



COVID-19 PANDEMIC

FRONTLINE

KEYWORKER

SELF CARE ACTS

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**The last of the human
freedoms: to choose one's
attitude in any given set of
circumstances, to choose one's
own way.**

*Victor Frankl, Austrian neurologist and Holocaust survivor, author of Man's
Search for Meaning*

Never before has it been so important for us to nurture a culture of self-care. Here at SelfCare Psychology we wanted to help in any way we could, to support those out there dealing with this pandemic.

Building on our Self Care Cards for Social Workers, we have expanded them to include all key workers, refining the content and advice. We have designed these cards to be best used virtually, with links to resources and embedded content such as videos, but you can also print out to use. There is a front and back to each card. Just set to double sided print and print from Page 4.

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We always advocate Self Care as a way of life, a building of habits and lifestyle, not as a one off. But in these challenging times, please use them as you see fit. There is no right or wrong answer. Just for you, with your team, as a one off or as the start of building a better way. Please share and tag us on social media, so we can all help spread the word and support each other. We will be featuring cards on our social media over the weeks to come, discussing them in more detail.

There is a lot we feel we cannot change at the moment, but we can absolutely change how we deal with it, kindly and together as one team!

Take care and stay safe,

Sass, Kate, and Roz

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SING

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SING

Singing can provide an emotional and physical release and is proven to improve mood. The physical act of singing opens up the body, releases tension and makes you breathe deeply. Think of your car as your personal karaoke studio, put on your favourite tunes, and go for it. In the car or at home, use a good song to shake off the worries of the day and refocus the mind.

Be careful what you choose to sing. Music has a profound effect on mood, so pick songs you know make you feel good.

Home Working Tip

There's nothing to stop you singing at home, but want to take it to the next level? Join Some Virtual Voices online for free weekly uplifting singing sessions and add some social connection to your social distance sing!

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MAKE AND APPRECIATE A HOT DRINK

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MAKE AND APPRECIATE A HOT DRINK

Make yourself a hot drink and take five minutes to truly appreciate it. If possible, avoid caffeine; fruit and herbal teas are comforting and won't stimulate your nervous system. Enjoying simple pleasures is important when there's so much uncertainty and pressure as our Co-Founder [explains here](#). How about making it a mindfulness meditation - [click here](#) for instructions from Mindful.

Peer Support: Pass it On

You can't make each other a brew right now, but you can enjoy one with colleagues; it's in these informal moments that the best support can be found. Whether it's in person or over a video chat, try to make the time for each other.

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MEET A FRIEND

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MEET A FRIEND

When things get on top of you, seeing a friendly face can make all the difference. Maintaining contact with loved ones however you're feeling helps us to remember that there is more to life than work. This may seem impossible in current circumstances, but get creative! How about scheduling activities over a video chat – book clubs, coffee and cake, pub quizzes, knit and knatter– all things we've seen done. If the cabinet office can hold their meetings on Zoom, you can surely have a coffee with a mate. If you're not sure how to use it, check out [this easy tutorial](#).

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CREATE A GRATITUDE PRACTICE

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CREATE A GRATITUDE PRACTICE

When faced with restrictions on daily life, and the threat of the pandemic, being grateful may seem counterintuitive.

But I bet we are all already missing things we previously took for granted. Taking the time to be grateful for what we have is proven to positively influence our wellbeing.

Making ourselves think about what we are grateful for every day forces us to think differently and reframes our lives and experiences in a positive way.

Many people find it helpful to do this just prior to going to sleep. There are many apps available which encourage gratitude practice, and remind you with alerts etc, a rundown can be found [here](#). If this isn't your thing, a simple notepad or bedtime ritual will work just as well.

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CREATE A SELF-CARE SQUAD

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CREATE A SELF-CARE SQUAD

Make a list of all the people in your life who lift you up. This is your self-care squad, they are your real-life cheerleaders and need to be cherished.

If you're feeling on top of things at the moment, reach out to someone on the list who you think you can help. If you're not, reach out to someone who can help you. Build your community and you'll never be short of support. We need each other more than ever.

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**PASSIVE
PROGRESSIVE
RELAXATION
EXERCISE**

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PASSIVE PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION EXERCISE

This type of exercise is used to help you reach a deep sense of relaxation. People who do not respond well to meditation often find this practice easier as it involves actively thinking rather than trying not to think. You can do this at work, maybe at your desk, wherever you feel most comfortable. For best results try to lie flat on your back where you won't be disturbed.

