



Broxtowe
Borough
COUNCIL

WELLBEING

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19
ON MENTAL HEALTH

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The COVID-19 pandemic poses a major risk to our mental health, as well as the more obvious threat to our physical health. We all began lockdown from uneven starting places. Many key workers needed to travel on public transport to work and often live in more cramped housing conditions, increasing the risk of infection. People with mortgages had the option of a mortgage holiday whereas those renting did not. Some of those receiving 80% of their salary under the Government's furlough scheme struggled to buy food.

Social distancing, legitimate concerns about the virus, fear of unemployment, domestic abuse, existing mental health conditions could all contribute to increased anxiety, depression, trauma or other mental health issues.

As a direct consequence of lockdown social distancing has caused social isolation for some people.

ISOLATION

Anyone can become isolated. Isolation is a feeling of being separated, real or perceived, from others and could occur due to distance, difficulties in using transport or a sense of not belonging.

Social isolation is described as having a lack of social relationships, an often deeply damaging experience. It can occur within groups of people, including in the workplace. Social isolation can also occur in solitude which may be healthy or unhealthy, chosen or forced. Some people are very happy in solitude.

An isolated person may experience low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, other mental health issues or loneliness, lacking but craving social contact.

POSSIBLE WARNING SIGNS

- Avoidance of social interaction
- Extended periods of time alone
- Have limited or superficial human contact
- Experience social anxiety at the mention of social interaction

- Lack meaningful social or professional relationships
- Develop distress and loneliness

Social media may be a factor in loneliness when it replaces in-person connections. When it increases access to meaningful relationships, it may reduce isolation.

TIPS FOR REDUCING ISOLATION

- Contact loved ones more frequently
- Plan to meet up with friends or work colleagues
- Even an hour of "me time" each week can help ward off loneliness. If children at home makes finding time for yourself difficult, ask a partner, friend or family member for help with childcare
- Share how you feel with people you trust
- Contact the Council's Employee Assistance Programme, Care First on **0808 168 2143**

PREPARING TO RETURN TO WORK

Returning to work may feel overwhelming after many weeks at home. You may be worried about what has changed, how you can maintain social distancing or what may cause you to be unable to cope.

There are some practical things you can do to make returning to work easier:

- Try to ensure a regular sleep pattern and enough sleep. Typically 7-8 hours for an adult.
- Sharing your experiences with others going through the same thing can help you feel less alone.
- Start to increase your contact with colleagues. Using social media can be a good way of communicating.

SLEEP

During the pandemic some people will have been struggling to sleep and getting less whilst others will have been getting more.

According to Mathew Walker, a leading sleep scientist, data he has been collating about sleep patterns during this pandemic is showing people are starting to sleep more in harmony with their chronotype – a morning person, an evening person or someone in-between. Our chronotype is “largely genetically determined, so it’s hard wired.” Therefore some people are more productive in the morning and others in the afternoon.

More sleep does equal more productivity and those people who sleep more will use fewer healthcare resources. There is also a very close link between your immune health and your sleep health. In one study researchers found insufficient sleep in the week prior to a flu jab the body produced less than 50% of the normal antibody response. The vaccination was less effective.

Researchers found that if you are not getting sufficient sleep in the week before you get your flu jab, you produce less than 50% of the normal antibody response ie the vaccination is far less effective.

HEALTH BENEFITS OF RETURNING TO WORK

People usually find going back to work after a period of isolation a positive experience. Our physical and mental health is mostly improved through work. People recover from sickness more quickly and are at less risk of long-term.

Work can provide:

- a structure and an environment for personal development
- develop new friendships, support pathways and more social events
- greater financial stability and the money to engage with our interests
- feeling you are contributing to society
- greater life expectancy
- a sense of identity
- a sense of belonging

BELONGING

The opposite of isolation is belonging. During childhood, belonging to family is the primal and most important of all our social groups and as we grow we seek other groups to belong to. It is important for our wellbeing to feel we belong in our place of work. Healthy relationships, good communication and effective management all contribute to a sense of belonging.

“Belonging is the innate human desire to be part of something larger than us. Because this yearning is so primal, we often try to acquire it by fitting in and by seeking approval, which are not only hollow substitutes for belonging, but often barriers to it. Because true belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world, our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance.”

B Brown, 2010

SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES OR EXPERIENCING POOR MENTAL HEALTH

By law, employers must make "reasonable adjustments" for workers with disabilities or long-term physical or mental conditions.

If extra help is needed beyond reasonable adjustments, Access to Work can provide a grant to pay for practical support so you can carry on doing your job.

Further information is available from HR.

