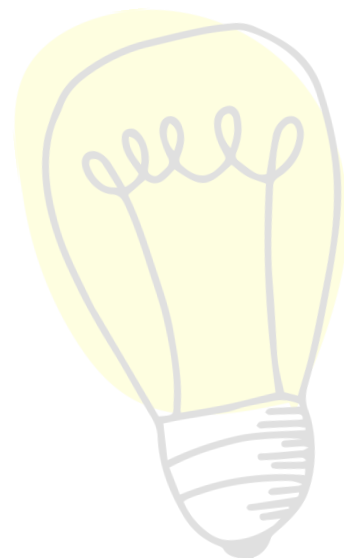
We also know that there is a lot of “fake news”, often circulating on messaging apps like WhatsApp. Messages that look extremely official and convincing are being forwarded from group to group, causing alarm and extreme behaviours like panic buying. Many of these messages later transpire to be hoaxes.

What can I do?

If you think that checking the news all the time is causing you to feel more worried, try to limit your checks to once or twice per day, maximum. This can help you to stay updated with any important news, whilst allowing you to spend the rest of your day engaged in tasks that truly help you move forward in life.

In this age, we can all benefit from being more savvy about how we interpret news. Take forwarded messages on WhatsApp with a pinch of salt. Stick to reliable medical organisations like the WHO or trusted news sources who are obliged to only present evidence-based information. If information has not come from one of these sources, there is a good chance that it is not entirely accurate.

See if you can identify one trusted source to get your information from. Write it down here:



When will I check this source?

How will I stop myself from checking excessively?

Stay connected - physical distancing, not social disconnection

When we are asked to “socially distance”, we automatically lose a lot of the connection that we get from going about our everyday lives. This is obviously much more pronounced in quarantine, where people are deliberately separated from others. We know that social connection is a significant factor in maintaining wellbeing and managing stress, and so it is normal to feel lonely in quarantine, or during prolonged periods of isolation during COVID.

What can I do?

It is particularly important to stay connected and seek support if you are struggling. Here are some ways to maintain that crucial connection that we all need to help us stay well:

- Stay connected with friends and family using video or phone calls, if face-to-face meetings aren't possible.
- Message close friends and family regularly and ensure regular check-ins are a part of your day
- Write longer e-mails to close friends or family to give you a deeper sense of connection
- Reach out to a friend you have fallen out of contact with to see how they are
- Chat to people online via local interest groups or friendship/dating apps

See if you can note down three ways that you can remain connected during your quarantine or whilst social distancing:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



Looking after your physical health

Our physical health and our mental health are closely linked. If one suffers, the other tends to deteriorate as a result. It is easy for our physical health to deteriorate whilst in quarantine or whilst socially distancing, as many of the things we would usually do to look after ourselves physically are perhaps much harder to access. However, it is important to do what you can to maintain your physical health.

What can I do?



Here are a few things we'd usually try to address in looking after our physical health. All of these are likely to have been affected by Covid-19 in some way. However, in unusual circumstances, we have to think creatively about how we can address our basic health needs. Although it may not be equivalent to what we would usually do, there are still ways to look after our physical health. For example, can you access one of the many free, online, equipment-free workouts that are available on social media? Can you take a look at some sleep hygiene tips to see if you can improve the quality of your sleep?

Take a look at the six areas above, and choose at least three that you can address. Write down something you can do each day to take care of each area:

1.

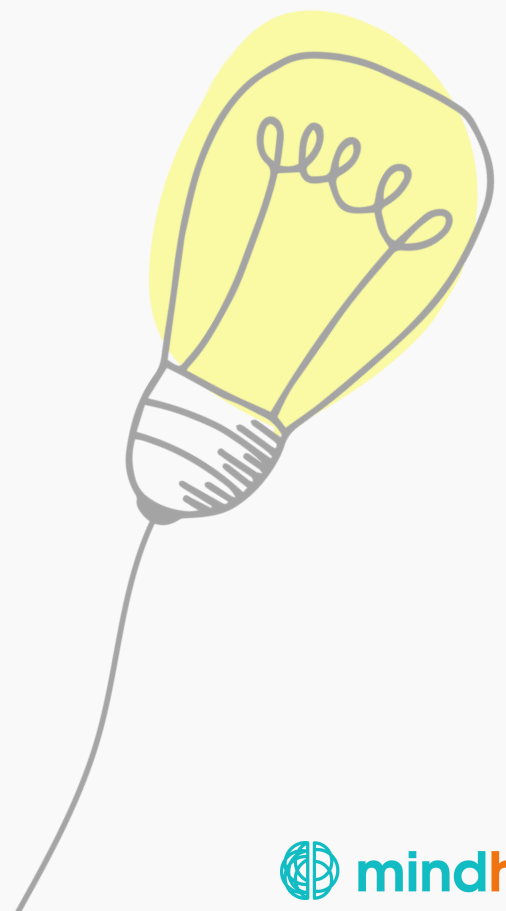
2.

3.

(4.)

(5.)

(6.)



Relaxation

What can I do?