The best way to experience this exercise is to listen to a recording to guide you.

[Try the this one from soundcloud.](#) They will talk you through each area of your body, helping you to identify and relax tension bit by bit.

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DO A FEELINGS DIARY

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DO A FEELINGS DIARY

Knowing what we feel and why is crucial to staying healthy when we're working with, and supporting, others. Self-awareness and insight are vital to maintaining balance, both personally and professionally.

Doing a feelings diary can really help to show patterns and triggers in our thoughts, feelings and emotions, both positive and negative. This knowledge is empowering and can help us manage our wellbeing and practice effectively. The coming weeks and months will be particularly challenging emotionally. Checking in with how we feel and processing our experiences is key to maintaining emotional health.

If you need a place to start, [try this article](#) which includes more detailed advice, suggestions for apps you can use and a free pdf printable if you prefer pen and paper.

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DANCE FOR 5 MINUTES

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DANCE FOR 5 MINUTES

Dancing combines the mood boosting effect of music with the endorphin release of exercise, so can only result in an improved day. Dancing with others in a class or on a night out isn't possible right now, but don't let that stop you! Why not turn up the music at home and just go for it for five minutes. Alternatively there are dance classes you can join online, such as free live sessions on instagram: from ballet to high energy dance fitness

Peer Support: Pass it On

If you're feeling brave, how about a mini 5-minute silent rave ?All put your headphones in, a timer on, and go crazy. Once you get over the awkwardness it's very liberating- and amusing! We think a video call silent rave could be incredible!

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PLAN A ME TIME ACTIVITY

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PLAN A ME TIME ACTIVITY

Schedule an activity just for you. This may seem odd and you may think you don't have time, but this is rarely the case, it is about your boundaries and your priorities.

The better you look after yourself, the better you can help others. You can do a lot for you in 5 minutes: make a call, listen to a song or meditation practice. It will all help refuel your self-care energy levels.

You may find that with all the restrictions on life outside work, you have more time than usual. Don't fall into the trap of mindlessly wasting time being bored and frustrated. Why not take up a hobby, or do all the things you usually don't have time for - a clearout, a long bath, a film fest. Plan it into your day to make sure it happens!

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**ASK
FOR HELP**

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ASK FOR HELP

Simple but effective. We all need support sometimes. Being able to ask for help is a strength not a weakness. In these difficult times we need to lean on each other and connect meaningfully, and accepting our vulnerability is the start. If you're in any doubt, check out Brene Brown, starting with this [TED Talk](#).

Home Working Tip

How about suggesting a regular video or group call peer supervision session? Foster a culture of helping within your team, offer to help when you can. You'll feel more able to ask when you need to.

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LEAVE WORK ON TIME

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LEAVE WORK ON TIME

Set an alarm on your phone to remind you and give you enough time to wrap things up. You may think this is impossible, sometimes it might be, but we can get into the habit of thinking we are indispensable. Even in the middle of a pandemic, your needs are important too.

You can't pour from an empty cup.

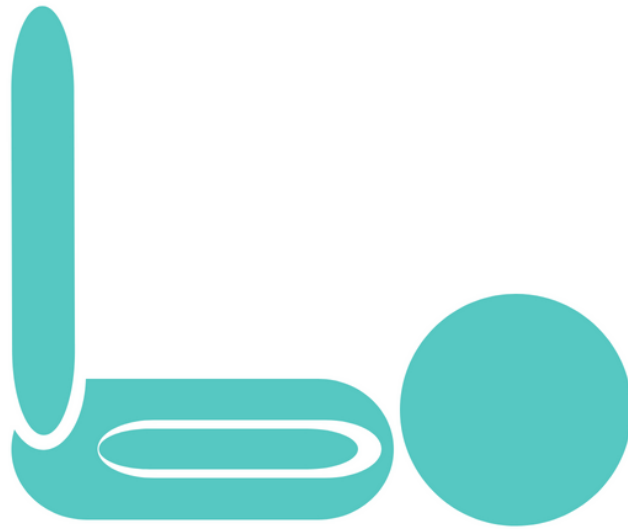
Home Working Tip

If you are working from home, it's easy for the lines between home and work time to get blurred.

