**Your wellbeing matters**

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The coronavirus outbreak has brought with it much uncertainty. With many of us working from home, self-isolating or continuing to deliver critical front-line services under pressure, it is understandable that we may experience frustration, concern and anxiety. Yet even with these unprecedented challenges there are still some simple steps we can take to look after our own wellbeing.

The suggestions we offer here are linked to the Wellbeing Wheel we developed for our recent wellbeing workshops. The Wellbeing Wheel identifies 5 key factors for enhancing our wellbeing. It introduces practical techniques to help you achieve small lifestyle changes which can positively impact your personal, physical and mental wellbeing.

There are so many organisations, groups and individuals reaching out to support us during this challenging period. If we had to choose just one, we would recommend the [Mind](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/) website. It is one of the best resources available to support you through some of the uncertainties arising from the COVID-19 outbreak.

**Connecting with others**

To support your own wellbeing through uncertain times, here are some suggestions of ways to connect.

* Family or Group Chats
	+ To help feel connected to those family and friends who are in isolation, maybe think about setting up a group chat to stay in touch. Sharing experiences with each other, and any funny memes to keep spirits up, can help bridge the gap.
* The world of technology allows for direct and interactive contact with Skype, FaceTime, Video Calling etc.
	+ Setting up routine contacts will help to build structure and regulate contact, so you feel less alone.
* Picking up the phone to your elderly relatives to check in
	+ Making it a daily call at a set time, can help you, as well as them, feel engaged and valued.
* Social Media
	+ The world of Social Media is excellent for keeping in touch. However, exposure to unhelpful sites can stir negative emotions. Take an opportunity to go into your settings for apps such as Facebook and Instagram. Select more of what you want to see and be part of and remove yourself from what you find less helpful.
* Take time to join social media groups with the same interests as you.
	+ A great example is ‘What’s on Stage’, where there are announcements of shows being streamed for you to enjoy.
	+ There are some great fitness networks. These will be live streaming daily work-out sessions to do at home - a great way to keep the whole family’s body and mind well.
* Connecting with help and support lines via phone, e-mail and through contacting websites.
	+ Currently, concern about the unknown may bring anxiety. Support your own wellbeing by making sure you’re aware of what support is available. Please see links on our Support page.
* When times are hard, it is possible to help yourself by reaching out to help others.
	+ Offering your skills to those who need it is a good way to do this. Here are some ideas are:
		- Volunteering to work for a local charity
		- Supporting foodbanks
		- Knitting and crocheting to make blankets for the homeless
		- Offering your services on-line to help parents who are home-schooling children
		- Letting your local council know of the skills you have, which could help support essential public services
		- Letting the emergency services know of any relevant experience you have, which they can draw on for support
		- Helping elderly and vulnerable neighbours with essential shopping or dog walking
		- Sharing audible and e-books with others (Amazon Audible currently offers a free service aimed at children and teens)
* Netflix Party
	+ - Through Google Chrome extension you can sync a movie with others, allowing a chat function at the same time.

**Wellbeing: Looking after our physical health**

Whilst at home in isolation or social distancing, it’s crucial to continue to look after our physical wellbeing. Here are just a few ideas.

* On-line fitness classes and routines are becoming available. An example below gives 50 free sites to choose from:
	+ [how-to-exercise-at-home](https://makeyourbodywork.com/how-to-exercise-at-home/)
* It’s an idea to get the ‘celeb’ workout DVDs dusted off to do and have fun with the family
* Cleaning your house to music
* Going up and down the stairs
* Using the tins of beans in the cupboard to act as weights
* If it is safe to do so, taking a walk in the country (please follow latest government guidance on social distancing)
* Dancing to music (making sure you’re not upsetting the neighbours)
* Try a home-based yoga class – many experienced yoga teachers are now offering online versions of their classes for free, and some subscription-based services may offer more for free during this time (eg.Ekhart Yoga)

**Wellbeing of the inner self – our mental health**

It is natural for us to worry during times of change and uncertainty, especially if we find ourselves indoors a lot, and with less social contact than we are used to. Here are some ways to help care for your inner self when things are uncertain.

