

- **You probably already have positive ways of coping with stressful situations that you have used at difficult times in the past.** Use these now. It may be difficult to learn new coping strategies right now.
- **It can be a challenge for health workers to accept care from others.** To keep going we need to fill up our energy levels after a day at work. Give care and TAKE care. If people offer support let them.
- **If you are feeling overwhelmed there are a number of ways to get support.** Speak to colleagues or your manager or someone you trust about how you are feeling. They are likely to be experiencing similar things to you - know that you are not alone in this. Focus on what you can control. Pay attention to what is going well. Share and celebrate successes. Be kind to yourself and others. Remember this is a marathon, not a sprint. It won't last forever and the epidemic will end.
- **Sanctuaries** - Staff sanctuaries are available or being set up across NHS Forth Valley sites. Sanctuaries provide a place for refreshment, a quiet time or if you prefer the chance to share and chat. Health and wellbeing resources will be available and information on activities like relaxation or structured support sessions.

Psychologists are currently at the FVRH sanctuary in the library during weekdays 9.00 am - 5.00 pm. This isn't just for formal support, come and have a tea or coffee and tell them about your day.

Ask your manager about staff sanctuaries and psychological first aid in your area or phone 01324 614387 to enquire about available support.



NHS FORTH VALLEY
STAFF

Support & Wellbeing

What to Expect with COVID-19

It's Okay Not to Be Okay



There's no doubt that these are unprecedented times, particularly working in the NHS where many of us are being asked to do things that are new or unfamiliar to us. We are stepping out of our comfort zones and into new roles and areas. These changes in themselves can lead to us feeling unsettled and uncertain, or stressed and anxious. On top of that we are all concerned about the risks posed by COVID-19 to ourselves and our families.



What we are doing is important and difficult work. Over the days and weeks we will all probably find that there are times when we feel anxious, stressed, scared, overwhelmed, angry, guilty, helpless and even numb. We may find our attention, concentration and memory isn't as good as it usually is or we may feel super focused at times. These are all normal responses to an extremely challenging situation.

We may find that we experience different emotions at different stages of the pandemic. For example, early on, we may feel anxious thinking about what could happen or that we find ourselves in a heightened state of 'readiness'. At the peak phases we may experience surges of adrenaline. Over time we may feel like we are running on 'empty'.

Sometimes we may find that things we have witnessed or heard about may go through our minds again and again, pop into our minds at odd times or feature in our dreams. We may find ourselves avoiding certain situations or reminders of things that we have experienced or heard about. This is a normal response and for most people will pass with time.

There may be times when we feel guilty about difficult decisions that we have to make. We may not feel any of these things, we may just feel numb. There may be positives too, feeling re-energised about our work and experiencing a renewed sense of purpose. We may value our colleagues more or we may find them difficult to be around.

There will be times when we are coping well and times when we feel that we are coping less well. Everyone is different, and everyone will experience different emotions at different times.

We know that certain things will be helpful at this time:

- **Take care of your basic physical needs as a priority.** Take time out for regular breaks and to eat and drink. Prioritise sleep and avoid drinking too much caffeine or alcohol or using drugs. Engage in physical exercise. Doing these things will help bring down high levels of arousal, common at these times. It will help you think more clearly and you will be able to focus better.
- **STOP, BREATHE then THINK.** Slowing your breathing slows the stress-cycle and re-engages your frontal lobes. This helps you focus and think more clearly.
- **Keep connected to your friends and family as much as you can via phone and video.** It is important to decide for yourself who to be in contact with and how much contact you want to have at the minute. Family and friends may well be worried about you and may also have lots of extra time to fill. They may want to see and talk to you more than usual while you are still at work. Prioritise your needs first and manage their expectations by sending text updates. Letting them know how you are and when you will contact them at a time that suits you.
- **Try to keep to a regular routine and plan things that make you feel good.** Limit time spent watching, reading or listening to the news. Do things that take your mind off the current crisis. This helps your body and mind de-stress.

