

# Wellbeing during Isolation

Bluebird  
PSYCHOLOGY

## A guide to supporting your mental health during isolation

*This document has been created by Joanna Bailey from Bluebird Psychology. You are welcome to distribute it. Please contact us at [email@bluebirdpsychology.com.au](mailto:email@bluebirdpsychology.com.au) with any questions.*

Many of you are going through major life changes right now. Many of you are afraid, lonely, anxious and overwhelmed. I want you to know that you are not alone in this pain and uncertainty and there are small achievable things we can do to care for ourselves and others during this time.

This workbook has been designed to give you some quick and simple ways to be able to improve your wellbeing during this time. If you are experiencing struggles, we would be happy to talk with you to find additional resources or supports to assist you.

Some people will find routine essential at this time to maintain a sense of structure and predictability during uncertain times. Others will find routine an additional burden that weighs them down. Either way, checking in with yourself in a structured or flexible way to see how you can continue to improve upon some important aspects of your wellbeing will be beneficial for all of us.

## 10 important areas of wellbeing:

Area of well-being:	Suggestions
<p><b>Connection:</b></p>  <p>Connecting with others helps us to regulate our mood, feel less isolated, helps us to externalise our experiences and gain perspective</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Phone calls, video calls, text messages, emails, write letters</li> <li>- Set up routines for scheduled catch ups such as doing a video call with a friend or a group once a week whilst you all eat dinner</li> <li>- Get dressed up and have a 'date night' at home with a partner or family member</li> </ul>
<p><b>Movement:</b></p>  <p>Exercise is vital to emotional and physical wellbeing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Watch YouTube videos for yoga, Pilates, cardio, dance or strengths-based exercises.</li> <li>- When safe and advisable, go for a walk</li> <li>- Do some gardening</li> <li>- Have a family dance party</li> </ul>
<p><b>Nutrition:</b></p>  <p>Feeding your body well will help improve your physical health, your energy levels, mood and cognition.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Try to maintain regular mealtimes.</li> <li>- Contact a dietician (this can be done by phone or video call) if you are struggling with eating habits.</li> <li>- Look into delivery services for groceries, meal kits or prepared meals if you are struggling to get groceries or to make meals</li> <li>- Ask friends, family and your community for help with groceries or meals if you are struggling</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sleep:</b></p>  <p>Sleep that of good depth, duration and stability will help improve your physical health, your energy levels, mood and cognition.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Set a regular bedtime</li> <li>- Practice relaxation skills before bed</li> <li>- Write down your worries or concerns on paper before bed</li> <li>- Limit screen use in the last hour of the evening</li> <li>- Avoid caffeine in the afternoon and evening</li> <li>- Avoid heavy meals in the last 1-2 hours of the evening</li> </ul>
<p><b>Rest and relaxation:</b></p>  <p>Time to rest is important for managing stress levels</p>	<p>Plan some down time during the day to engage in activities you find restful such as reading, mindfulness exercises, meditation, prayer, gentle yoga or listening to music.</p>

<p><b>Fun and enjoyment:</b></p>  <p>Time for fun is important for managing stress and improving our mood</p>	<p>Plan some time to engage in activities you find fun such as watching movies, creative activities, games or playing with a pet.</p>
<p><b>Time outdoors:</b></p>  <p>Time outdoors is beneficial for our physical and emotional wellbeing.</p>	<p>Sunlight is essential for our mental health, our energy levels and our sleep patterns. If it is safe to do so, go for regular walk or sit outside whilst having a coffee or a meal.</p>
<p><b>Productivity:</b></p>  <p>Time spent on productive tasks provides a sense of accomplishment, self-esteem, hope and a sense of control within our lives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Spring cleaning</li> <li>- Working on a household project</li> <li>- Planning future holidays and events</li> <li>- Learning new skills</li> <li>- Completing online training</li> <li>- Set long term goals for your life and then break these down into medium and short term goals.</li> <li>- Break your short term goals into small achievable steps and set aside time in your week to achieve these.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Values based goals:</b></p>  <p>Setting goals to live by our values system is beneficial for our wellbeing during times of change</p>	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gratitude - journaling</li> <li>- Kindness – Small caring acts</li> <li>- Faith – Prayer or reading</li> <li>- Creativity – Small creative activities</li> </ul> <p>In a broader sense we can use this time as an opportunity to reevaluate how we can live by our values more fully.</p>
<p><b>Caring for others:</b></p>  <p>Caring for others is beneficial for our own emotional wellbeing as well as that of others.</p>	<p>Think about how you can care for your community at this time. You may be able to volunteer your time, finances or skills to organisations or individuals in your community.</p>