There are a lot of great relaxation exercises available online. Although a relaxation exercise might feel like the last thing you want to do when you're feeling stressed, you will be surprised at how helpful it can be. When we are feeling stressed or overwhelmed, this can affect our bodies (as mental health is linked to physical health), and this can result in feeling 'tense' and stiff in our muscles, which can further lead to muscle aches and pains. A deliberate attempt to therefore relax our bodies through breathing or through muscle relaxation can be particularly helpful towards bringing our stress levels down.

Some examples are:

1. **'Lazy 8' breathing:** youtube.com/watch?v=n0Fv2NnqF5o
2. **Progressive muscle relaxation:** youtube.com/watch?v=86HUcX8ZtAk
3. **Guided imagery - safe place visualisation:** youtube.com/watch?v=pPBxNLpOLNU

Take a look at the above relaxation exercises, and pick one to try. Note down when you plan to try this out:

"I will try exercise 1 / 2 / 3. I will try it today / tomorrow at ____ am/pm".

Set an alarm so you remember to try it.



Find effective ways to spend your time

It is easy for time to pass without us doing very much to help ourselves. When we are experiencing high levels of stress, we might find that we can spend many hours doing things that are mindless, or things that inadvertently drive up our worry and stress levels even more.

What can I do?

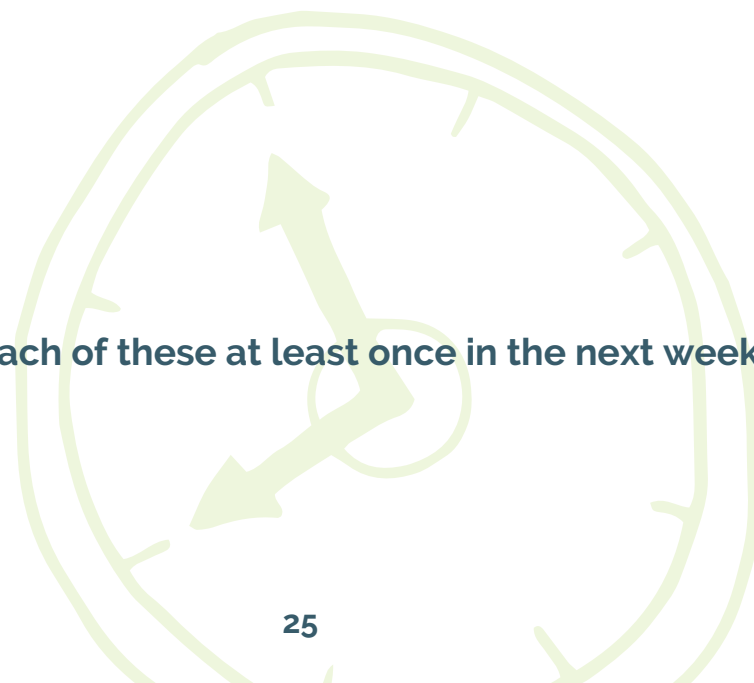
Check in with your experience. Ask yourself - what activities or tasks tend to help me feel like I am being effective? Hint - scrolling through social media usually isn't one of them! But you might find that doing things like working, planning for the future, researching hobbies or interests, or speaking to loved ones helps you to feel effective and that the time spent is worthwhile.

It is important to keep as much structure as you can. Maintaining a consistent routine gives us a boost to our moods, helping us to get things done and preventing us from falling into ineffective, time-wasting activities that make us feel worse.

See if you can write down three things you can do to help you feel like you're being effective with your time:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Plan a time to do each of these at least once in the next week.



Identify your own resources

During times of high stress and uncertainty, it can be difficult to remember what we are good at. We may not realise it, but these characteristics are likely a big part of what keeps us moving forward in our everyday lives, giving our relationships and our livelihoods a helping hand.

What can I do?

Think of someone who really cares for you. What would they say your greatest strengths are? Are you an optimist? Someone who is great at problem-solving, or someone with a flair for design? Are you very knowledgeable on one subject, or a great listener?

If you aren't sure what they'd say, now might be a good opportunity to ask them!

Now is the time to play to your strengths. Every single one of us has resources that we can turn to in times of need. Think about how you can use your individual resources and strengths to help you through this difficult time.

What are three things that people who are close to me would say I am good at?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

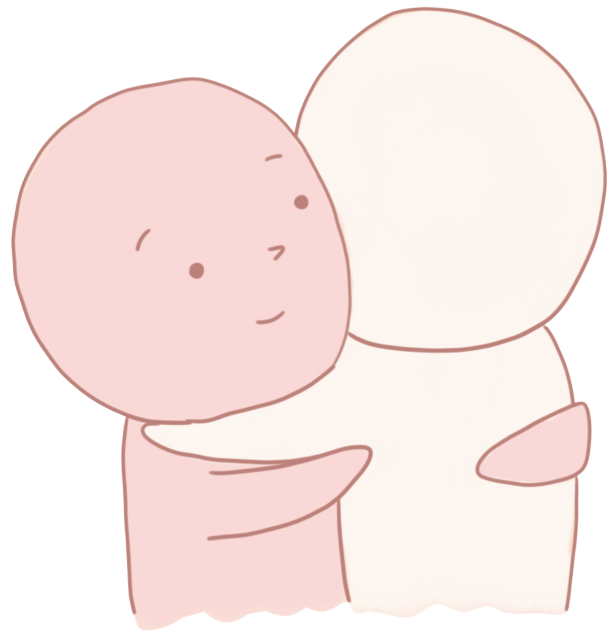
How can I use these strengths and resources to help me get through this period?

