

Student Mentors: Looking after yourself during these strange times

Leaving campus – whether it is your first year or your last – tends to be a bittersweet experience for students, but it is safe to say that it has never been quite this disorientating. It is completely understandable if the last few weeks at university have left you in a state of shock, confusion, upset and fear.

These feelings are hugely valid, and there is nothing that can be said that will take them away. However, there are also many things we can do to support and manage our wellbeing during these difficult times.

We have compiled some tips for self-care, studying from home, staying connected with your friends and dealing with complicated home situations, to try and help you deal with the next few months.

Throughout it all, the most important thing is to remember to always **talk to others about how you are feeling**. Whether this is your family, friends, partner or support services at the University or in the community - help and support is out there for you to access.

Self-care tips during the outbreak

- Create a **new daily routine** that prioritises looking after yourself. You could try reading more or watching movies, having an exercise routine, trying new relaxation techniques, or learning new things via the internet. Try to rest and view this as a new – if unusual experience – that might have its benefits.
- 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 at [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).
- Try to **stay connected**. Keep in touch with your friends and family by phone, email or social media, or [contact a helpline for emotional support](#).
- **Assess your social media activity**: are there particular accounts or people that are increasing your worry or anxiety? Considering muting or unfollowing accounts or hashtags that cause you to feel anxious.
- Remind yourself that **it is okay to feel vulnerable or overwhelmed** as we read news about the outbreak. It is important to acknowledge these feelings and remind each other to look after our physical and mental health.
- Do what you can to **avoid increasing habits that may not be helpful in the long-term**, like smoking and drinking.
- Incorporate **physical activity** into your daily routine. Exercising at home can be simple and there are options for everyone, for example:
 - Cleaning your room

- Dancing to music
- Going up and down the stairs
- Online workouts
- Standing up and moving around: if you notice you've been sitting down for an hour, just getting up or changing your position can help
- Get as much **sunlight, fresh air and nature** as you can, whilst following Government stipulations.
- Find **new ways to spend your time**: clear out your wardrobe; write long letters or emails to friends who you don't often speak to; delete those super old emails clogging up your inbox; pick up the musical instrument you haven't played since you left school; try yoga or pilates; do some colouring; learn how to put up shelves; listen to podcasts on a topic you know nothing about; anything!
- **Share how you are feeling** – this is an unknown time for all of us, and so many people will be finding it hard. Remember that it is always okay to ask for help and support.
 - Click [here](#) to access the University's mental health support and [here](#) for community mental health support.
 - There are also many apps that you can use to help you practice meditation or mindfulness. The [Breathe app](#) has created a free meditation collection called **Inner Wellness During Coronavirus**, which covers topics such as fear of illness, coping with your family and boredom.

Studying from home

- Tips for studying from home:
 - **Waking up**: you may be able to have extra time in bed without those 9am lectures to rush to, but aim to wake up around the same time every day. This helps stabilise your internal clock and improve your sleep overall, making it easier to study.
 - **Getting ready**: keep your usual morning routine – get ready, washed and dressed as if you are going to a lecture or to the library.
 - **Setting up your study space**: try to set aside a study space separate from your sleeping area. This will make it easier to switch off at the end of the day.
 - **Get moving**: including some movement into your home-study routine will help maintain your physical and mental health.
 - If you're not self-isolating, try going for a walk or a jog either before you start studying, during your lunch break or once you have finished studying for the day. If you need to stay indoors, look online for an activity that suits you, such as a home yoga video or a fitness class.
 - **Eat well and stay hydrated**: eating regularly and keeping your blood sugar stable can help your mood and energy levels. Make sure that you are also drinking enough water!
 - **Take a break**: be sure to take regular breaks away from your screen and stretch your legs during the day. Have a clearly defined lunch break and move away from your study space to eat it!

- **Virtual social sessions:** replace the usual social time you have by studying with virtual coffee or lunch breaks, sharing photo updates of your lunchtime walk or competing in an online quiz with a study buddy.

Staying connected with other people

Whilst we may have to be physically distant from each other right now, that doesn't mean that we have to lose all social contact with each other. Here are a few ideas of different ways that you can stay connected with your friends:

- Play an **online game** with each other such as the new multiplayer Mario Kart, Words with Friends or Monopoly online.
- Download the [Netflix Party](#) Google extension. It allows you to watch the same Netflix shows at the same time as all of your friends and adds a group chat to the screen so that even when you're in isolation you can still feel as though you're watching together.
- Create a Spotify **playlist** that all of your friends can add their favourite feel-good songs to.
- Pick a **book** that you can read at the same time as a friend, and have a Skype or Facetime chat about each chapter once you finish it.
- Create a **Whatsapp** group with people you don't usually talk to – your neighbours or people you had lectures or seminars with.

Dealing with a difficult home situation

If your home situation is a stressful one, there are a few things that you can do to try to ease the pressure:

- **Walk away from tense situations if you can:** being cooped up with other people will naturally be frustrating and might create tension. You can defuse difficult situations by walking away from arguments until everyone starts to feel calmer. Spend some time in another room, or go for a walk or jog outside providing you're not self-isolating.
- **Create a rota:** if you're in a situation where lots of people are fighting over who gets to pick the TV channel, who cooks and cleans or anything else, you might find it helpful to create a rota. This can help you agree a fair system and help avoid arguments.
- **Take mini-breaks for yourself:** this could include anything from checking in with friends or other family, to drawing, cooking, going for a walk or practicing yoga.
- **Reach out for help:** if your living situation is difficult, please don't struggle in silence. Speak to someone you trust. [Call a friend or helpline](#). If you're worried about being overheard, you could try texting or emailing instead. There are lots of helplines which also offer text and online messenger support.