## Keeping track of habits for wellbeing:

	This is important to me because:	One small goal I commit to is:	What would help me act on this:	Tick when acted upon:
Connection				
Movement				
Nutrition				
Sleep				
Rest and relaxation				
Fun and enjoyment				
Time outdoors				
Productivity				
Values based goals				
Caring for others				

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation

One of our reactions to fear and anxiety is muscle tension. Muscle tension is part of a process that helps our bodies prepare for potentially dangerous situations. Even though some of those situations may not actually be dangerous, our bodies respond in the same way. Muscle tension can lead to backaches, tension headaches and fatigue. Muscle relaxation exercises such as Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) can be helpful in reducing stress and anxiety, improving sleep and reducing stress related muscle pain.

In PMR exercises, we tense up particular muscles and then relax them. Keep in mind, if you have any injuries, or a history of physical problems that may cause muscle pain, always consult your doctor before you start.

Once you have set aside the time and place for relaxation, make yourself comfortable and minimise distractions. slow down your breathing. When you are ready to begin, tense the muscle group described. Make sure you can feel the tension, but not so much that you feel pain. Keep the muscle tensed for approximately 10 seconds. Relax the muscles and keep it relaxed for approximately 10 seconds.

### Relaxation sequence

1. Hands and forearms. Make fists with your hands.
2. Upper arms. Bring your forearm up to your shoulder to 'make a muscle'.
3. Forehead. Raise your eyebrows as high as they will go, as though you were surprised by something.
4. Eyes and cheeks. Squeeze your eyes tight shut.
5. Mouth and jaw. Open your mouth as wide as you can, as you might when you are yawning.
6. Neck. Be careful as you tense these muscles. Face forward and then pull your head back slowly, as though you are looking up to the ceiling.
7. Shoulders. Tense the muscles in your shoulders as you bring your shoulders up towards your ears. 8. Shoulder blades/Back. Push your shoulder blades back, trying to almost touch them together, so that your chest is pushed forward.
9. Chest and stomach. Breathe in deeply, filling up your lungs and chest with air.
10. Upper leg. Tighten your thigh.
11. Lower leg. Do this slowly and carefully to avoid cramps. Pull your toes towards you to stretch the calf muscle.
12. Feet. Curl your toes downwards.

With practice you can become more aware of your muscles, how they respond with tension, and how you can relax them.

## Breathing exercises

Breathing regulation plays an important role in managing anxiety. When our breathing rate becomes elevated, a number of physiological changes begin to occur.

Anxiety causes an increase in our breathing rate, as part of the physical fight or flight response to a perceived threat. However, when our breathing rate increases without any physical exertion, we breathe out too much carbon dioxide. If the body cannot quickly return carbon dioxide levels to the optimal range, we experience further symptoms such as dizziness, light-headedness, headache, weakness and tingling in the extremities and muscle stiffness.

Continued over breathing can leave you feeling exhausted or 'on edge' so that you're more likely to respond to stressful situations with intense anxiety and panic

Use the following steps to be well on your way to developing a better breathing habit.

1. Sit in a comfortable chair or lay on a bed
2. Take a breath in for 4 seconds (through the nose if possible)
3. Hold the breath for 2 seconds
4. Release the breath taking 6 seconds (through the mouth if possible), then pause slightly before breathing in again.

Imagine your lungs are like a balloon filling with air and then deflating until they are completely empty. Try placing a hand on your abdomen just below your rib cage to feel it rise and fall. Your abdomen should rise more than your chest. If you are feeling anxious, place one hand on your heart with gentle pressure. Practice regularly.

