

“Look after yourself. Stay safe.” Phrases like this have become common place over the past few weeks as we end our telephone or video calls. It betrays a new sense of precarious vulnerability to our wellbeing that, until recently, many of us took for granted. But, of course, our state of wellbeing – physical, mental, emotional, spiritual – is not only dependent upon whether or not we catch Coronavirus, but also very much related to its associated and ongoing effects in our lives.

For some of us this season of life is necessarily quieter than usual. This may result in feelings of isolation, loneliness, acute awareness of – even discomfort with – our inner-thoughts, struggles with our identity or sense of self apart from our usual social contexts, or the exposure of relational difficulties heightened either by a new separation or proximity.

For others, this season is one of extreme noise and busyness: increased workload for keyworkers, the pressures of children being at home, needing to learn new skills, feeling de-skilled due to being unable to perform tasks in the way we’re used to, working in less-than-ideal environments, etc. Additionally, many of us are facing a number of very stressful life events, involving ‘loss’ (e.g. bereavement, employment, relationships, freedoms, etc.) and ‘threat’ (e.g. to our health, to our family, to our livelihoods, etc.). It is important to recognise that such circumstances can have a significant impact upon our mental health and wellbeing.

The Church of England has produced its own [guidance](#) around mental wellbeing and the Coronavirus. They have also produced a very helpful booklet, [Supporting Good Mental Health](#), comprising 13 daily Bible reflections written by Revd Prof Christopher Cook and accompanied by practical ‘have a go’ habits by Ruth Rice. In addition to the helpful CofE guidance, we would like to share some other information and resources which we hope may be helpful.

It is difficult to comprehend a large scale of illness, pain and loss, not to mention the even greater numbers of grieving family members, friends and communities. While the loss and suffering associated with Coronavirus is more gradual, dispersed and hidden than many of the conflicts or disasters we naturally associate with the word tragedy or trauma, we must make no mistake that this current situation is a trauma. We need to understand it and respond to it as such. The [Tragedy and Congregations](#) Project have done a lot of thinking in the area of Christian response to trauma. They have provided some helpful very [reflections](#) for churches in light of Coronavirus.

It is important to be aware of the impact this reality is having upon both our own wellbeing, and that of those we care for. The protracted nature of this current trauma (and the associated physiological and psychological responses of fight, flight, freeze, etc.) can all mount up and we must be aware of the effects of “crisis fatigue.” In one sense, it is entirely normal to experience things like becoming intensely focussed on Coronavirus to neglect of other things, emotional lability, and the disruption to normal rhythms of sleeping, eating, etc. However, it is not hard to see how a continuation of this pattern could lead to adverse effects on our wellbeing. Therefore, it is worth thinking about how we can be promoting good mental physical wellbeing in ourselves and our churches. Below we offer some pointers:

Rest: Sleep is one of the single most important influences upon our health, happiness, safety, productivity, and even life expectancy. It is also a great reminder that God is God and we are not (Psa 4)! If you struggle with sleep, or even if you don’t, [here](#) are 10 helpful tips on getting a good night’s sleep.

Rhythm: The loss of many of the things that provide structure to our day can cause us to adopt an unhealthy rhythm of work, rest, mealtimes, exercise, etc. It is important to establish new routines that are sustainable and life-giving in this season. Think about how you are starting and finishing

work; establishing boundaries with regards to our time and environment; moderating screen time and social media; quiet times/daily devotions/prayer and worship, etc.

Refuel: It can be easy to slip into unhealthy habits with regards to under or over-eating in these circumstances. Try to ensure a healthy diet and limit any alcohol intake to less than 14 units/week.

Recreation: With many of our usual activities curtailed at present, it is important to ensure we are still finding opportunity to do things we enjoy. Make sure you exercise daily, as encouraged by the government guidance. Also, make time for things you enjoy doing and that give you relaxation – reading, games, quizzes, a TV program, etc.

Relationships: While the pandemic has inevitably had a big impact on how we do our relationships, it is vital we continue to maintain them in new ways. Make sure you keep in touch with family, friends, colleagues, and congregation members. It is also important to ensure you are honestly sharing your thoughts, fears and feelings with someone you trust – perhaps a close friend, mentor or your spiritual advisor.

Restrict and Reputable: (We're pushing the alliteration now!) With regular briefings from the Government and almost single-minded press attention on Coronavirus, it can be tempting to spend a great deal of time checking the latest news and developments. However, it is most helpful to ensure you get your news and information from an informed, reliable and reputable source and to try to restrict checking the news to once or twice a day.

Finally, if you are worried about your own, or someone else's mental health – particularly if you note significant changes in mood, personality, behaviour, thoughts, speech, attention and concentration – then the local GP should be contacted in first instance.

The local hospice may be a good resource on bereavement, as is the new National Bereavement Helpline: 0800 2600 400. This may be a time when churches, or possibly deaneries, can reach out to local services in their area to explore how they might work together over the coming months.

[Inter Diocesan Counselling Service \(IDCS\)](#) is a free, professional counselling service to whom clergy, LLMs, Ordinands and their families can self-refer. They are offering remote counselling during the lockdown.