

## COVID-19

### Mental Health and Wellbeing

By now everyone is very aware of the pandemic sweeping across the globe. The media frenzy, level of information and conversations may be concerning and everyone can be impacted differently depending on personal circumstances. The situation is intense and information is ever evolving.

During times like these, it's easy to feel overwhelmed and think we have no control. This is understandable when you work or volunteer in a healthcare setting as the level of exposure to information, fear and potentially infected people is much greater than the general public. Feeling anxious or worried right now is not a sign of weakness.

The Wellbeing and Support team have collated a range of useful resources from reputable sources to help you and your family better cope during the COVID-19 outbreak. During this time of uncertainty it is important that everyone is looking after everyone, this is a shared responsibility. Make a conscious decision to access all the supports that are available to you and your immediate family and encourage your colleagues and fellow volunteers to do the same.

St John staff and volunteers are special and resilient people. Put your energy into what you can control; now, more than ever, invest in self-care; recognise and challenge when unhelpful thinking may be impacting on wellbeing; limit your exposure to media and change the topic of conversation if talk of COVID-19 becomes all consuming.

Detailed below you will find information on a number of topics relevant to coping with the COVID-19 outbreak. These topics include managing anxiety and supporting your colleagues and fellow volunteers. You may also have children and young people in your life who are struggling so we have provided some strategies to help them.

In addition you will find a list of online resources to access along with suggested organisations to follow on social media who provide regular updates on a range of mental health related topics. You will also continue to have ongoing access to St John Wellbeing and Support services to provide you with the assistance you may need during this time.

### Coping with Anxiety

Feelings of worry and unease are a very common and natural part of dealing with a pandemic. Identify and acknowledge how you are feeling and give yourself permission to experience these feelings. When you are able to identify and acknowledge how you are feeling you are then able to deal with these feelings in a healthy way. Use helpful strategies before your feelings escalate into crippling anxiety and panic.

According to the Australian Psychological Society, here are some useful strategies to help us cope with these feelings resulting from the outbreak:

#### 1. Learn the facts

- a. Constant exposure via media outlets can keep us in a heightened state of anxiety.

- b. Limit media exposure and only seek **factual** information from trusted sources, i.e. the WHO.

## 2. Keep things in perspective

- a. During tumultuous times it's easy to view things through a 'worst-case scenario' lens. We don't have to focus on the worst-case scenario—we can challenge it by asking:
  - i. Am I getting ahead of myself, assuming something bad will happen when I really don't know the outcome?
  - ii. Am I overestimating how bad the consequences will be?
  - iii. Am I underestimating my ability to cope?
- b. Thinking about how we would cope, even if the worst were to happen, can help put things into the right perspective.

## 3. Take reasonable precautions

- a. Be proactive by following the recommended hygiene practices and social distancing guidelines.
- b. Please call the St John WA COVID-19 Support Line to answer questions/concerns around personal circumstances, illness, work and precautions to safeguard against the spread of the virus.
- c. Regularly check the Connect COVID-19 page to keep current with evolving information.
- d. Be confident to ask questions; this is a new environment for everyone and you have a right to feel supported and gather the information you need.

## 4. Practice self-care

- a. In order to give ourselves the best opportunity to make sound decisions and look at our situations as clearly as possible, it's important we maintain good mental health.
- b. Try to maintain good social connections while still safeguarding yourself and your family. This may require changes and adjustments to how you remain connected with others.
- c. Make time for hobbies and enjoyable activities and prioritise taking time for yourself. Again, this may require some modifications and changes.
- d. Maintain a healthy lifestyle
  - i. Eat a balanced and healthy diet
  - ii. Exercise regularly
  - iii. Get quality sleep
  - iv. Avoid alcohol and other drugs
- e. Utilise mindfulness and other relaxation techniques

This is a great time to remind everyone that you are more than an emergency service worker, you are more than admin and support, you are more than a volunteer—you are also quite possibly a parent, grandparent, brother, sister, daughter, son, friend...

Switching between roles in life, or wearing different hats, requires practice. In 2019, Wellbeing and Support, in conjunction with Dr. Adam Fraser, offered The Third Space online learning modules—that space in between our work roles and the other roles we transition to after work.