E.g. My best friend always tells me how much she enjoys my cooking.

→ So maybe I could use my passion for food to help others? by putting together some of my own recipes and sharing them online?

Practice self-compassion

During times of high stress and uncertainty, it can be difficult to remember what we are good at. We may not realise it, but these characteristics are likely a big part of what keeps us moving forward in our everyday lives, giving our relationships and our livelihoods a helping hand.



“Other people seem to be able to cope just fine”

“There are people with much bigger problems than me, why is this affecting me so much?”

“I mess up the easiest things”

This harsh inner critic can have a huge impact on our mental health. We might particularly find the inner critic showing up during this difficult time. It's a bit like having a highly critical sports coach - if you're constantly being shouted at the whole time and told you're useless, how well does it help you to play your best game?

What can I do?

Try to kick-start some self-compassion for yourself. The next time you notice yourself being self-critical, try asking: “What would I say to a friend who was in this situation?”. This can help you to step away from that inner critic and introduce some kindness, turning this inwards to offer some relief. It's a bit like turning that critical coach into someone with a bit more constructive feedback to give.

For example:

Critical inner voice:

*Why are you finding this so hard?
You don't even have the virus,
you're so ungrateful!*

Compassionate alternatives:

*There has been so much change
and uncertainty over the last few
months, it's normal to be finding
things difficult right now. Cut
yourself some slack - you're
doing the best you can!*

See if you can challenge your harsh inner critic with self-compassion. When you notice that self-critic talking to you, see if you can catch what it is saying, write it down, then prompt yourself with “what would I say to a friend” to come up with a compassionate alternative. You can record your examples here:

Critical inner voice:

Compassionate alternatives:

Critical inner voice:

Compassionate alternatives:

Critical inner voice:

Compassionate alternatives:

Taking these tips forward

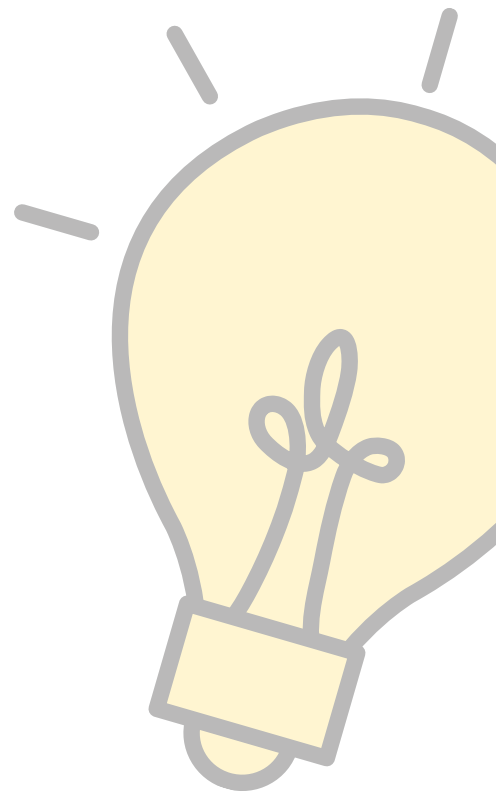
Now is your chance to try some of these out.

Note down three of the above areas that stood out to you, that you think could be helpful to address:

1.

2.

3.



Now set yourself a challenge to work through the tips for these three areas in the next week.

