

Missing People's guide on

## How to take care of your mental health

In the past year, we have all faced challenges that we didn't expect to and have had to adapt to a new way of life. Maybe your bedroom has become your office, or you have occupied the role of both teacher and parent?

But more worryingly, COVID-19 has left a lot of us feeling isolated and unable to access vital services. Many of us have not been able to spend as much time with our loved ones as we normally would and have felt the uncertainty of not knowing when we will see them again. Some of us may have even felt our support networks break down or disappear, especially during the lockdown periods.

As a result, you may be feeling anxious or alone, and it may be taking a toll on your mental wellbeing. Although spring is on the horizon, these feelings may be heightened in the colder months, and you may be finding it even more difficult to take care of your mental health.

Our frontline services team have offered the following tips to help you prioritise and look after your mental health this winter and beyond.

*In a new survey conducted by Missing People of people at risk of going missing, and those who have disappeared, 67% of respondents said their mental health was worse because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and 50% said their ability to access support services was worse.*

# How to take care of your mental health

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## Take vitamin D

With the blue skies and glow of the summer sun still scarce, your body is not able to soak up as much sunlight as it needs to create vitamin D. Taking a simple supplement in the colder months could do wonders for your overall health.

## Make the most of the limited daylight

While vitamin D will help to keep your body healthy, make sure you still make the most of the limited daylight available. For many with a computer-based job, this is difficult, but even a short walk in your lunch break is incredibly beneficial for your mental wellbeing. You can also buy natural daylight lightbulbs which are fantastic, especially for workspaces.

## Stay in the 'now'

Mindfulness is not for everybody but if it works for you, use it. Don't think long-term, focus instead on the very short-term, day by day or hour by hour. Anxiety lives in the gap between the present and the future. Stay in the present. It's all you have.

Cry and vent if and when you need to. It's allowed.

## Establish a support network

Reach out to your family and friends and agree who you can reach out to for support and in what circumstances. Open the conversation with those you seek to be part of your support network so that you can both set your boundaries. Sharing, caring, and honest communication are key to creating a solid support network.

## Manage your relationship with social media

Social media can raise anxiety and negatively impact sleep so try setting timers for how long you spend on your accounts. Make sure that you remain in control when using social media. If you start feeling stressed or comparing yourself to others, try taking a break and see how you feel afterwards. If you have a missing loved one, you will want to check for updates, but consider having a friend that you trust to manage this for you instead.

## Manage your relationship with the news

Much like with social media, the news can be a great source of anxiety for many people. This year more than ever, you may find yourself checking the news frequently for updates about the pandemic but feeling more stressed as a result. Try limiting how often you check the news and turn alerts off on your phone.

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## Keep moving

Along with trying to get outside every day, exercise does your mental health a world of good. Even a short walk can help clear your mind and leave you feeling calmer. Due to COVID restrictions, many of us may not be moving about as much during the day, so staying active is not as easy but try and do just one thing a day that elevates your heart rate. Your body and mind will thank you!

## Make a new routine and stick to it

We have all seen changes this year and some of us have got used to adapting to new situations. However, many of us haven't and are still struggling to settle into our new normal. The best thing you can do is create a new routine that fits your new lifestyle. You may find that your bedtime needs altering, or your work hours have changed. Once you have found a routine that works, stick to it.

## Just because "It could be worse", it doesn't mean it shouldn't be better

When we all know so many people are facing struggles with their health or financial security it is easy to brush off things we are going through, or think it's not right to talk or complain about what is going on. There is no limit to how many people can be feeling in a bad place, so don't squash your worries and feelings down. Find the space to talk about what's going on.

## Put yourself first

It is OK to put yourself and your mental wellbeing first. For many, this is difficult to do and can lead to feelings of guilt or feeling like you are being selfish. Take some time for yourself and figure out what is best for you right now. You will be surprised by how many people will empathise and support you.

## Don't be afraid to speak to your GP

If you're not sure if you need medical support or not, have a chat with your GP rather than staying in doubt.

## Get support

If nothing else seems to be helping or you feel you have nowhere to turn, reach out for support. Our free, confidential helpline, on 116 000, is here for anyone affected by a disappearance or thinking of leaving home. Other agencies that can help are [Samaritans](#), [SANEline](#), [CALM](#), [SHOUT](#) and [Papyrus HOPELINK](#).