

COVID 19- Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Resources

Keeping your eye on the horizon metaphor

Imagine you are in your boat in the storm
Occasionally, waves send water over the side and into the boat, causing you the inconvenience of wet feet. The boat includes a bailer to bail out this water, and you know how to use it.



So one day, when a particularly big wave breaks over the side and leaves water in your boat, you start bailing. You may start bailing calmly or mindfully, but eventually, you might find yourself bailing desperately or wildly to get rid of all this water.

While you've been bailing, have you noticed what is happening to your boat? Where is it headed? Where has it drifted to? Would it be fair to say you've been bailing more than sailing?

Now imagine that you take a look at the bailer and see that it is really a sieve, full of holes? What would you do? The implicit purpose of bailing water here is probably to get your boat back on track—once you rid the boat of the water. But if your tool is not suited to the task, you will find yourself struggling to get rid of any water, let alone guide your boat.

The question is would you rather be on a boat that has only a little water in the bottom, but is drifting without direction, or on a boat that may have quite a bit of water in the bottom but is heading in the direction you wish to go.

Sometimes working desperately to avoid wet feet (or other painful or uncomfortable feelings and thoughts) gets us so off-track; the distraction and struggle of “wet feet” becomes our block to focusing on what is important to us.

Keeping an eye on the horizon; on our values, hopes and dreams can help us to stay focused on what is important to us and the here and now. This helps us to not always get caught up in thoughts and feelings that can arise. But remember it is ok if this does happen- it happens to us all! We can acknowledge without judgement and gently bring our eyes back to focus on the horizon

Further information on how to look after ourselves and others

1. Noticing the physical sensations in our bodies

Being aware of the physical sensations we feel during stress e.g. fast heart rate, butterflies in our stomach or tingling body and checking in with our bodies is really important. In being aware of these physical sensations we are already engaged in grounding, which means that we are redirect your attention away from stressors that may or may not be there and placing that focus on what is immediately present in the here and now.



2. Practice deep breathing

Slowed and deepened breathing in turn slows our heart rate and lowers blood pressure, which signals to the brain that the threat to our safety has passed and puts our body into rest and digest mode.

Follow the link for more information:

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/breathing-exercises-for-stress/>



3. Mindfulness

Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally. Mindfulness is practical way to notice your thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and any sights, sounds and smells, as they happen.

Mindfulness can simply be noticing what we don't normally notice, because our heads are too busy in the future or in the past. The goal isn't to clear your mind or to stop thinking- it's to become aware of your thoughts and feelings, rather than getting lost in them.

The thoughts, feelings, and sensations you notice should be observed in a non-judgemental manner. There is no need to judge or change them. Being mindful helps us to train our attention. Our minds wander about 50% of the time, but every time we practice being mindful, we are exercising our attention "muscle". We can take more control over our focus of attention and choose what we focus on...rather than our

attention being dominated by that which distresses us and takes us away from the present moment.

Examples of Mindfulness Practice

Mindful Activities

Walking

Start noticing how your body moves with each step. Then expand your awareness to your surroundings. What do you see, hear, smell, and feel?

Washing the dishes

If we wash the dishes each evening, we might tend to be 'in our heads' as we're washing up, thinking about what we have to do or worrying about future events. Instead, we might notice the temperature of the water and how it feels on the skin, the texture of the bubbles on the skin. The sounds of the water as we take out and put dishes into the water. Just noticing what we might not normally notice.



This technique can also be applied to other daily activities e.g. eating, washing our face, hoovering.

To be aware of your immediate

surroundings- this will allow your brain to perceive that the danger has passed.

Some people focus on the feeling of their feet on the floor or 5 senses; Identify 5 things you can see, 4 you can hear, 3 you can touch, 2 you can smell and 1 you can taste.



The more we practice mindfulness, perhaps the more (initially at least) we will notice our thoughts intruding, and that's ok. The only aim of mindful practice/activities is to bring our attention back to the activity continually, noticing those sensations, from outside and within us.

Adapted from: What is Mindfulness? (therapistaid.com) and Mindfulness (getselfhelp.co.uk)

Other useful resource:

Headspace You Tube Channel for short videos on supporting wellbeing for young children through to adults:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/Getsomeheadspace>