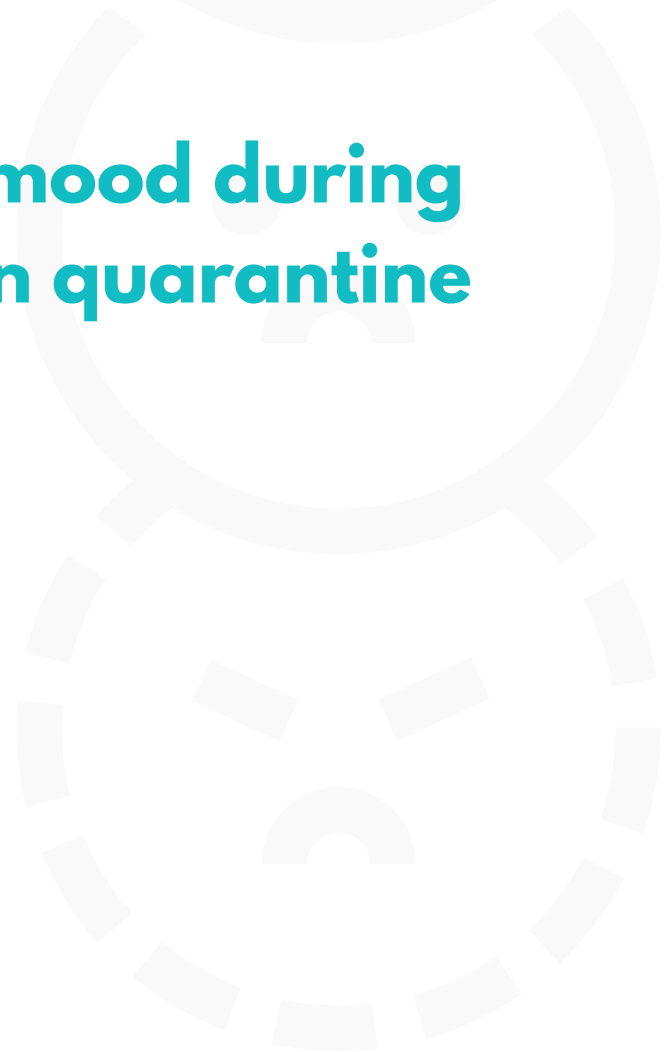
We've reached the end of this section! On the next page, you will find a record where you can make some notes about what you did to manage stress. There is also a space to record how this went so that you can review and look back on this.

Stress management record

Day	What did I do to try to manage stress today?	What went well?	What were the challenges?	What could I try to help myself to overcome this next time?



Section 2: Looking after your mood during COVID-19 & whilst in quarantine



How can being exposed to prolonged periods of isolation and uncertainty affect our mood?

There are a number of factors that affect our mood. This includes biological, situational, psychological, social and physical factors. You might remember from Section 1 that when we have “good mental health”, it means we can feel and express a range of emotions. It does not mean that we should feel happy all the time, but we should be able to experience a sense of happiness at least some of the time and not find ourselves feeling low, sad or hopeless for prolonged periods.

One area that is particularly important to maintaining a “good” level of mood is behaviour. Although we may not be as aware of this when we are feeling well, there are a number of things that we need to do regularly in order to protect our mood. Studies have shown that regular participation in activities that provide a sense of pleasure, achievement and mastery, are essential in preventing depressed or low mood (Beck et al., 1979).

If you are someone who does not usually struggle with low mood, you will probably find that when you are going about your regular routine, you do many tasks and activities each day that give you a sense of:



What do we mean by pleasure, achievement and mastery ('PAM')?

Pleasure

Things that we enjoy. This is different for each of us; for some people, it might mean participating in hobbies; for others, it might be reading a good book.

Achievement

Successfully completing tasks we intended to do. This may be attained through work tasks, completing chores or through hobbies, like completing a difficult crossword puzzle.

Mastery

Improving our knowledge or skills in a particular area. This might come from accomplishing a difficult work task, improving our abilities in a sport or finishing a level in a computer game.

Some tasks or activities might allow us to experience a sense of more than one of these. For example, improving our skills in a dance class can give us a sense of pleasure, achievement and mastery. Ideally, we need to experience a degree of each of the above every day to keep our mood healthy; and we probably don't realise how much of a boost we can get from consistently checking things off each day. These don't have to be "big" things - they can be the small, day to day tasks that keep you busy, engaged and motivated. Once we start to lose out on things that provide us with 'PAM', our moods can suffer.

Think about your usual routine. See if you can name three things that you would usually do that would give you a sense of **pleasure**:

1.

2.

3.

Now consider what usually gives you a sense of **achievement**, and see if you can name three things here (it's OK if some of them also appear on the 'pleasure' list):

1.

2.

3.

Finally, see if you can list three things that you usually do that give you a sense of **mastery**. (again, it's OK if something appears on more than one list):

1.

2.