### Breathing tips:

When you first begin changing your breathing, it may be difficult to slow your breathing down to this rate. Adjust your breathing rate slowly.

By using breathing retraining, you can slow your breathing down and reduce your general level anxiety. With enough practice, it can assist you to manage anxious episodes and improve your sleep if practiced before bed.

## Mindfulness exercises

It's very easy to get stuck in painful thoughts of our past, worries about our present and anxiety for our future.

Mindfulness is a mental training practice that can be helpful in these situations. It is the practice of bringing our thoughts into the present. We allow our thoughts to come and go without holding on to them or battling against them. We shift our focus to something in the present moment.

Mindfulness practice can assist us to reduce stress, manage depression, strengthen focus and deepen relationships.

Learning mindfulness is straightforward enough to practice on your own, however a psychologist or a program can help if you are trying to manage significant mood or anxiety issues. Here's a basic technique to help you get started:

1. Find a quiet and comfortable place.
2. Become aware of your breath, attuning to the sensation of air moving in and out of your body as you breathe. Feel your belly rise and fall and the air enter your nostrils and leave your mouth. Pay attention to the way each breath changes and is different.
3. Watch every thought come and go, whether it be a worry, fear, anxiety, or hope. When thoughts come up in your mind, don't ignore or suppress them. Notice your mind chattering away, let it talk like it is a radio in the corner of the room. Remain calm and use your breathing as an anchor.
4. If you find yourself getting carried away in your thoughts, observe where your mind went off to, without judgment, and just return to your breathing. Remember not to be hard on yourself if this happens.
5. As the time comes to a close, sit for a minute or two, becoming aware of where you are. .

Here are some tips on cultivating mindfulness in your daily routine.

- Washing dishes – Notice the feeling of the warm water on your hands, the look of the bubbles, the sounds of the pans clunking on the bottom of the sink. We 'washing the dishes to wash the dishes'—not to get them over with so you can go watch TV.
- Brushing your teeth – Feel your feet on the floor, the brush in your hand, and your arm moving up and down.
- Driving – Use mindfulness to keep your attention anchored to the experience of driving. Turn off the radio, imagine your spine growing tall, find the half-way point between relaxing your hands and gripping the wheel too tightly, and whenever you notice your mind wandering, gently bring your attention back to where you and your car are in space.
- Exercise – Go for a walk and notice your breathing, the sounds and smells around you, and the colours, light and shadow you can see. Notice the feeling of your feet hitting the pavement and the movement of your legs.

Apps for relaxation, stress management and mindfulness skills:

- 'Calm', 'Headspace' and 'Smiling Mind'

## Adjusting to working from home

### Tips from Bluebird Psychologist Sarah Sewell

This difficult time is bringing about work and study changes for many of us. As many Australians begin to adapt to 'the new normal', here are some recommendations for how we can best manage the changes.

#### Workspace set up

- It is ideal to have a workspace that is separate from the rest of your living areas. If you don't have a spare room, try to find a corner of your house that is away from where you typically have your rest and relaxation time. Where possible, avoid having your workspace be in your bedroom.
- Try to only do work related tasks when you are in your designated workspace. When it is time to have a coffee or lunch break, move away from that area and spend time in your rest and relaxation space e.g. sit on the lounge, sit outside, or go for a brief walk.
- Having a schedule for the day can help keep you on task. Given that you're at home, it can be tempting to get side-tracked by household tasks that demand your attention. Keep a running list of home related tasks that come to mind as you see them and come back to them when it is outside your regular work hours. This helps you keep the work/home boundary in place.
- Stay in regular contact with your manager and colleagues, where appropriate. In a usual office set up, many conversations happen on the go. When working from home you may need to be more intentional about checking in and connecting.

#### Transitioning from 'work mode' to 'home mode'

Having an end of the workday routine can help you shift from work to home mode. This could be:

- Tidying your work area and turning off work devices.
- Having a shower and changing into comfortable clothing.
- Going for a walk or going outside.
- Connecting with friends/family members either in your household or via phone, social media etc.

