

It's OK to not be OK

There is a good reason for clichés, old wives' tales, and phrases such as 'It's OK to not be OK'. There is an element of truth in all of them. Several months into this pandemic we want to reassure you that whatever you are feeling, it is OK.

COVID-19 is not just a physical risk. If you are lonely because you are isolated or working from home, stressed by juggling childcare and work, dealing with bereavement, or returning to work on the frontline following a difficult time with COVID-19 it is natural for you to feel a level of anxiety.

We are all, to some degree, scared right now. A pandemic and the changes and risks it brings is traumatic. Trauma fractures our sense of safety and security and everything we knew becomes compromised.

Fear doesn't just disappear, but we can learn to walk alongside it and take action anyway. The truth is we are never really safe to begin with. Life can change in an instant, but there are many things we can do to help us cope.

The clinicians with years of experience amongst us, and those who have faced adversity already in their lives, will already know this and will have adapted to some degree.

However we are now facing a new reality, and for those of you returning to work having experienced the illness, or acknowledging the reality of your own mortality, or readjusting after homeworking / isolation, know that there are some tips and tools in place to support you.

SOURCES OF HELP:

- **Your line manager**
- **Kays Medical**
EEAST's occupational health provider.
24-hour 'In Crisis' telephone support: **0808 196 2370**
24-hour Employee Assistance Program: **0808 196 2374**
- **Wellbeing @ EEAST**
wellbeing@eastamb.nhs.uk
- **Need to Know COVID-19 pages**
Extra sources of help support guide.
- **Shout**
A free 24/7 text service for anyone in crisis anytime, anywhere.
Text Shout to 852258.
- **Samaritans**
A free, confidential helpline specifically for ambulance staff.
Call 0800 131 7000, 7am to 11pm, 7 days a week.

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Coping with fear and uncertainty

"Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear, not absence of fear."
- Mark Twain

How do we 'feel the fear and do it anyway'?

Fear is something we all struggle with and stepping out of our comfort zones, especially for those who have now experienced the virus first-hand, is huge.

Taking action despite our fears, doing the things that scare us under significant uncertainty, is how we grow and become more resilient, as uncomfortable as this might seem.

Basically, and this is never easy, we have to learn to take back the control we do have and let go of everything we cannot control.

Technically, there isn't much we can do about COVID-19 nor the impact it is having, but there is a lot we can do for the wellbeing of ourselves and others.



When you are struggling with overwhelming fear try these tips:

Ask yourself why?

Why am I scared? What of? What do I think is going to happen? What is the worst that can happen?

And isn't that OK? It's OK to be scared, concerned, overwhelmed after all.

Acknowledge your feelings, but don't let them stop you from living. Instead of being annoyed at yourself that you can't stop worrying, accept that you are worried and don't blame yourself.

Consider 'what if my fear were unfounded? What might I have missed?'

Act 'as if'

Act as if you are confident, as if all will be well. As if you were not afraid.

Picture yourself in the same situation you are confronting, but as if all is ok and going to be ok. How would you be coping then? What would you be thinking, feeling? Carry this picture with you.

What would you do if you knew it would ultimately be alright?

Imagine if you could say 'I can go to work, and I will be fine'. Knowing that you will cope whatever happens. The answer probably is that you would do it.

Think about why you were in this line of work; you chose to be a health professional - would you really have it differently?

What are the consequences of doing nothing?

If you do nothing, you stay stuck where you are, nothing changes - you remain in fear.

Project yourself forward a few years: ask yourself 'what would I have liked to have done?'

Progress not perfection

Don't aim for perfection right away. Just take small steps you are comfortable with.

Don't compare yourself to others, don't aim for their goals. Aim for your own. Take that first step. Make a start. Go at your own pace.

You cannot control any outcome right now, but you don't have to increase your fear by expecting the worst either. **Think the best,** enjoy what you can, because 'what will be will be'.

Fear has the ability to make us freeze, run away, or fight. Are any of these the outcomes we would really want? **Take back the control you do have.** We are powerless against the virus, but not ourselves. We can adjust how we respond and in doing so help others do the same.

Look after yourself as well as you can. Rest, eat and drink well, exercise, spend time on your own interests, with your family and friends. Use tools like mindfulness and relaxation (e.g. Headspace, Calm), visualisation, our sources of help guide (on the COVID-19 pages on Need to Know).

Keep talking and sharing your fears. Speak to your line manager, colleagues and our health provider Kays Medical. Wellbeing @ EEST can provide further information.

Whatever you do remember that **it really is OK not to be OK.** You simply need to accept your thoughts and feelings, put them to one side, feel the fear, but do it anyway. Don't let COVID-19 stop you living the life you have.

Take care of yourself and each other.