Create clear boundaries: a change of clothes or shoes, the putting away of laptops, the clearing of the table of work papers. We all need a mental break. Try these ten top tips- hint, this is one of them!

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LEGS UP THE WALL POSE

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LEGS UP THE WALL POSE

This is a simple yoga exercise, which is accessible to most people and has a range of health benefits. It is said to relax tension in the back, improve digestion, calm the nervous system and regulate blood pressure to name a few.

Lie on your back on the floor, with your feet up the wall, and your bottom as close to the wall as comfortably possible. Hold for ten minutes minimum.

Peer Support: Pass it On

Encourage colleagues to do this with you, set a daily alarm, ready steady, GO! If WFH, maybe you could share pictures and videos of you doing it? Tag us in on social media!

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**MAKE A LIST OF
WHY YOU DO THE
JOB THAT YOU DO**

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MAKE A LIST OF WHY YOU DO THE JOB THAT YOU DO

Knowing your why is so important to maintaining your motivation. Making a list of why you chose this career in the first place can help you to refocus and realign.

Knowing your values and motivation gives you a rich resource to tap into when things are hard, and a helpful barometer to guide your practice and recognise your successes. The scale and magnitude of the challenge posed by COVID-19 can make us all feel small and useless in its wake. Remembering why you do what you do reminds you why we are all important.

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**TAKE TEN
MINUTES TO
PLAN LUNCH**

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TAKE TEN MINUTES TO PLAN LUNCH

Taking the time to sort out your lunch for the next day is time well spent. It's so much easier to make positive choices in advance, when you're not hungry and in a hurry.

This isn't about telling you what to eat, but it is about giving yourself the opportunity to choose mindfully what you fuel your body with.

Home Working Tip

If you are working from home, this can still be useful. Maintaining routine can help us feel grounded and keep us focused.

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**STAND UP AND
STRETCH TWICE
A DAY**

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STAND UP AND STRETCH TWICE A DAY

Stand up and reach for the sky!

Spending time focused, stressed out, can make you hunch up and tense your muscles. Stretching regularly helps to mitigate against this and stops it leading to bigger issues such as back pain.

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PHONE A FRIEND

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PHONE A FRIEND

If you're feeling overwhelmed, pick up the phone and talk to someone. Having a conversation with someone outside the situation, who cares about you, can make all the difference. If you can, video call, as this can increase the feeling of connection. Will it fundamentally change your situation? No. Will it help you to feel better? Probably!

Home Working Tip

Being at home around family, partners, flatmates, or alone, all day every day, can take its toll. Staying connected with others is important and can provide much needed distraction and perspective. If you do a caring role, it's key to maintain contact with colleagues. These informal debriefs are essential, as they understand the challenges in a way others can't.

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**GET AT LEAST 7
HOURS OF SLEEP
TONIGHT**

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GET AT LEAST 7 HOURS OF SLEEP TONIGHT

The research is in, and the conclusion is clear: good sleep is crucial for our mental and physical health.

Sleep is something we increasingly seem to devalue as we strive to have and do more. The cult of busy is affecting our sleep, and we need to change that. Add in the stress of COVID-19 and you've got a perfect storm.

If you struggle to sleep, as many people will be right now, there are many things you can try. Examples include lavender oil, a bath before bed, a screen ban one hour prior to sleeping, sleep hypnosis tracks [like this](#), and keeping the bedroom cool.

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**DO THE 4-7-8
BREATHING
EXERCISE**

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DO THE 4-7-8 BREATHING EXERCISE

The 4-7-8 breathing technique, developed by Dr. Andrew Weil, has been described as a “natural tranquilizer for the nervous system”. It’s great for when you are feeling stressed. You can do this at work, maybe at your desk, or somewhere private if you feel more comfortable. It can also aid sleep. To prepare either lie down, sit up straight or stand up straight.

1. Breathe in through your nose for a count of 4
2. Hold the breath for a count of 7
3. Exhale for a count of 8
4. Repeat a maximum of 4 times initially, building to 8 when fully comfortable with the practice.

Find detailed instructions from [Dr Weil himself on Youtube.](#)

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**OBSERVE
WHAT'S GOING ON
RATHER THAN
GETTING SWAMPED**

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OBSERVE

WHAT'S GOING ON RATHER THAN GETTING SWAMPED

When you feel stress rising, STOP:

S = STOP

Identify the feeling and take a pause.