Maintaining quality relationships and connections are important and being fully present when we're with those closest to us can be difficult, especially in the current environment. It is

important for your own wellbeing to make a conscious effort to detach from work or volunteering and be fully engaged with those in your personal life. This might be a good time to revisit the modules offered in the Third Space programme.

## Supporting My Colleagues and Fellow Volunteers

As the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to take a number of months and is constantly evolving, it's important we make it a priority to check in with each other and offer support. Resiliency, that ability to bounce back after adversity, allows us to adequately handle the normal stressors in life. It's when all of the unexpected stressors (such as COVID-19) begin to occur we may find it difficult to quickly recover and need to rely on our support networks.

Wellbeing and Support has specifically focussed on providing St John people with the education and skills required to look after yourselves and support your colleagues. Over the last six years, staff and volunteers have completed a range of peer support topics including how to have a supportive conversation. In addition, here are some of the signs and symptoms to look out for in yourself and others:

- Increased concerns about the future
- Changes in presentation i.e. short tempered, quiet, poor personal hygiene
- Changes in interactions with others (becoming withdrawn)
- Risk-taking or reckless behaviours
- Decreased confidence and self-esteem
- Difficulty concentrating

Checking in with a colleague is a kind and compassionate gesture. Connecting with someone, listening to them, encouraging support-seeking and following up to check in again.

You might like to start a conversation with mentioning the difference or sign you've noticed and asking if your colleague is okay, e.g. "Sam, you've mentioned a few times you've been unable to switch off from work when you get home. Is there anything you want to talk about?"

These steps can make all the difference in an already uncertain and stressful time.

## Supporting my Children

We all want to protect our children from exposure to COVID-19. Rather than completely isolating them from information, it is recommended we speak to them openly and make some minor age-related adjustments to help them navigate this current situation. Their constant exposure to media stories and conversations can possibly leave children feeling overwhelmed and scared.

Each child's reaction to COVID-19 will be unique and parents/caregivers know their children best in regard to what generally works with reassuring their children. However, here are some general tips to better support our children:

1. Provide reassurance – let your children know there are many people working very hard to keep them and those around them safe. Keeping calm and using a calm tone is important as is reminding them ‘we will get through this together.’ We may not have all the answers—it’s okay to admit this—but being available and open to talk is what’s important.
2. Ask them to talk to you about what they have heard and how they are feeling about it all. This small step will allow you to address any fears and focus on correcting misinformation. Listening and acknowledging their feelings helps your children understand, accept and manage their emotions. Choosing not to discuss what’s happening in the world can often exacerbate fears and minimises opportunities to correct misinformed concerns.
3. Focus on things they (our children) can do to minimise infection. Teach them on basic hygiene practice while making it fun. Having them sing their favourite song while washing their hands can take some of the pressure off of making changes. Social distancing, proper cough/sneeze etiquette, etc. should also be discussed.
4. Minimise all media coverage where possible. It’s the same principal as when we are trying to minimise our own exposure.
5. Increase self-care activities for the family. Routine helps children feel safe and secure. Having planned activities within the house provides opportunities to engage in positive coping and necessary distraction.

## Additional Supports

### COVID-19 Telephone Support Line

St John has established a COVID-19 Support Line for our employees and volunteers that will operate from 8.30am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday.

The COVID-19 support team will help you review your circumstances, provide relevant advice, and work through how best to support you. Please understand that the call volume may be high, so the team asks for your patience at this time.

1. If you are unwell with cold/flu-like symptoms or a high temperature, **do not come to work** - Before you return to work you must contact us on **9334 8288** (COVID19SUPPORTLINE in People Services)
2. If you are returning to work after any overseas or domestic travel, **defer your return to work** - Until you have contacted us on **9334 8288** (COVID19SUPPORTLINE in People Services)
3. If you have had contact with a proven COVID-19 case, you must contact us on **9334 8288** (COVID19SUPPORTLINE in People Services) - This includes contact with a person undergoing COVID-19 testing
4. If you have upcoming international travel plans, you must contact us on **9334 8288** (COVID19SUPPORTLINE in People Services) - The cautions and risks for international travel are changing daily at present

## Wellbeing and Support – 9373 3827

Wellbeing and Support team empowers people around the state with sustainable strategies to safely and confidently own their mental health journey and wellbeing. We provide support to employees, volunteers and families.