* Keep to a routine that works for you. It may help to get up and go to bed at the usual time and to plan the day in chunks of time even if you are not at work. Include activities which you enjoy, or which help you to feel calm, focused and energised.
* Notice which activities really absorb you and create clear time to spend on these. Notice when you feel more, or less, energetic and work around this. Punctuate your day with different types of activities and work tasks to keep your mind and body fresh and alert.
* Explore different ways to relax and discover what helps you most. Perhaps it is listening to music, radio or a podcast while you work. Take a moment now and then just to enjoy the here and now - sunlight coming through the window, pets at play, or birds and wildlife in the garden.
* Take notice of the present moment. There are many ways to do this including mindful practices like breath awareness or meditation. If meditation is new to you, you might want to start with a guided version.
* Allow yourself some time out. How about trying a guided relaxation? This simple practice comes from the yoga tradition. It calms the nervous system and can help you to unwind at the end of the day, so you sleep better.
* If you find that your worries become overwhelming, stop what you’re doing, take a slow deep breath and ground yourself. To do this, plant your feet firmly on the ground, focus on your breath, breathe slowly and take notice of what is around you – what you can see, hear, feel etc. Remind yourself that this will pass.
* If you continue to feel overwhelmed or if you just need to talk to someone about how you are feeling, please go to our support page where you will find lots of suggestions, including our brand new staff resource – the [Employee Assistance Programme](https://thehighlandcouncil.spectrum.life/login?org=j5n2Rh73) (please use the Google Chrome browser), our [Mental Health and Wellbeing toolkit](https://www.highland.gov.uk/staffsite/info/35/learning_and_development/182/mental_health_and_wellbeing_mhw_toolkit/38) and of course our list of internal [Mental Health Representatives](https://www.highland.gov.uk/staffsite/downloads/file/5908/mental_health_representative_contact_list).

**Wellbeing: time to learn**

An excellent way to keep your mind stimulated whilst staying home keeping safe, is by learning new things. Here are some ideas which can be shared with the family.

* Virtual museum tours including:
	+ British Museum in London
	+ Van Gogh museum in Amsterdam
	+ Guggenheim in New York
	+ National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C
	+ Musee d’Orsay in Paris
* Experiencing the Arts
	+ The Metropolitan Opera will show nightly Met Opera steams.
* Read something new!
	+ With so many downloadable books, to set up a virtual book club is an excellent way of learning and engaging with others.
* Get your game on!
	+ Why not get a pack of cards, and learn new card games for the family to play?
	+ Playing on games consoles can be a new experience for some, it may also create an opportunity to bond with the younger members of the family.
* Explore Pinterest
	+ Whether it’s to learn about art and craft concepts, or how to sew. Pinterest is great for giving ideas.
* DIY Projects
	+ - There’s lots of YouTube tutorials on DIY such as how to put up a shelf, fix a leaking tap or stopping a floor-board from squeaking. *BUT remember anything electrical or gas related will require qualified engineers!*
* There are zoos online with live video cameras on the animals.
* Clearing the garden:
	+ Spring is officially here and taking time to spruce up the garden is an excellent way to stay healthy and occupied.
* Explore the internet
	+ There are so many ways to learn about new places and people on the internet. Examples:
		- Atlas Obscura
		- TedTalks
		- Stuff You Should Know podcast
* Dust off those musical instruments you have at home and learn to play. There are many teach yourself videos on YouTube and lots of apps to get you on your way

**Wellbeing: working from home**

To support social distancing, lots of us are being asked to work from home. Here are some points to consider when making this change to your working life.

* Routines and Structures
	+ Setting a routine of when to begin and end your working day, ensuring you take a break and lunch when you usually would.
	+ During such times, working at home can mean flexibility, especially when you have children at home also to entertain. So, finding a pattern that works for you and discussing this with your line manager is a good idea.
* Communication
	+ Checking in with your line manager and team mates regularly using Skype or other technology to help with this.
	+ For managers, don’t be too task focused, ask more how people are coping and what ideas your staff member has to help achieve the longer-term goals.
* Food
	+ Making sure you’ve got healthy snacks to keep you going, and you’re structuring your habits.
	+ Making sure you drink plenty of water
* Fresh Air
	+ Take the comfort breaks you need and take time to enjoy sitting in the garden
	+ Open the windows and enjoy the sounds of Spring
* Workstation
	+ Just as you would at work, make sure you’ve set up a work station that suits your needs. Make sure:
		- Your chair is comfortable
		- Your PC or Laptop is at the right height and distance
		- Cables are not a hazard, and that you are near power supplies
		- You have good connections to WiFi
		- You remain mindful of others using the network for essential work connections
* Where possible, minimise distraction. (negotiating flexibility around work times and family times will help with this)