T = TAKE A DEEP BREATH

Bring yourself into the moment.

O = OBSERVE

Consider what is going on in your body, emotions, and thoughts. Take a step back and get some perspective.

P = PROCEED

Carry on, making a conscious, intentional choice to incorporate what you have just learnt.

For worksheets and further info to help you with this check out www.getselfhelp.co.uk/stopp.htm

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TAKE A WALK

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TAKE A WALK

Get out and take a walk (or run if you're so inclined) in the fresh air today. Walking has a huge impact on your physical and emotional health when practised regularly and it's free and easy and can be done in your lunch break wherever you are. Use your social distancing approved exercise time!

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DESK YOGA

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DESK YOGA

You may or may not be a fan of yoga but what we do know is how beneficial it can be physically and emotionally. Whilst developing a full regular yoga practice may seem intimidating, trying a short simple routine at your desk can be fun and easy. No special equipment needed. To get started [search Youtube for desk yoga- there is a range of short videos available](#) such as the one below

Peer Support: Pass it On

Get your colleagues to join in, in person or over a video chat. If you're working from home, why not rope in the whole household. It's calmer and easier than Joe Wickes! Better still, it's doable in the smallest of homes.

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READ A BOOK FOR PLEASURE

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READ A BOOK FOR PLEASURE

We have become so used to the constant interruption and instant gratification of smartphones, social media, TV on demand and the myth of multi-tasking, that concentrating on one thing can be a struggle. Constant pandemic updates contribute further to this.

The beauty of reading is that when you're immersed you can't think about anything else. Reading regularly for pleasure can be an escape from everyday life, which is more important now than ever. Money is tight for a lot of people right now, so how about utilising your library? They're closed, but many provide online content and ebooks, using apps like [BorrowBox](#).

Peer Support: Pass it On

Why not start a book club with colleagues, family or friends? This could easily be done virtually. Or, join an existing open access virtual one, [suggestions here](#).

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**GO TO THE TOILET
WHEN YOU NEED
THE TOILET**

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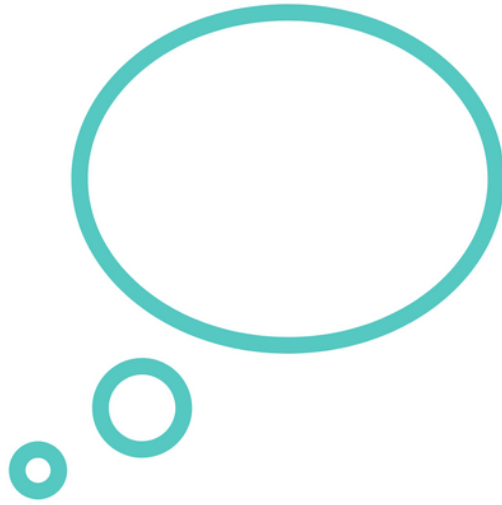


GO TO THE TOILET WHEN YOU NEED THE TOILET

Yes, it is as simple as that, and yet how many of us sit rocking on a chair whilst we 'just make this call', 'finish this report' or 'fill in this form'? With the pressure of work, we can live so much in our heads that we ignore or block out our basic physical needs. Make the effort to pay more attention to your body and go to the toilet as soon as you feel the need wherever possible. Your needs are a priority.

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**ALLOW
YOURSELF FIVE
MINUTES TO
DAYDREAM**

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ALLOW YOURSELF FIVE MINUTES TO DAYDREAM

We are living in unprecedented times of uncertainty and stress. Give yourself permission to just switch off for five minutes. Pop a timer on your phone, and checkout, letting your mind wander at will. We all need a mini break every now and then, even if it is just in our imagination.