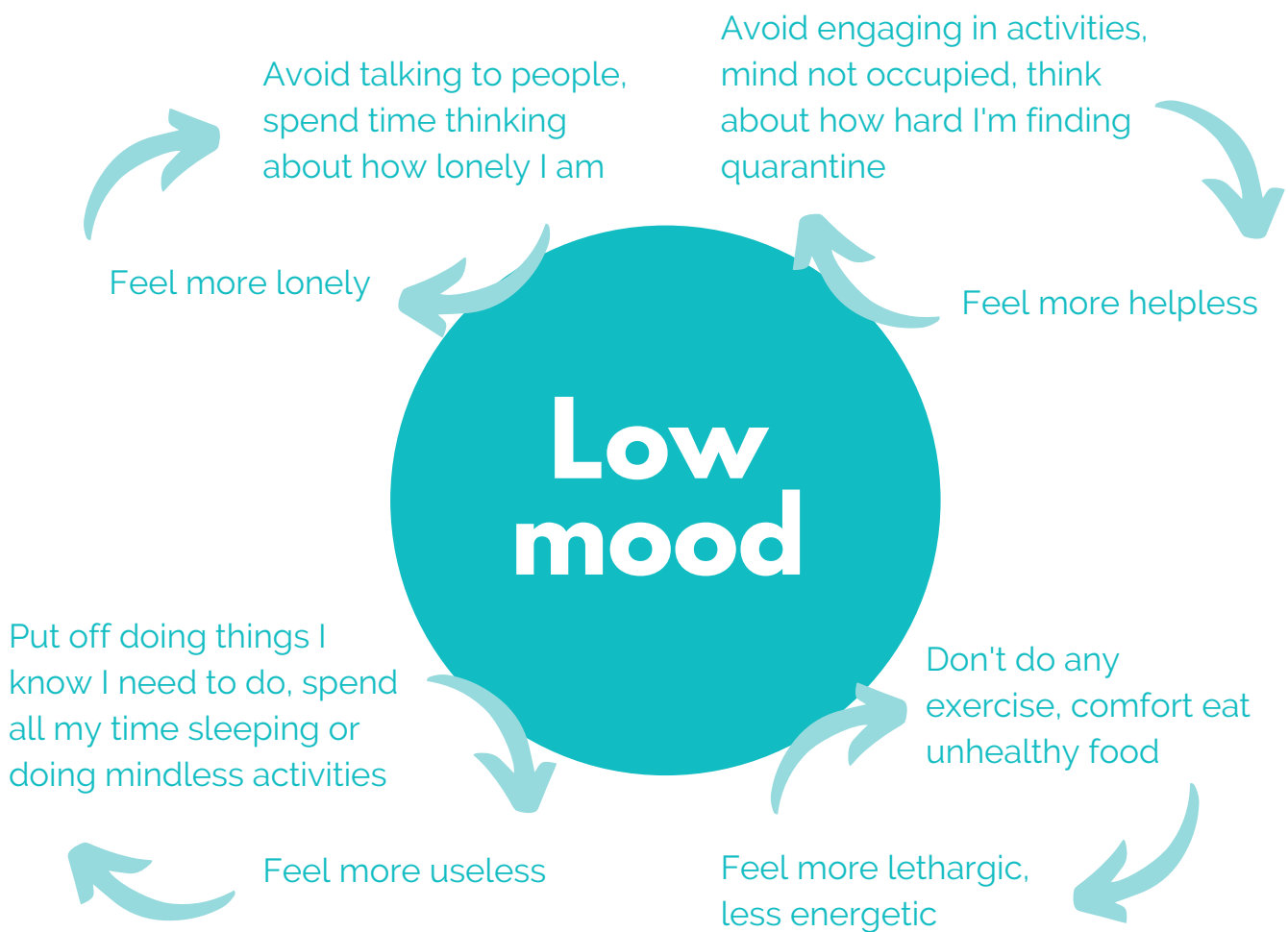
3.

As a result of the Covid-19 outbreak, many of us have been suddenly forced into a new environment that leaves us unable to access many of our regular activities. This might mean that many of the things that usually provide us with that vital 'PAM' are now no longer accessible, and our mood can worsen as a result.



What happens when we don't get our daily dose of 'PAM'?

Once we are deprived of our opportunities for 'PAM', we might find ourselves with more time on our hands. We can slip into patterns of avoidance and other habits that, unintentionally, keep us feeling low. The diagram³ below illustrates how this might happen:



It is important that we recognise when this might be happening, so that we can catch some of these 'vicious cycles' that feed into and worsen the low mood.

³ Adapted from Veale (2008).

What can we do to improve this?

Even though we may not be able to do the things we would usually do to meet our daily quota of 'PAM', we can still try to get some of what we need. It does not matter if many of the things that you would usually do for pleasure, achievement and mastery are not accessible right now. All we are looking for is ensuring that you get enough activity to keep you ticking over during COVID-19.

To try to increase our levels of activity, we can think about:

1. Things we usually do that are still possible
2. Things we would not usually do but are available to us

You might want to use the 'activity idea checklist' below to help you identify some activities that you could do during quarantine or during social distancing. You can also look at the list you made above to identify the things you would usually do to get your 'PAM', to see if any of those things are still possible.

When identifying activities, you should look for things that appeal to you. Each of us is unique, and something that gives one person a sense of pleasure or achievement may seem unappealing to someone else! Most importantly, it has to be meaningful and enjoyable to you. Look for things that appeal to your **interests**.

Try to align activities with our personal **values** when deciding on how to spend our time. We will usually find that 'PAM' activities tie into things that are important to us. To give yourself some clues of what your values might be, if you don't know already, think about the following questions:

When I look back on this period, how would I like to say that I used my time?

If someone was writing my biography, what would I like them to say about how I coped during this time?

The ideas that come up for you here may give you some clues about the types of activity that are meaningful for you. They are likely to give you a sense of that vital pleasure, achievement and mastery that we all need.

