



# Staff Wellbeing and Support Guidance

## What is good mental health?

Just like our physical health, mental health is something that we should be thinking about all the time, not just when we are experiencing periods of time where we are struggling, feeling low or stressed. Looking after our mental health can not only help us now, but will give us the proper tools to help us cope with difficult times in the future and also reduces the risk of physical health problems.

There are lots of little things we can do on a day-to-day basis that can make a big impact. This booklet contains guidance and helpful tips on how you can improve your mental health and wellbeing and take control of your thoughts, with a section on mindfulness towards the end. Everything included in this booklet is an introduction to the topic, so if you would like any further guidance or support please feel free to approach a member of the management team or Sam the Mental Health and Wellbeing Champion for more information. Remember, we are here to help.

At the current time of this booklet being created, the Covid-19 outbreak is still ongoing and Thorpe House recognises that all staff may feel under increased pressure and that anxiety levels may be increased as people are concerned about their health, the health of their friends and family, the health of the service users we support as well as concerns over financial pressures and difficulties with the ongoing social distancing measures. These anxieties can lead to sleep difficulties, concentration issues, feelings of being unable to cope and can leave us at risk of ill health. We may have a mix of emotions during this time and we know that everyone is trying their best, even on days when they are finding this more difficult.

This guidance has been put together to give staff some tips and resources which can be used to support mental health during this difficult and unprecedented time.

### Here's a quick exercise

Drop your shoulders

Loosen your stomach

Relax your eyebrows

Drop your tongue from the roof of your mouth

Pause and take a breath - breathe in for the count of 5, hold for 5, breathe out for the count of 7



## 1. Get some sleep



Getting a good night's sleep can impact our mental health in many ways; it can improve our mood, concentration and make us more productive during the day. Below are some tips to help you improve your sleep:

**Establish a routine** – try to go to bed at the same time every night and waking up at the same time every morning. This helps by regulating our body clock and will make falling asleep much easier.

**Switch off** – it's easy to fall into the trap of looking at our phones or watching TV just before bed, but the blue light from screens inhibits the production of melatonin, the hormone that makes us feel sleepy therefore taking longer for us to fall asleep. Try doing something away from screens an hour before bed such as reading a book, journaling or listening to music.

**Avoid caffeine and nicotine** – try to avoid smoking and caffeine or sugary drinks in the hours before bed as they are stimulants and interfere with the process of falling asleep. Try a healthy swap such as a warm, milky drink or herbal tea.

**Avoid drinking** – while having a drink might make you feel sleepy, drinking alcohol actually disrupts sleep because it prevents your body from falling into deep sleep, which is the restorative phase and can leave you feeling groggy the next day.

**Make the room dark** – darkness helps promote the production of the sleep hormone, so the darker it is, the easier it is to fall asleep. Try to make your room as dark as possible by covering any excess brightness; thick curtains can help and covering lights on electronic devices.

**No naps** – as much as we all love a nap, if you are having naps during the day they could be contributing to your struggle to fall asleep at night. Try to only sleep during night time hours.



### Try this exercise tonight

Did you know you might be breathing into your chest rather than your stomach? Abdominal breathing refers to deep breathing into the abdomen rather than shallow breathing in the chest. The following steps will make sure that you are breathing from your diaphragm.

1. Lie down with your legs straight and slightly apart and make sure the muscles in your body are relaxed. Point your toes outward, put your arms at your side gently, make sure your palms are facing up and close your eyes
2. Place one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest. Notice which hand rises the most as you inhale.
4. If the hand on your chest rises the most as you inhale, focus on filling your stomach (bottom of your lungs) full of air before you reach the top. The easy way to do this is to try and force your abdomen to rise as you breathe. Over time, this gets easier.
5. As you breathe, be sure to inhale through your nose and then exhale through your mouth. Keep your face relaxed as you do this. Breathe in and out while counting to make sure that you are breathing slowly. Relax and focus on the sound of your breath.

## 2. Connect with other people

Humans by nature are sociable, meaning that interacting with other people improves our mental health and wellbeing – we need *connection* to stay healthy. Spending quality time with our friends and family has many benefits including:

- ✚ Providing emotional support during difficult times
- ✚ Assisting with building a sense of self-worth and belonging
- ✚ Giving opportunities to share positive experiences and learn from one another

It can seem difficult trying to stay in touch with loved ones when we are feeling busy, stressed or down, but maintaining regular contact can improve mood and make us feel healthier and may even help us feel better sooner. Try not to rely on social media and technology solely to keep in touch, face-to-face interaction is the best way to feel connected to others. Here are some ideas for keeping in touch:

Going for a walk with someone

Meeting for a coffee

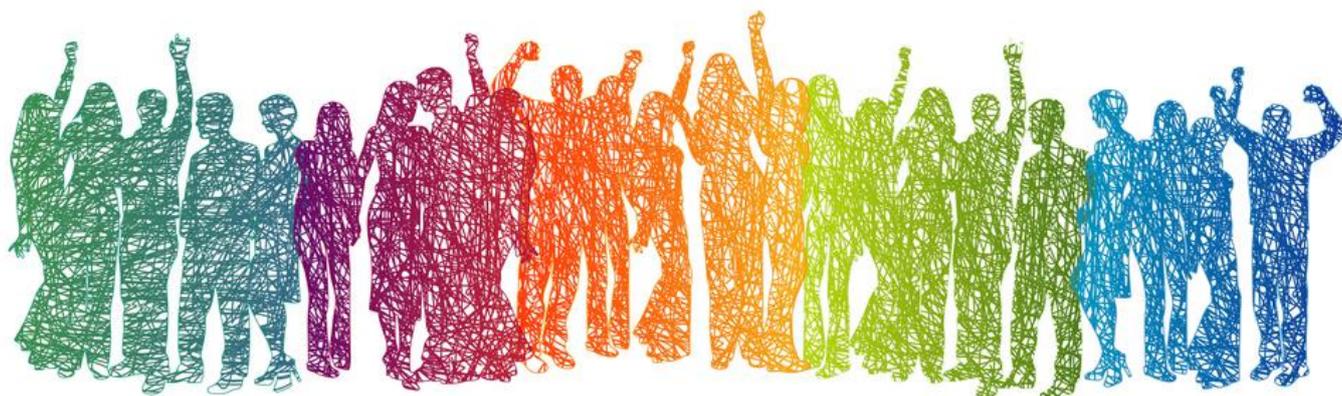
Have lunch with a colleague

Use technology – phone calls, video calls and texting are great ways to keep in touch from a distance

Try switching off the TV and spending time with family without screens

Try volunteering with a local charity

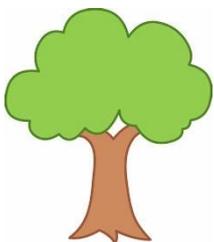
If you feel like you are unable to share your worries with close friends and family, Samaritans are a volunteer-run charity that offer a non-judgemental listening service and are available 24/7. You can call on 116 123 to speak to someone straight away or email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org). The service is completely confidential and you don't even have to give your real name – they are just there to listen.



### 3. Move your body

The average adult is recommended to do between 75 to 150 minutes of exercise each week, anything that raises your heart rate. Keeping active doesn't necessarily mean joining a gym and exercising for hours on end; doing something as simple as getting up when the adverts come on the TV or dancing to your favourite songs can make a massive difference. Studies show that if you keep moving throughout the day and try to not sit for long periods of time, it can improve cardiovascular health as well as flexibility, joints and muscle tone.

Exercise, even just a short ten minute walk, is proven to boost mood, lower stress and maintain brain health by improving cognitive functions such as memory, attention and problem solving. In the boxes below are things you can do to contribute towards moving every day.



**Did you know?...** Being in nature or green spaces has been shown to have a positive impact on mental health through simply being in a natural environment. Walking has been proven to reduce feelings of depression and anxiety, and while you're out walking you'll also be getting a dose of vitamin D from being in natural light.

## 4. You are what you eat



GOOD  
FOOD = GOOD  
MOOD

we eat is processed and the manufacturing techniques can affect its nutritional value. Due to these lifestyle changes and the rise in convenience foods, compared to our ancestors we consume fewer vegetables, fresh fruit and wholegrain foods in our diet, but far more sugar, saturated fats and additives. Rather than counting calories, you should try to focus on the quality of what you are eating and make sure you are including a wide variety of nutrient dense foods.

Current research has shown that the food we eat is associated with our mood, behaviour and cognition and an unbalanced or poor quality diet can be a contributing factor towards low mood and anxiety, and can also leave us more vulnerable to chronic illness later in life.

The modern lifestyle has affected our relationship with food. A lot of the food

For a healthy brain functioning you need good amounts of:

Complex carbohydrates

Essential fatty acids

Amino acids

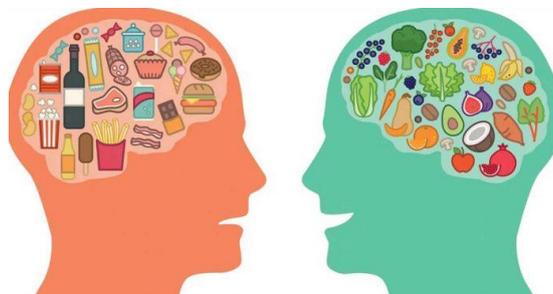
Vitamins

Minerals

Water

Protect your mental health through a healthy diet:

- Eat 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day
  - Eat a wide variety of foods
  - Drink plenty of fluids
- Include oily fish or an omega-3 supplement
  - Avoid refined and high sugar foods
  - Keep alcohol intake minimal
- Avoid saturated & hydrogenated vegetable oils
  - Eat regularly throughout the day
  - Aim to include protein with every meal
- Eat wholegrain foods e.g. pasta, bread and brown rice.