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**LISTEN TO A FIVE-
MINUTE
MEDITATION ON
AN APP**

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LISTEN TO A FIVE-MINUTE MEDITATION ON AN APP

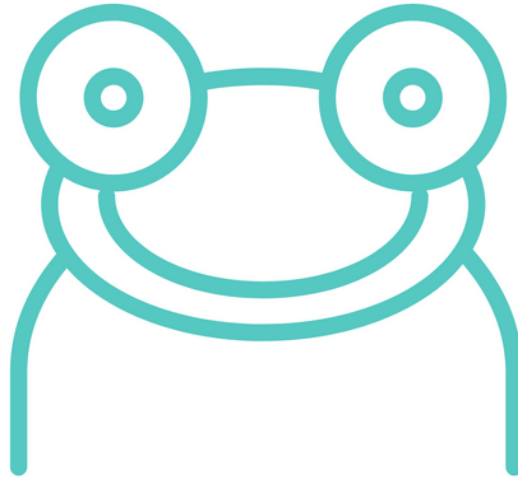
If you've never tried meditation before, now is a good time to start. If you have, now is a good time to practise. We've all heard the hype but may not be convinced it's for us but you won't know unless you try.

Challenge yourself to try just 10 minutes a day, for a week. You can download one of the many phone apps and set a time to do it every day.

One positive of this pandemic has been people's willingness to help others. Currently [Headpsace](#), a popular app, is offering extra free content, and [Calm](#), a similar app has a range of resources for free available [here](#).

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EAT YOUR FROG

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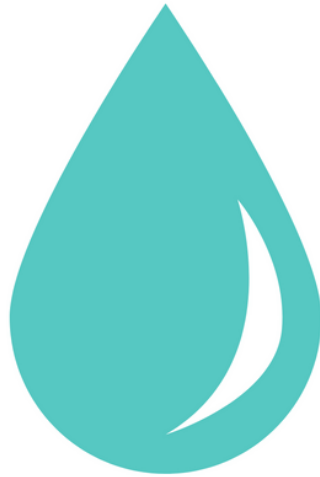
EAT YOUR FROG

This is the brainchild of productivity expert Brian Tracy. The basic principle is that each day, you identify the task you are most dreading having to do but which is essential: the difficult phone call to a client, the report that feels like it will never end, the conversation with a manager where you know there will be conflict. You do it now, first thing, no excuses.

For the rest of the day, you feel better. You've achieved something right at the start of the day, you're no longer dreading things, and you feel productive. When so much is uncertain, taking some control back is essential. It's a win!

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**DRINK A LITRE OF
WATER A DAY**

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DRINK A LITRE OF WATER A DAY

This sounds deceptively simple. In reality, many of us struggle with achieving this basic goal.

A good way to start can be to get a large water bottle that you can fill and keep on your desk to help you monitor your intake.

Alternatively there are many apps for your phone which allow you to track how much water you drink. [See here for a lowdown on the best.](#)

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PERSONAL PICTURE IN YOUR WORK SPACE

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PERSONAL PICTURE IN YOUR WORK SPACE

You spend a lot of time at work. Make it that bit more welcoming by adding some photos or pictures that cheer you up.

No office, no problem! Get creative: home screens on phones, key rings, locker pictures, can all give you that fix of the familiar. You could tuck a laminated picture collage into your diary, or purse. Reach for them if you begin to feel overwhelmed.

Home Working Tip

WFH, surrounded by the familiar, you may be less inclined to want to see more of it! How about pictures of a place that makes you feel calm, like a favorite holiday destination or beauty spot. You could make it your screensaver.

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**FIND A SMELL
THAT MAKES YOU
SMILE**

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FIND A SMELL THAT MAKES YOU SMILE

Smell is our most evocative sense and has the ability to instantly transport us to memories and feelings we associate with them.

Additionally, certain smells have been shown to have positive effects on our wellbeing. Lavender essential oil promotes relaxation, whilst rosemary essential oil increases alertness and boosts memory.

Think about what your favourite smells are – think about the feelings they evoke rather than just how ‘nice’ they smell. Now find a way to carry that smell with you, for example on a tissue, and breathe it in whenever you feel stressed.

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DO THE 'EQUAL BREATHING' EXERCISE

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DO THE 'EQUAL BREATHING' EXERCISE

Equalising your breathing can have a calming effect on the body and mind, and is great for when you are feeling stressed. It is also known as Sama-Vritti and is taken from a yoga tradition but backed by modern science. You can do this at work, at your desk or wherever you feel most comfortable. To prepare either lie down, sit up straight or stand up straight.

1. Breathe in through your nose for a count of 4
2. Pause
3. Exhale
for a count of 4
4. Repeat for a few minutes, or as long as you feel comfortable.

