Infectious disease outbreaks, like the current Coronavirus (Covid 19), can be scary and can affect our mental health. While it is important to stay informed, there are also many things we can do to support and manage our wellbeing during such times.

Here are some tips we hope will help you, your friends and your family to look after your mental health at a time when there is much discussion of potential threats to our physical health.

Looking after your mental health while you have to stay at home

The government is now advising us to avoid all but essential social contact. This will mean that more of us will be spending a lot of time at home and many of our regular social activities will no longer be available to us. It will help to try and see it as a different period of time in your life, and not necessarily a bad one, even if you didn't choose it.
It will mean a different rhythm of life, a chance to be in touch with others in different ways than usual. Be in touch with other people regularly on social media, e-mail or on the phone, as they are still good ways of being close to the people who matter to you.

Create a new daily routine that prioritises looking after yourself. You could try reading more or watching movies, having an exercise routine, trying new relaxation techniques, or finding new knowledge on the internet. Try and rest and view this as a new if unusual experience, that might have its benefits.

Make sure your wider health needs are being looked after such as having enough prescription medicines available to you.

Try to avoid speculation and look up reputable sources on the outbreak

Rumour and speculation can fuel anxiety. Having access to good quality information about the virus can help you feel more in control.
You can get up-to-date information and advice on the virus here:

- [Gov.uk](Gov.uk)
- Health Protection Scotland
- Public Health Wales

Follow hygiene advice such as washing your hands more often than usual, for 20 seconds with soap and hot water (sing 'happy birthday' to yourself twice to make sure you do this for 20 seconds). You should do this whenever you get home or into work, blow your nose, sneeze or cough, eat or handle food. If you can't wash your hands straightaway, use hand sanitiser and then wash them at the next opportunity.

You should also use tissues if you sneeze and make sure you dispose of them quickly; and stay at home if you are feeling unwell.

Try to stay connected

At times of stress, we work better in company and with support. Try and keep in touch with your friends and family, by telephone, email or social media, or contact a helpline for emotional support. You may like to focus on the things you can do if you feel able to:

- stress management
- keep active
- eat a balanced diet

Stay in touch with friends on social media but try not to sensationalise things. If you are sharing content, use this from trusted sources, and remember that your friends might be worried too.

Talk to your children

Involving our family and children in our plans for good health is essential. We need be alert to and ask children what they have heard about the outbreak and support them, without causing them alarm. We need to minimise the negative impact it has on our children and explain the facts to them. Discuss the news with them but try and avoid over-exposure to coverage of the virus. Be as truthful as possible.

Let's not avoid the 'scary topic' but engage in a way that is appropriate for them. We have more advice on talking with your children about world news.

Try to anticipate distress

It is OK to feel vulnerable and overwhelmed as we read news about the outbreak, especially if you have experienced trauma or a mental health problem in the past, or if you have a long-term physical health condition that makes you more vulnerable to the effects of the coronavirus.
It's important to acknowledge these feelings and remind each other to look after our physical and mental health. We should also be aware of and avoid increasing habits that may not be helpful in the long term, like smoking and drinking.

Try and reassure people you know who may be worried and check in with people who you know are living alone.

Try not to make assumptions

Don't judge people and avoid jumping to conclusions about who is responsible for the spread of the disease. The Coronavirus can affect anyone, regardless of gender, ethnicity or sex.

Try to manage how you follow the outbreak in the media

There is extensive news coverage about the outbreak. If you find that the news is causing you huge stress, it's important to find a balance.
It's best that you don't avoid all news and that you keep informing and educating yourself, but limit your news intake if it is bothering you.