#### Exercise, sleep, and device use

- Regular exercise is important for overall health, including mental health. At this stage (April 2020), Australians are allowed to leave our homes for the purpose of exercising. This is a good opportunity to get out of the house and stay active. Additionally, there are many online exercise programs that you can follow along with or participate live with.
- Maintaining a regular sleep pattern will also assist in having robust mental health. For most people, approximately 8 hours of continuous sleep is sufficient. Avoiding caffeine in the evenings, putting away devices 1-2 hours before bed, and having sufficient wind down time can assist in having a quality sleep.
- Keeping up to date with the current medical situation is important. However, an overload of information can increase anxiety levels. Decide on 1-2 news sources that are objective and informative and check those a few times a day.

## Managing the isolation

Staying connected to friends and loved ones is important. Face time, apps such as house party, online card games, and live workouts via Zoom can be ways that we can feel connected to others. It is normal to feel upset or down about the social changes that have occurred. Remember that we're all in this together and that it will pass.

Take this opportunity to do things you might not have had time for before. Such as:

- Engage in a new hobby such as drawing, writing, painting.
- Connect with a family member or friend who you haven't spoken to in a while.
- Read books.
- Improve the space around you- clear out cupboards and organise your home.

Make plans for when things have improved e.g. plan to join a sporting group or a hobby class. Connect with your local shelter or animal foster group online and see if you can be of help. Have a plan for your day (both workdays and weekends) of how you're going to spend your time. Try to include at least 1-2 things in your day that will bring you joy.

## Relationship management

Some of us may be living with partners, children, or family members. It is normal to see an increase in conflict in this time. Most people will be experiencing stress and anxiety, and this, combined with significantly more time together, can result in disagreements.

- Try to be aware of when your own stress and anxiety is impacting on the way you are communicating and responding to others.
- Take a breath and pause before responding.
- If you feel overwhelmed, let the other person know that you need to remove yourself from the conversation but will be able to talk again shortly.
- Be gentle and understanding, not only of your partner/family member but also of yourself.

Staying home may not be the safest option for some of us. If you are concerned about your safety at home, you can visit [1800respect.org.au](http://1800respect.org.au) or call them on 1800 737 732.

## Managing anxiety

Although our individual circumstances may differ, we are going through a collective stressful experience. It is normal that you may feel overwhelmed, worried, anxious, and concerned.

Here are some strategies that you can try to assist with managing those challenging emotions:

- Be mindful of your thinking. Imagining worst case scenarios and underestimating your ability to cope can contribute to feeling anxious at this time.
- Try to be aware of when your thinking moves from the present circumstances to the imagined ones. Some ways to stay present in the here and now are:

- Acknowledge five things you can see around you, four things you can touch around you, three things you hear, two things you can smell, one thing you can taste.
- Take three deep breaths.
- Take a short walk.
- Connect with others about how you're feeling.
- Remind yourself of the things you are in control of.

If you feel that you need additional support to manage, reach out to a psychologist who can support you further and provide ongoing assistance.

## General Resources

### Help lines:

- Emergency Services – 000
- Lifeline – 13 11 14
- Suicide Call Back Service – (03)8371 2862
- Kids Helpline – 1800 55 1800
- Mental Health Line – 1800 011 511

### Financial assistance websites:

- <https://treasury.gov.au/coronavirus/households>
- <https://www.business.gov.au/Risk-management/Emergency-management/Coronavirus-information-and-support-for-business>
- <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/subjects/affected-coronavirus-covid-19>

### A free guide to managing stress related to the virus

- <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1egT4Gdk8bayqyFRd-Clq9hi1YI6tKPTX/view?fbclid=IwAR2r3B88tn1t0-EP-CHFCC3p2pFN74WcpuU69S4xssBvkbDKZK-v7S83uA>