Remember to drink regularly during the day! Did you know that being just 2% dehydrated can affect your mood, memory and your ability to complete daily tasks?

## 4. Try Mindfulness



Mindfulness is a technique that you can learn which helps you to focus on the present moment and not be overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us. It has roots in meditation and Buddhism, but you don't need to hold any beliefs or be spiritual to try it; this is something that is innately human, you just need to learn how to access it.

When we practice mindfulness, we're practicing the art of creating space for ourselves – the space to think, breath and space between ourselves and our reactions. Mindfulness isn't about controlling your emotions, it's about observing them as they pass by and bringing you back to the present moment instead of worrying about the past or the future; you simply need to be in the now.

Techniques to bring you back to the present moment can:

### What are the benefits of mindfulness?

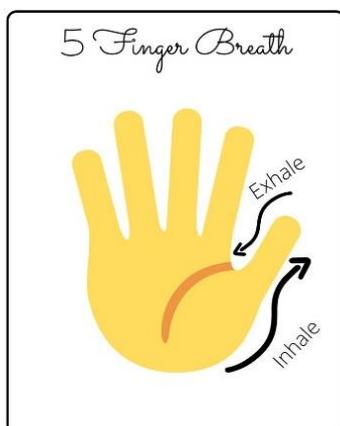
- Understand your emotions better
- Cope better with difficult thoughts Feel calmer
- Boost your attention and concentration
- Improve your relationships

*Notice the thoughts that come and go in your mind* - Everyone's experience of the world is different, but thoughts don't define who you are and they can be reframed and let go.

*Notice how your body is feeling* – negative emotions can be stored in the body e.g. many people with anxiety experience a tight chest and shallow breathing. Muscle tension and a fast heartbeat can also occur when we are worried.

*Create a boundary between you and your thoughts* – giving yourself the opportunity to see a situation as neutral and evaluate your reactions more calmly.

Below are some easy techniques you can implement in your day-to-day routine. We also have an app on the iPad called Insight Timer which includes guided meditations which are less than 5 minutes each. Please feel free to use this and take some time for yourself during the day (which is difficult sometimes!)



Make space.

*If you want any tips or further information, please ask Sam the Admin!*



## 4. Try Mindfulness

# A Mindful S.N.A.C.K.

The next time you're feeling stressed out, overwhelmed, or unsure, reach for a moment of calm awareness: a mindfulness SNACK. Here's how to do it:

**S**  
**Stop**

Just stop whatever you're doing. (Stopping, by definition, requires us to begin again. We can always begin again.)

**N**  
**Notice**

What is happening within and around you?

**A**  
**Accept**

This is a tricky one. Whatever it is you're struggling with (time, kids, sleepiness, frustration) acknowledge it for what it is, without judgment.

**C**  
**Curious**

Ground yourself with questions about your experience and environment: What am I feeling? What do I need right now?

**K**  
**Kindness**

Respond to yourself and others (mistakes and all) with kindness and observe how that helps things get back on track.



*This too shall pass.*

## 5. Online Resources

### Websites and resources where you can find information if you are feeling anxious, frightened or worried

- ❖ [Samaritans | Every life lost to suicide is a tragedy | Here to listen](http://www.samaritans.org) – www.samaritans.org
- ❖ [Mental Health Foundation](http://www.mentalhealth.org) – www.mentalhealth.org
- ❖ [Mindfulness - Headspace](http://www.headspace.com/mindfulness) – www.headspace.com/mindfulness
- ❖ [Free Mental Health & Growth App | Practice Self-Care, Manage Stress, Anxiety & More! | 29k](http://www.29k.org) – www.29k.org - free psychological tools for mental health and inner development
- ❖ Occupational health department at Kirklees – contact on 01484 226424
- ❖ Apps that can help with mindfulness and relaxation – Headspace, Insight timer, Unmind, Calm, Free mind, Mindfulness

### Other Resources for Sleep

- ❖ <https://www.sleepio.com/articles/sleep-basics/>
- ❖ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/blog/ten-top-tips-good-sleep>
- ❖ <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-guidelines-covid-19-isolation>

[Get Your Mind Plan - Every Mind Matters - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

[How Are You? quiz - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)