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PROMPT A COLLEAGUE TO SELF-CARE

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PROMPT A COLLEAGUE TO SELF-CARE

Supporting colleagues to prioritise their needs helps build a culture of self care. This makes the work environment healthier for you and others. We all need to look after each other in these difficult times.

The more you prompt them, the more they'll prompt you, and slowly but surely it will become the norm - no more unrealistic expectations of each other and glorification of working until you drop.

Self-care is not a luxury, it is our responsibility. No one can self-care for you!

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LAUGH

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LAUGH

Laughing feels good. It's undeniable. Not only that, but studies suggest a wide range of benefits, from extending your life to boosting your immune system.

Make sure you get in a good belly laugh a day, in whatever way works for you. For some people it's watching a favourite comedy. For others its (virtually!) meeting up with friends or chatting with family. You might feel that laughing is inappropriate whilst tackling a pandemic, or not feel like it. However, we need to keep our spirits up and humour can have a big part in that, no matter how grim our circumstances are. Whatever works for you.

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**TAKE A LUNCH
BREAK AWAY FROM
YOUR DESK**

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TAKE A LUNCH BREAK AWAY FROM YOUR DESK

Leave your desk, office, classroom, ward or sofa for lunch. A brisk walk or a change of scenery can make all the difference to your wellbeing, even if you can only tour the building or move from the kitchen to lounge! It's important to remember that taking a break can make you more productive not less. Becoming overwhelmed helps no one.

Peer Support: Pass it On

Go alone or encourage a colleague to go with you. In these times of great stress it may be difficult to avoid work talk, if so try to keep it either solution focused or use it as an opportunity to mutually debrief.

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RELAX NECK AND SHOULDERS

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RELAX NECK AND SHOULDERS

Take two minutes and pay attention to the tension in your neck and shoulders. Set a daily alarm on your phone to remind you. Slowly and carefully turn your head from side to side, lightly stretching the muscles and holding at the point of tension. Then roll your shoulders, forward and then backwards, slowly whilst feeling for areas of tension and mindfully relaxing. Hunch your shoulders up to your ears as hard as you can, then hold for five seconds before releasing.

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**TAKE A PHOTO OF
ONE BEAUTIFUL
THING A DAY**

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TAKE A PHOTO OF ONE BEAUTIFUL THING A DAY

This challenges you to look for the beautiful wherever you are and whatever you happen to be doing, every day. Social distancing can add an element of challenge and seemingly limit your options. But remember "creativity doesn't grow in abundance, it grows from scarcity" (Jorgen Vig Knudstorp).

This small shift in perception can reframe how you see the world – it's amazing what you notice and appreciate once you start looking. It also forces you to exist in the here and now, rather than living in your head ruminating on the past and worrying about the future.

Maybe you could join a challenge on social media where you share your photos to hold yourself accountable and motivate you.

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MAKE A SELF-CARE KIT

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MAKE A SELF-CARE KIT

This is not simply a First Aid kit for our emotions. Self care is about more than crisis intervention, it's about building ourselves up to be resilient: physically, emotionally and professionally.

That requires ongoing input, not a one-off. So, your selfcare kit should include things, people, places and actions that help you maintain equilibrium, as well as things that can help in an emergency. Your kit could be virtual- there are apps out there that help with this. It could be a list of actions to take.

Whatever works for you. Think of it as a plan of action.

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PRACTISE THE FIVE SENSES EXERCISE

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PRACTISE THE FIVE SENSES EXERCISE

The five senses grounding exercise is a really useful tool to have in your self care arsenal. When practised regularly it creates an anchor you can drop whenever you begin to feel overwhelmed, bringing you back to the moment and allowing you to take back control. All you have to do is:

Stop and focus on:

1. Finding five things you can see
2. Finding four things you can hear
3. Finding three things you can smell
4. Finding two things you can touch
5. Finding one thing you can taste

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**MAKE A LIST OF
WHY YOU ARE
GREAT AT YOUR JOB**

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MAKE A LIST OF WHY YOU ARE GREAT AT YOUR JOB

Remembering what you have achieved is crucial to maintaining morale, this is not showing off! Make a list and put it somewhere prominent, maybe the front of your diary, a post it on your laptop, or the sun visor in your car?

Peer Support: Pass it On

If you're struggling with this, chat with colleagues and help each other with your lists!

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