Activity Idea Checklist

- Do an online workout
- Do some yoga
- Do some stretching
- Do a 'no equipment' workout
- Take photos on your phone
- Look through old photos and make an album
- Doodle/sketch/colour
- Draw or paint (if you have the materials)
- Make a vision board
- Decorate your living space
- Do some origami
- Do a puzzle
- Play a boardgame
- Take moments in the day to deliberately slow down what you're doing
- Practice mindfulness
- Do a relaxation exercises
- Read some inspirational stories online
- Try a new food or order something in
- Try a new exercise routine
- Do something spontaneous
- Watch a new movie or TV show
- Watch a funny YouTube video
- Watch a documentary
- Find something to watch that inspires you

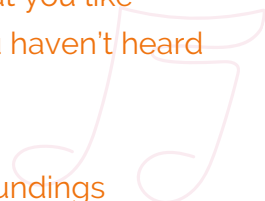
- Reconnect with an old friend
- Join an online group
- Initiate a conversation
- Video chat with friends and family
- Join a dating app or website
- Share a funny story with someone
- Tidy your working space
- Do some washing up
- Clean your living space
- Organise a cupboard or draw
- Rearrange furniture
- Explore ways to connect with nature
- Learn about animals online
- Spend some quality time with a pet (if you have one)
- Care for your plants (if you have them)
- Research the benefits of having plants at home
- Learn a new fact
- Find a new recipe
- Learn a new card game
- Watch some tutorial videos
- Listen to educational podcasts
- Learn to say a few phrases in a new language

Activity Idea Checklist

- Read something out loud
- Read a newspaper or magazine
- Read about a topic that you're passionate about
- Read a favourite book
- Read a blog from a website



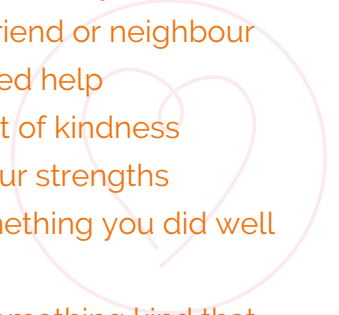
- Find an old song that you like
- Listen to a song you haven't heard before
- Listen to a podcast
- Listen to your surroundings
- Sing along to something you like



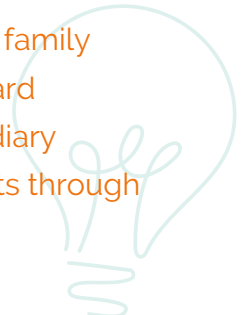
- Set some work/home/family goals
- Plan your next holiday/research places you would like to visit in the future
- Research a topic you've always wanted to know more about
- Make a 'to do' list



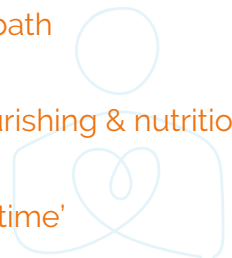
- Offer to help someone you know
- Reach out to a friend or neighbour to see if they need help
- Try a random act of kindness
- Make a list of your strengths
- Write down something you did well today
- Acknowledge something kind that you did for someone



- Write a letter to your family
- Write a 'thank you' card
- Write in a journal or diary
- Express your thoughts through creative writing
- Start a blog
- Try calligraphy (if this is new to you)



- Take a shower or bath
- Nourish your skin
- Eat something nourishing & nutritious
- Wash your hair
- Limit your 'screen time'



Others

(add some ideas of your own!)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Once you have identified some activities that you think you would enjoy, list a few of them here. Try to make sure that each one gives you at least one of the 'PAM' factors. Ideally, we are looking for a range of activities that offer you a good balance of pleasure, achievement and mastery.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

Activity Scheduling

Next, we want to use our planning skills to make sure that enough 'PAM' activities are happening each day. Psychologists use 'activity scheduling' to help people to structure their days to include enough mood-boosting tasks and activities. This is as simple as it sounds - it involves looking ahead and scheduling meaningful, enjoyable activities that you can do in each section of your day to keep yourself busy and prevent you from falling into vicious cycles that can make your mood worse.

Planning ahead is a really important part of this process, because when the time comes for you to do your activity, you may not feel like it. However, if you do your activity as planned, in spite of how you are feeling, you can still experience the mood-boosting benefits. We also suggest that you write your plans down, as research shows that we are far more likely to carry out planned tasks when we have them written down.

You can use the table on the next page below to help you plan ahead. Always include an enjoyable, meaningful or useful activity in each section of your day.

You will also see that there are spaces to enter your wake-up time and your bedtime. We know that maintaining a consistent structure can protect our mental health. This structure can easily slip away when we are faced with changes to our surroundings, so we need to put in extra efforts to maintain it. Implementing a regular schedule to wake up, have meals and go to bed can be helpful for sustaining our motivation and momentum throughout the day. It also promotes good quality sleep, which is vital to our mental health.



My Activity Schedule

Morning alarm time:

Bedtime:

Breakfast time:

Lunchtime:

Dinner time:

Day	Morning (9am-1pm)	Afternoon (1pm-6pm)	Evening (6pm-11pm)
Example	Make a to do list to organise my finances (A=7)	Complete some online training for work (M=7) Clear e-mail inbox (A=6)	Video chat with family (P=8) Make a Pinterest board of holiday ideas (P=6)

After you have completed each activity, add a rating (out of 10) for each activity based on how much pleasure, achievement or mastery you gained from engaging in that activity, as this will help you to monitor your progress.