### A short free online course for managing your mental health at this time:

- [https://www.udemy.com/course/mental-health-for-coping-with-stress-anxiety-covid-19/?fbclid=IwAR1GyzdnBrrvrubdA6uoByb3-DOgtzLv0McfR\\_bTUFyP2UM5gM1pl5EJa0](https://www.udemy.com/course/mental-health-for-coping-with-stress-anxiety-covid-19/?fbclid=IwAR1GyzdnBrrvrubdA6uoByb3-DOgtzLv0McfR_bTUFyP2UM5gM1pl5EJa0)

## **Are you in isolation in a domestic violence relationship?**

If you are isolated with someone who is being abusive towards you, there is support available:

- Download the Daisy app:  
1800respect.org.au/daisy/
- Lisa Harnum Foundation: [www.lisahf.org.au](http://www.lisahf.org.au)
- 1800 737 732 - 24hr national sexual assault, family and domestic violence counselling line
- 13 11 14 - Lifeline 24 hrs

## Resources for kids:

- Have a family meeting and discuss family values and write these on a piece of paper to put up on your wall. Have family discussions about what each family member is finding difficult, what they are enjoying and what sort of support they are needing. Make a commitment to each other to care for each other's needs.
- Look up lists of activities to do with kids at home. Write these on slips of paper and put in a jar or bowl to pull one out when needed. Activity lists for kids:
  - [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/16F\\_z7wsBK8YkvCyaYBliKq\\_fPEqhjE3mi7xQEuxvxEl/e/dit?ts=5e717fbc#gid=0](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/16F_z7wsBK8YkvCyaYBliKq_fPEqhjE3mi7xQEuxvxEl/e/dit?ts=5e717fbc#gid=0)
  - [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Kn\\_j8Ck2o8YlIXaMeUVPzgKp6o1L9CFI/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Kn_j8Ck2o8YlIXaMeUVPzgKp6o1L9CFI/view)
- Information for supporting kids through uncertainty (developed for children with Autism, but useful for all kids):
- <https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/sites/afirm.fpg.unc.edu/files/covid-resources/Supporting%20Individuals%20with%20Autism%20through%20Uncertian%20Times%20Full%20Packet.pdf>
- Free audio books: <https://stories.audible.com/start-listen>
- Free TED talks for kids: [https://www.ted.com/playlists/86/talks\\_to\\_watch\\_with\\_kids](https://www.ted.com/playlists/86/talks_to_watch_with_kids)
- Free downloadable books for kids about the virus:
  - <https://www.littlemummascreations.com.au/shop/dontwalkyourcatandotheradviceforaworriedkid>
  - [https://www.mindheart.co/descargables?fbclid=IwAR2IpE5ybs69WN0RxOokwO6NYSurt1Sy\\_eOR3lsaWEo\\_Ch9Oh6ab-sR6Gxs](https://www.mindheart.co/descargables?fbclid=IwAR2IpE5ybs69WN0RxOokwO6NYSurt1Sy_eOR3lsaWEo_Ch9Oh6ab-sR6Gxs)
- Free online anxiety program for kids: <https://www.brave-online.com/>

## Bluebird Psychology Study Without Stress

### Online Program for grades 10-12

This online seminar program will equip students in grades 10 to 12 with knowledge and tips to manage the stress associated with studying, assessments and exams. This is an engaging and practical program that will benefit students through their high school years and beyond.

Topics include:

- Understanding stress
- Managing expectations and beliefs about exams
- Timetables and goals
- How thoughts affect performance
- Challenging unhelpful thinking patterns
- Understanding perfectionism and procrastination
- Building study habits and exam preparation
- Problem solving skills

Students will receive a hard-copy workbook and will have access to the online workshop sessions and question answer time.

Contact us to reserve your child's place. Please pass on this information to any of your child's friends who may be interested in booking. Discounts are available for booking more than one student.

## **Appointments with Bluebird Psychology:**

If you have concerns you wish to discuss with us,  
please email at us at so we can provide resources,  
set up an appointment with one of our psychologists  
or refer you to other appropriate services.



## **We will continue to support you**

Appointments will continue to be available for existing and new clients. Appointments are available face to face or by phone or video call.

Reach out if we can be of support to you.  
Ph: (02) 9659 5696 email@bluebirdpsychology.com.au



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