If you would like a chat please call 9373 3827 (phone monitored 24 hours a day, every day of the year). Our website is: <http://beingwellsja.com.au/about-us/>

Visit the Wellbeing and Support Connect page and the above website where we will be adding further COVID-19 mental health and wellbeing resources as they become available. We will also be posting updates and helpful information on Yammer.

## Wellbeing Education

Due to social distancing requirements and travel restrictions, face-to-face wellbeing education has been postponed until further notice. If you wish to still undertake Wellbeing education you have the following options.

**Friday Features** mini modules via video conferencing format. Call us on 9373 3827 or visit the Wellbeing and Support Connect page for further information.

**Trauma Informed Practice** is a best practice framework for engaging patients who experience mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues. This session is available in an online format via LMS and is a prerequisite for the 2020 Wellbeing Education session if you are a Country Ambulance Volunteer.

**The Third Space** online modules offered during 2019 Wellbeing Education are still available for completion. Please search your St John contact email address inbox (this may be your personal email address) for an email from [admin@dradamfraser.com](mailto:admin@dradamfraser.com) titled The Third Space.

## St John Approved External Provider Network

Wellbeing and Support has an extensive network of Clinical and registered Psychologists for all St John Ambulance employees, volunteers and eligible family members to access.

Employees, volunteers and immediate family members living within the same house can access up to six sessions a year, free of charge. There is no identifying information on invoices or reporting. What you discuss with your psychologist will stay private and confidential.

During this time St John providers have been given permission to provide telephone and video psychological support to ensure increased accessibility.

To access support please refer to the link <http://beingwellsja.com.au/professional-care/>

## 24/7 Support in the Community

- **Mental Health Line** – 1800 011 511
- **Beyond Blue** – 1300 224 636
- **Lifeline** – 13 11 14
- **Mensline** – 1300 789 978
- **Kids Helpline** – 1800 551 800
- **Suicide Call Back Service**- 1300 659 467

## Online Resources

<https://www.lifeinmindaustralia.com.au/support-for-those-impacted-by-adverse-events/mental-health-support-for-covid-19>

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>

<https://headtohealth.gov.au/covid-19-support>

<https://www.psychology.org.au/COVID-19-Australians>

<https://headspace.org.au/young-people/how-to-cope-with-stress-related-to-covid-19/>

<file:///U:/COVID%2019%20Resources/WHO%20Helping%20Young%20Children%20Cope%20with%20COVID19.pdf>

<https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/news/news-detail/2020/03/22/coronavirus-reassuring-your-child-about-the-unknown>

<https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/news/news-detail/2020/03/20/10-tips-for-managing-anxiety-during-covid-19>

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1egT4Gdk8bayqyFRd-Clq9hi1YI6tKPTX/view>

## Social Media

The following reputable organisations provide regular helpful updates on their Instagram feed to assist with coping and maintaining wellbeing during the COVID-19 outbreak.

- Psychology Today (psych\_today)
- Black Dog Institute (blackdoginst)
- RUOK (ruokday)
- Smiling Mind (smilingmind)
- headspace (headspace\_au)

## Factual Helpful COVID-19 Information

**For up to date information go to:**

**Department of Health**

Updated daily with the latest medical and official reports.

<https://www.healthywa.wa.gov.au/>

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources>

**Department of Health Coronavirus Health Information Line- 1800 020 080**

A collection of resources for health professionals and the public about coronavirus including translated resources

**Local state territory health departments**

For questions about testing or the welfare of people with the virus, contact your state or territory health authority

<https://health.govcms.gov.au/about-us/contact-us/local-state-and-territory-health-departments>

**For WA:**

<https://health.govcms.gov.au/contacts/western-australian-department-of-health>

**World Health Organization**

The World Health Organization provides information and guidance regarding the current outbreak of coronavirus disease.

<https://www.who.int/>

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

**Healthdirect – 1800 022 222**

Provides free, trusted health information and advice, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/>

**Smart Travellers**

Delivering a range of consular services for Australian travelling or living overseas.

<https://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/>