

## Guidance on mental health and wellbeing and Coronavirus

Infectious disease outbreaks, like the current Coronavirus (Covid 19), can be scary and can affect our mental health. This is true within the Church context. However often we think that our faith should get us through alone. But the reality is, we are all human and subject to both physical and mental ill health. This is true of congregations and of ministers. It is easy to be so busy looking after others' needs that we forget our own!

This guidance aims to help ministers and others who are offering pastoral support to better understand the sorts of mental health and wellbeing issues that individuals within their communities might be experiencing and offer support; and for us all to be aware of our mental health and wellbeing and the need to try to stay both physically and mentally well at this time. Here are some tips based on ones the Mental Health Foundation has produced that will help clergy, pastoral teams, and other members of the church and community to look after your mental health at a time when there is much discussion of potential threats to our physical health.

1. Try to avoid speculation and look up reputable sources on the outbreak
  - Rumour and speculation can fuel anxiety. Having access to good quality information about the virus can help you feel more in control.
  - You can get up-to-date information and advice on the virus here: [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk). alternatively, if you can't access the internet, ask a trusted friend to look for you.
  
2. Follow the Government advice on staying safe
  - Follow hygiene advice such as washing your hands more often than usual, for 20 seconds with soap and hot water (sing 'happy birthday' to yourself twice to make sure you do this for 20 seconds). You should do this whenever you get home or into work, blow your nose, sneeze or cough, eat or handle food. If you can't wash your hands straightaway, use hand sanitiser and then wash them at the next opportunity.
  - You should also use tissues if you sneeze and make sure you dispose of them quickly; and stay at home if you are feeling unwell.
  - Follow appropriate advice on social distancing and self-isolation
  
3. Try to stay connected
  - At times of stress, we work better in company and with support. Try and keep in touch with your friends and family or contact a helpline for emotional support.
  - It is a good idea to stick to your daily routine. You may also like to focus on the things you can do if you feel able to:
    - stress management
    - keep active
    - eat a balanced diet
  - Stay in touch with friends on social media but try not to sensationalise things. If you are sharing content, use this from trusted sources, and remember that your friends might be worried too.

#### 4. Talk to your children

- Involving our family and children in our plans for good health is essential. We need be alert to and ask children what they have heard about the outbreak and support them, without causing them alarm.
- We need to minimise the negative impact it has on our children and explain the facts to them. Discuss the news with them but try and avoid over-exposure to coverage of the virus. Be as truthful as possible.
- Let's not avoid the 'scary topic' but engage in a way that is appropriate for them. We have more advice on talking with your children about world news.

#### 5. Try to anticipate distress

- It is normal to feel vulnerable and overwhelmed as we read news about the outbreak, especially if you have experienced trauma or a mental health problem in the past, or if you have a long-term physical health condition that makes you more vulnerable to the effects of the coronavirus.
- It's important to acknowledge these feelings and remind each other to look after our physical and mental health. We should also be aware of and avoid increasing habits that may not be helpful in the long term, like smoking and drinking.
- Try and reassure people you know who may be worried and check in with people who you know are living alone.

#### 6. Try not to make assumptions

- Don't judge people and avoid jumping to conclusions about who is responsible for the spread of the disease. The Coronavirus can affect anyone, regardless of gender, ethnicity or sex.

#### 7. Try to manage how you follow the outbreak in the media

- There is extensive news coverage about the outbreak. If you find that the news is causing you huge stress, it's important to find a balance.
- It's best that you don't avoid all news and that you keep informing and educating yourself, but limit your news intake if it is bothering you.

#### 8. How should people deal with being in self-isolation or in quarantine?

- If there's a chance you could have coronavirus, you may be asked to stay away from other people (self-isolate).
- For people that are in self-isolation or are in quarantine, this may seem like a daunting prospect. It will help to try and see it as a different period of time in your life, and not necessarily a bad one, even if you didn't choose it.
- It will mean a different rhythm of life, a chance to be in touch with others in different ways than usual. Be in touch with other people regularly on social media, e-mail or on the phone, as they are still good ways of being close to the people who matter to you.
- Create a daily routine that prioritises looking after yourself. You could try reading more or watching movies, having an exercise routine, trying new relaxation techniques, or finding

new knowledge on the internet. Try and rest and view this as a new if unusual experience, that might have its benefits.

- Make sure your wider health needs are being looked after such as having enough prescription medicines available to you.
9. Responding to those with mental illness issues
- Churches often become aware of individuals who are experiencing mental ill health and who need specialist help and support. Ensure you have contact details for the relevant NHS mental health providers, the Samaritans and any other specialist local support services that may be relevant. Ensure those who are offering pastoral care are aware of not going beyond their remit and expertise in offering advice and support, and to recognise when to ask for help in dealing with an individual.
10. Looking after your spiritual health
- It is important to look after your spiritual health as well as your physical and mental health. This is as important for clergy as lay people in these challenging times, when the danger is to be so busy looking after everyone else's spiritual needs that we may forget our own. Find ways to pray, read the Bible, talk to other Christians maybe by phone. Your church may have a pastoral visiting team who can keep in touch and support you. Maybe you could buddy with someone as a prayer partner etc. Some churches will be offering services over the internet. There are resources available of the Church of England website for daily prayer and other spiritual support.
  - You may find it helpful to memorise a verse or passage of scripture that you can use when you feel anxious, such as:-

**Psalm 121**

*Assurance of God's Protection*

*1 I lift up my eyes to the hills—*

*from where will my help come?*

*2 My help comes from the Lord,*

*who made heaven and earth.*

*3 He will not let your foot be moved;*

*he who keeps you will not slumber.*

*4 He who keeps Israel*

*will neither slumber nor sleep.*

*5 The Lord is your keeper;*

*the Lord is your shade at your right hand.*

*6 The sun shall not strike you by day,*

*nor the moon by night.*

*7 The Lord will keep you from all evil;*

*he will keep your life.*

*8 The Lord will keep*

*your going out and your coming in*

**Matthew 28 v20**

*Jesus said, "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age"*

**Psalm 23**

*1 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*

*2 He makes me lie down in green pastures;*

*he leads me beside still waters*

*3 he restores my soul*

*He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.*

*4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley,*

*I fear no evil;*

*for you are with me; your rod and your staff—*

*they comfort me.*

*5 You prepare a table before me*

*in the presence of my enemies;*

*you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*

*6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me*

*all the days of my life,*

*and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord*

*my whole life long*