Pleasure = (P)

Achievement = (A)

Mastery = (M)

E.g. 'Clear email inbox" (A = 7 out of 10)

We recommend that you complete the activity schedule and plan your activities ahead for the week. You can then review this at the end of the week, noticing the effect that different activities have on your mood. Research shows that typically on the days where you manage to include a healthy dose of 'PAM' activities, the more motivated you are likely to feel. Therefore, it is important to review your activity schedule at the end of the week, to establish which types of activities helped to lift your mood, and which types of activities you'd like to do more or less of, going forward into the following week. Taking time to review your activity schedule will help to increase your self-awareness and ensure that you are planning your days and weeks to include things that can boost your mood.

Returning back to a “normal” routine post-quarantine & adapting to a new normal

If you have been in quarantine or have endured a prolonged period of isolation or loss of routine due to the impacts of Covid-19, transitioning back to your usual routine may conjure up a range of mixed feelings.

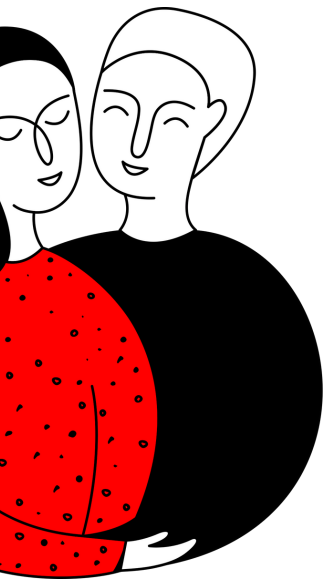
For some, this will be a welcome change. Many will be eager to resume and reinstate the day-to-day activities that they had lost or missed out on (e.g. connecting with friends and family in person, being able to return to the gym, or eating out at your favourite restaurants). Returning to normality can also mean financial gain and job security for some people. For others however, the resumption of activities may involve worry, anxiety or concern. All of these feelings are normal and easily understood in the current context.



Some common feelings & emotions you may be experiencing:

Anxiety, Worry, Apprehension:

With the many uncertainties around Covid-19, many of us may understandably still be feeling worried. Worries may centre on health, the lack of certainty about the future, deciding on a sensible level of caution to exercise or other areas. Returning to social situations, office working or group events may feel quite overwhelming, particularly for those who have been in isolation or quarantine. It's important to recognise that it is normal to feel worried, stressed or anxious, given the huge uncertainties that remain about the pandemic and possible future outcomes. Transition and change brings with it uncertainty, which naturally will cause feelings of unease.



Joy & Relief:

For many of us, social distancing measures have meant that we have had to spend more time being cooped up indoors. For many people, this could have been a big challenge, given the limitation of small living spaces in Hong Kong, particularly for those enduring quarantine or for those living alone. Understandably, this would have likely impacted our moods, our relationships and our overall well-being. Given the change from the norm we have all experienced since the start of the pandemic, it's likely that some people have been feeling frustrated by the situation, particularly over the 'loss' of some activities they used to enjoy. A reinstatement of activities will therefore mean a huge sense of joy and relief for many people, since this may mean people being able to go out again, meet friends, see colleagues, go shopping, eat out, etc.

Sadness & Reluctance:

Everyone responds to situations differently. Whilst many people may have struggled with adapting to the impact of Covid-19, others may have relished the opportunity to spend more time alone. It may be that for some people, having their own space, away from the distractions of daily life, became a comforting 'new norm'. In this case, resuming "normal" routines could also lead to a sense of loss for these people because they could no longer spend as much time alone and away from the hustle.



Take a moment to think about which emotion(s) or feeling(s) are relevant to you, and why?

Remember, regardless of how you may be feeling, it's important to recognise that any feelings and reactions are completely normal in reaction to this unprecedented time.

Additional tips on managing mental health post covid-19:

As routines and activities begin to change again, make sure to slow down and not jump straight back into it too quickly. Take time to care for yourself; this has been a difficult time for everyone. Here are some quick tips to help you ease back into pre-Covid routines:

- Take your time and take things slowly if necessary, to help you transition back to the lifestyle you previously led.
- Be flexible with your schedule, don't plan too many social or work events as this can be overwhelming.
- Prioritise self-care, do a self-care check in, remember to be kind to yourself.
- Continue exercising and make this a part of your new routine. Even if it's a 30 minute walk around your neighbourhood or an online class.
- Do what makes you feel safe and comfortable.
- Continue the hobbies you started or built on over the last few months, don't see this as the end.
- Try to only check the news once or twice a day and turn off notifications to avoid feeling overwhelmed.
- Reach out and connect with others.
- Remember that any negative emotions make you human!