KINDNESS

Kindness toward colleagues can benefit people experiencing poor mental health. A small act of kindness can be enough to encourage people experiencing anxiety, depression, and other difficulties to reach out for help. Asking how someone is, making more effort to speak to someone who is largely ignored or opening a door are all relatively little things that can mean a lot to someone who is struggling.

A 2019 study published in the Journal of Social Psychology looked at how acts of kindness made us feel, and if our responses differed depending on who we were kind to.

“It found that all kindness led to increased wellbeing, whether with strangers, or even just being kind to ourselves. And the more our acts of kindness, the better we will feel.”

SELF CARE

Self-care is something we do for ourselves in order to take care of our mental, emotional, and physical health. Self-care is important to maintain a healthy relationship with yourself as it produces positive feelings and boosts your confidence and self-esteem. Effective self-care is central to improved mood, better relationships, with oneself and others, and helps to reduce anxiety.

Important areas for self care:

- Sleep – Think about your nightly routine. Make sure the bedroom is cool, avoid caffeine and sugar in the hours before you sleep as both make going to sleep more

difficult and if you feel stress speak to your manager if its work related.

- **Nutrition** - The types of foods you eat crucially impact the bacteria that live in your stomach. An unhappy gut can lead to an unhappy person, and vice-versa. Some excellent self-care foods include fatty fish, blueberries, nuts, green leafy veggies, and brassicas, like broccoli.
- **Exercise** - Daily exercise, such as walking, yoga or going to the gym, can help both physically and mentally, improving mood and reducing stress.
- **Boundaries** - If you are feeling stressed or overworked, saying yes to loved ones or colleagues can lead to burnout, anxiety, and irritability. Learning how to politely say no, you'll start to feel more empowered, and you'll have more time for your self-care.
- **Spending time outside** can help reduce stress, lower blood pressure, and help to improve sleep.

Pets can improve mood and can be hugely beneficial for our self-care. Dogs especially can help reduce stress and feelings of anxiety and can even help to lower blood pressure.

A healthy work-life balance. Overwork, and the accompanying stress and exhaustion can cause you to be less productive, more disorganised and feeling emotionally drained. Professional self-care habits like taking allowed breaks (for lunch, calling a friend or family member, or going for a walk), setting professional boundaries, avoiding overcommitting, etc. ensures that you stay focused, motivated and healthy.

USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

There are many organisations both locally and nationally who provide support to people seeking help. These are some of the better known organisations.

Mind

0300 123 3393 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm)

Promotes the views and needs of people with mental health problems.

www.mind.org.uk

PAPYRUS

HOPELINEUK 0800 068 4141 (Monday to Friday, 10am to 10pm, and 2pm to 10pm on weekends and bank holidays)

Young suicide prevention society.

www.papyrus-uk.org

Rethink Mental Illness

0300 5000 927 (Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 4pm)

Support and advice for people living with mental illness.

www.rethink.org

Samaritans

116 123 (free 24-hour helpline)

Confidential support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair.

www.samaritans.org.uk

SANE

SANEline: 0300 304 7000 (daily, 4.30pm to 10.30pm)

Emotional support, information and guidance for people affected by mental illness, their families and carers.

Peer support forum: www.sane.org.uk/supportforum
www.sane.org.uk/supportforum

YoungMinds

Parents' helpline **0808 802 5544** (Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 4pm)

Information on child and adolescent mental health.
Services for parents and professionals.

www.youngminds.org.uk

Childline

0800 1111 for Childline for children (24-hour helpline)

0808 800 5000 for adults concerned about a child (24-hour helpline)

Children's charity dedicated to ending child abuse and child cruelty.

www.nspcc.org.uk

Refuge

0808 2000 247 (24-hour helpline)

Advice on dealing with domestic violence.

www.refuge.org.uk

Alcoholics Anonymous

0800 917 7650 (24-hour helpline)

www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

National Gambling Helpline

0808 8020 133 (daily, 8am to midnight)

www.begambleaware.org

Alzheimer's Society

0333 150 3456 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm and 10am to 4pm on weekends)

Provides information on dementia, including factsheets and helplines.

www.alzheimers.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care

0808 808 1677 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

www.cruse.org.uk

Rape Crisis

To find your local services phone: **0808 802 9999**
(daily, 12pm to 2.30pm and 7pm to 9.30pm)

www.rapecrisis.org.uk

Victim Support

0808 168 9111 (24-hour helpline)

<http://www.victimsupport.org>

Beat

0808 801 0677 (adults) or **0808 801 0711** (for under-18s)

Eating disorders

<http://www.b-eat.co.uk>

Relate

0300 0030396

The UK's largest provider of relationship support.

<http://www.relate.org.uk>

FRANK

0300 1236600

A support service offering information about drugs

<https://www.talktofrank.com/>