



## Coronavirus – Information, strategies and tools to help work with, stress, worry and anxiety

**We manage stress, worry, change and uncertainty and anxiety, all the time. However, the circumstances with coronavirus are new to most of us. Here are a few ideas that might help you.**

### Anxiety

Anxiety is our normal and natural reaction to stress and threat. The virus is a real and concerning threat, it is going to change the way we all feel, work and respond for a period of time until we are all able to find a rhythm of being and working that fits with this situation. Anxiety changes the way our body responds and feels. What is important to remember is things will keep changing and to try to look after yourself compassionately. You may experience some of these sensations:

- Worry (mind going over 'what if' scenarios over and over)
- Panic (heart and mind racing)
- Shock (physical trauma, hyper vigilant, restless, emotional, absent, distracted).
- Denial (a real inability to think or discuss what is going on).
- Depression (sadness) feel low, little motivation, wishing to withdraw.
- Anger (spikes of adrenalin) being very animated, wanting to talk a lot or do something!
- Bargaining (making internal deals – endless mental chatter trying to make a narrative sense of what is going on).
- Acceptance (feeling familiar with the situation without necessarily liking it).
- Guilt (feeling responsible, cogitating over 'what ifs').

Please know that these are all normal, natural and helpful. Try to be tolerant of yourself and others. One of the difficulties we may face aside from our physical responses is working and spending time with relatives, partners or colleagues who might be having different responses to us. These stages pass and rotate. At some points, you might experience rapid changes in yourself or others. Please try to notice this and take care in the differences. This makes it harder to communicate and may sometimes feel triggering. Humans are herd animals and it may be hard to resist doing what other people are doing, please try to step back and make decisions for yourself. Remember this time will pass and things will change again.

**Stop – notice: body, thoughts, feelings and energy levels. This too will pass.**

**Change – do something different.**

**Repeat and reward– congratulate yourself for catching the sensations, build on what works, and use it again.**

### Keeping updated with the News/national/work or daily briefings

There is a lot of NEWS. The News can present us with new and shocking or dispiriting information. Please try to manage your exposure to the news, don't have it on all the time, if possible, and bear in mind that others might not be able to tolerate it (especially if they are anxious see above). Choose or set a routine of when you are going to check in, and remember to switch it off again. Reduce or remove push alerts. If you receive a lot of news shocks your body is likely to experience fear, we have autonomic survival responses to fear (fight, flight, freeze), these are survival responses and very useful, but not the best states to process information. If you are working from home remember to give yourself a break from your screens and go outside.

### Panic

This response to anything, which is perceived as a real or potential threat, begins when certain primitive parts of the body send a message to the adrenal glands. These begin a process involving a number of hormones including adrenaline, whose purpose is to prepare the body for vigorous emergency action. You may notice a feeling of churning or 'butterflies' in the stomach, or feeling nauseous or sick. You may find your thoughts are racing. Try to slow yourself down, practice any mindful, breathing based practices, yoga, Pilates, or slow exercise based activity. Walking, talking steadily or singing can be incredibly helpful in helping you bring your breath back into rhythm.

### **Sleep**

Your sleep may well be disrupted – this is also normal. Try not to alter your sleep patterns. Allow the sleep disturbance to be and work on gentle routines to go to sleep or back to sleep at night. Try to avoid looking at the news in the middle of the night. Good sleep is not just 7 hours – completed cycles and naps (between 4 hours - 20 minutes) of sleep restore and arm us to manage the day ahead.

### **Competence**

Ground yourself in your competence – remind yourself of the things that you do well, whatever those things may be. Remind yourself of any anxiety, change or uncertainty you have managed in the past. Keep contact with your social network, the people who you feel comfortable with. We feel better when we feel certain about ourselves, reminding ourselves of our competence and our primary contacts can really help with that.

### **Decisions**

Try not to make a decision too quickly unless you have an imperative to. We make good decisions when we are regulated (not alarmed) and a good decision includes using both your mind and your emotions. Talk to someone to help you think a decision through.

### **Ground yourself in the here and now**

When things seem overwhelming try to bring your mind and body back into the present moment. Trying to imagine a myriad of different futures is very difficult and exhausting. Look around you to make contact with someone you know. If we spend too much time considering scary futures our bodies will get scared and become hyper-vigilant and agitated. Try to minimise the wear and tear on your body, and work with the here and now as much as you can. We can manage what is around us very well.

### **Feeling tired**

All of this is likely to make us feel more tired than normal. Try to eat well, exercise and take rest.

### **Things that may help**

- Step back – break the circuit – breath, sit or stand.
- Body awareness – turn your attention to your body and notice your feet or hands to establish safety
- Relaxation explore any safe immobilisation –calming down-regulating techniques and activities, walking, singing, physical movement, doing gentle repetitive activities.
- Consider getting support from those around you or from the university.
- Vitality raising up-regulating techniques and activities.
- Soothing nourishing activities.
- Pleasurable or mastery tasks for satisfaction.
- Allow for feeling frightened/upset.
- Remember any routine that has helped in the past that you could use now.
- Use mindfulness techniques to bring yourself back into the present moment – use your mind when your body struggles, use your body when your mind has become agitated. Take a moment out.
- Look to all the things that you do/have that bring you comfort, and the people you regard as your anchors.
- Recognise that one of our resources is to ask for help when we need it.
- Recognise your own stress symptoms.
- Be prepared to be less focused/distracted/angry at unexpected things.
- Avoid any extremes.
- If you know what you need from others let them know.
- Talk when you need to.

**If you are concerned please consider talking to your colleagues, your line manager, ODPL, your HR managers, or SCPSS.**