Acknowledgements

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The COVID mental health relief committee is a group of therapists practising in Hong Kong. The group are:

Sharmeen Shroff

Kaili Chen

Natalie Loong

Bhavna Bharvani

Malin Rigneus

Jillian Carrol

Teresa Chan

Hannah Sugarman

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Canadian Psychological Association

Centre for Clinical Interventions, Department of Health, Western Australia

Central Health

Central Minds

Covid-19 Mental Health Relief Committee

FACE COVID by Russ Harris

Mind HK (resources adapted with permission)

Mind UK

Psychology Tools

Veale, D. (2008). Behavioural activation for depression. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*, 14(1), 29-36.

Disclaimer

This resource has been designed and created to be a self-help guide to support individuals who have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Although these resources can assist people experiencing higher levels of stress, they are not intended as a substitute for formal mental health support from a professional. If you find that you are experiencing high levels of distress that are too difficult to manage, you can find more urgent support below.

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Finding Support

There may be times in life when you experience an intolerable level of distress that even normal coping strategies become insufficient and urgent help is needed. These situations are known as crises. During a crisis, it may feel as though you have nowhere to turn. You may feel overwhelmed by negative emotions like panic, confusion, hopelessness, sadness, and anger, you may have thoughts about hurting yourself or someone else, you may be desperate for a way out, or you may even have hurt yourself one way or another.

It is okay and in fact, important to reach out for support so that you can get yourself the help you need to feel better. Talking to someone about your thoughts, feelings and experiences often make them more tolerable, so try speaking to someone you trust, or a medical or mental health professional. However, if there is an emergency or immediate support is needed, use the resources below:

If you may act on your suicidal thoughts, have seriously harmed yourself, or are in a life-threatening situation, call 999 or visit your nearest emergency room for immediate assistance.

If you are feeling extremely distressed or unsafe or having suicidal thoughts, call the hotlines below at any time to reach trained individuals who can give you the support you need.

Caritas Family Crisis Support Centre

Individuals or families in crisis or distress
24-hour hotline (Cantonese): 18288

Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups

Children and Youths aged 6 to 24 who are in crisis or distress

Youthline: 2777 8899

Mon-Sat: 2pm-2am

Utouch whatsapp counselling: 6277 8899

Utouch online counselling:

<http://www.utouch.hk/>

Tue - Thu: 4 pm - 10 pm;

Fri - Sat: 4 pm - 2 am

Hospital Authority

Individuals in psychological distress
24-hour hotline: 2466 7350

The Samaritans

Individuals who are suicidal or in distress
24-hour hotline (Multilingual): 2896 0000

The Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong

Individuals who are suicidal or in distress

24-hour hotline (Cantonese): 2389 2222

Hotline (English): 2389 2223

Mon-Fri (except public holiday): 6:30 am - 10pm

Online Counselling Chat Room (Chinese):

<https://chatpoint.org.hk/#/home>

Mon-Fri: 6 am - 1 am;

Sat, Sun & Public Holidays: 8 pm - 1 am

Harmony House

Individuals encountering domestic violence

24-hour hotline for women: 2522 0434

Hotline for men: 2295 1386

Hotline for children: 2751 8822

Mon - Fri (except public holiday):

4:30 pm-7 pm

Open Up

Youths aged 11 to 35 who are in distress

24-hour online text platform counselling

(Chinese & English)

SMS: 9101 2012

Website: www.openup.hk

Facebook/Instagram/WeChat: hkopenup

Suicide Prevention Services

Individuals who are suicidal or in distress

24-hour hotline (Cantonese): 2382 0000

Youth below age 24

Youthlink (Cantonese): 2382 0777

Daily 2pm-2am

The Boys' & Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong

Youths below age 24 who are in crisis or distress

Nite Cat online counselling

Whatsapp: 9726 8159/9852 8625

Website & chatroom: <http://nitecat.bgca.org.hk>

Facebook: nitecatonline

Mon, Tue & Fri: 6 pm - 2 am;

Wed, Thu & Sat: 2 pm - 10 pm

Tung Wah Group of Hospitals CEASE Crisis Centre

Individuals or families encountering sexual violence, domestic violence or other family crises

24-hour hotline: 18281

About Mind HK

Mind HK (Mind Mental Health Hong Kong Limited) is a S88 registered charity (91/16471), which launched in 2017. Our vision is to ensure no one in Hong Kong has to face a mental health problem alone. Through resources, training, and outreach campaigns and programmes, we help to educate around mental health and remove the associate stigma, with the aim of achieving the best mental health for all in Hong Kong. With existing collaboration and research efforts, we are here to support Hong Kong in becoming a global leader and regional model for public mental health. For more on our work, mission and vision, please visit www.mind.org.hk.

Useful Resources

If you want to learn more about other mental health topics, please visit **our**

Mental Health A to Z:

www.mind.org.hk/mental-health-a-to-z/

COVID-19 Mental Health Information Hub:

Mental health resources and local supports available to take care of your mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic

mind.org.hk/covid-information-hub

If you are in an emergency or crisis situation, please contact 999, or go to your nearest A&E.

More local urgent support in Hong Kong:

mind.org.hk/find-help-now

More non-urgent support can be found here:

mind.org.hk/community-directory/

How & where to seek help in Hong Kong:

mind.org.hk/getting-help/



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