



## **Survivors of Suicide**

### **Coronavirus (COVID-19) advice sheet**

#### **What this pamphlet is not**

This pamphlet is not for medical advice. We have made it very clear at SOS that we are not doctors or any kind of medical authority. As such, we can not offer medical advice. It has never been more important than now that SOS makes this line very clear. **Please make sure you are only getting medical advice from reputable RELIABLE MEDICAL SOURCES.**

The following sources are known to have good, factual information where you can be assured that the information is reliable and not alarmist:



The NHS (National Health Service)

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>



The CDC (Centers for Disease Control)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/prevention.html>



The ECDC (European Centers for Disease Control)

<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/coronavirus>



The WHO (World Health Organisation)

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

Please do not take medical advice from home remedy or community sites such as reddit, facebook or mums.net. These sites often have false information or “home remedies” and fake treatments that should never be trusted or tried until verified at one of the links above.

The above links have information on hand washing, when to self isolate, when to contact a doctor and more and so that information will not be included here as it is best obtained from the links above.

#### **So if you can't give me medical advice, what is the purpose of this pamphlet?**

This pamphlet has been designed specifically to help people who may be experiencing emotional or mental distress due to worries and concerns during the coronavirus pandemic. Our remit is to do as much as we are able to support people who suffer with mental health issues and that includes during times of world wide stress and worry. We're going to offer some general advice for dealing with the coronavirus from a mental health perspective.

## Clickable index

It is recommended that you read the whole leaflet as you may find tips and suggestions in other parts of this leaflet that also apply to you.

To enable you to locate specific help quickly, please click the relevant topics on the the index below.

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## Talking to your Doctor

- As well as contacting your doctor if you present the symptoms in our reference links (acting within guidelines for your specific area), if your mental health is deteriorating in any way because of anxiety, self isolation, or conflicts within your mental health - contact your mental health care team. You need to let the professionals who are involved with your care know of any kind of decline. It's a cliche but it's true - an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. So as soon as you start to feel there may be a problem, that's when you should seek mental health help.
- If you have been wary about getting mental health help up to now, this might be a very good time to try. Remember, getting help can be a way of feeling more in control. Asking for help does not mean that you have to surrender your autonomy and you can absolutely take an active role in directing the course of your mental health treatment. Make sure you are advocating for yourself. If something doesn't feel right - say so. If you are unable to do that, consider taking a trusted person along with you who can.
- If you are not financially in a position to seek help that doesn't mean you are stuck dealing with these problems alone. Groups like SOS are still here to support you whether you have the money to get medical intervention or not. There are also helplines, free clinics and other resources within your area that you may be able to access.

The National alliance on mental health (NAMI) can help you find resources in your area such as free clinics and doctors who offer sliding scale treatment. NAMI is an RL peer support organisation who have a free helpline. Check them out at:



<https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/NAMI-HelpLine>

You can also find information at:



<https://www.mentalhealth.gov/> (USA)

And make sure you check with your primary care physician for any resources they may know of.

For those of you in the UK, contact your GP and also consider contacting MIND. They are a free peer support group and in some areas have begun offering psychotherapy.



<https://www.mind.org.uk>

## SOS is here for you

As previously stated we can not give you medical advice but we absolutely are here to support you from a mental health perspective. We have a team of **mentors** who have all received training and ongoing support to deliver the best service possible to anyone seeking mental health support. We have an **active group** that can help you feel connected and in touch with people and we also have a very **tranquil land** where we hold **meetings**, have a **mental health library**, games or can simply offer a little **respite**.

As well as reading this pamphlet consider attending one of our regular meetings to get support. The dates and times for these meetings can be found in-world right inside the main entrance to the SOS House.

As part of our mission to support those who may be struggling with their mental health during this crisis, we've put together this leaflet. Below you will find information compiled by SOS that may be helpful for a variety of different issues. We've tried to keep our advice as practical as possible. Advice is listed alphabetically. For anyone who would just like to talk to someone, hit up a mentor board at SOS House or jump in group chat and reach out to us there.

## Addiction

- Pay close attention to your mental health and anxiety levels. Depression, anxiety and other mental health conditions can be a major trigger for substance abuse, relapse and increasing your addictive behaviour. In many cases, addictive behaviour is a coping mechanism (but a bad one). The coronavirus crisis might trigger increased anxiety or interfere with your mood cycles, so be careful to practice self-care, keep taking your medication and follow other specific tips related to positive coping mechanisms during this time.
- Try not to isolate yourself mentally, even if you are more physically isolated than usual. Our addictive behaviour tends to increase when we are isolated and not talking to other people. Use social media, Second Life and other platforms to increase rather than decrease your levels of contact with people. Keep in touch with your friends. Being alone versus being in a lighthearted conversation can make all the difference in your behaviour.
- Reach out when you feel yourself being pulled towards your drug or behaviour of choice. During periods of anxiety or isolation, as mentioned above, you may sometimes feel increased cravings to alleviate those pressures with the quick release or comforting rewards associated with your substance or behaviour. Talk about it. Tell your friends or family that you are having these thoughts and feelings, or reach out to someone such as a mentor at SOS or another support group. The faster you talk

about these thoughts and feelings, the less likely you are to be overwhelmed by them.

- Pay attention to your use, if you are using. It can be easy to increase when you're stressed or isolated. While it may not be possible to stop your addictive behaviour immediately in the midst of the pandemic, work hard to make sure this isn't a time when your problem gets worse. Stability is better than going backwards.
- If you are managing a taper or maintenance program, make sure that you have access to whatever your doctor or other professional has prescribed. Running out of medication, for example, could trigger a relapse in desperation to alleviate the pain of physical withdrawals. Plan ahead to make sure that you have access to whatever treatment or resources you need as part of your recovery and maintenance programs.
- If you have an appointment scheduled, such as with medical professionals or outpatient programs, call ahead to check if they are still going ahead or can be conducted over the phone. Different organizations will have different response plans and contingency measures, which may change daily. Planning ahead can help you to avoid additional stress and anxiety.
- If you live in a treatment facility or cohabitation housing program, follow all of the guidelines around washing hands and contact with others. Facility managers should have policies in place, so follow them. If gatherings are cancelled temporarily, increase your usage of online support groups such as SOS.
- Remember that although coronavirus is serious and in some cases can be a life-threatening condition, your addiction is extremely serious and may also be life-threatening. You must continue to prioritize your recovery and physical/mental health needs during this time.

## Anxiety

- Check your symptoms, but not constantly. You are likely to find unfamiliar physical sensations that are harmless but make you feel anxious. Normal physical changes and sensations pass in time, so if you feel your chest tighten, shift your focus onto pleasurable activities and adopt "watchful waiting" in the meantime. You should of course keep an eye on more obvious symptoms, such as if you develop a cough or a fever.
- Don't obsessively check news sources. Constant monitoring of news updates and social media feeds can significantly increase your anxiety. If you are feeling anxious, consider turning off automatic notifications and updates on COVID-19. It's good to keep up with important news and alerts, but doing so throughout the day or watching cable news 24/7 can make you *more* anxious rather than less.

Instead, do less frequent checks of reliable, impartial sources of information updates on COVID-19 (Such as WHO and CDC - Links above). This might include national health websites, rather than alarmist news or social media feeds that only make you worry more. Remember that many TV channels and websites want you to be alarmed, so that you keep watching or reading.

Setting aside a specific time each day to check news might be a good idea. Pick a time when you know you are least likely to be negatively affected by the news, or if you think you will get anxious, avoid checking the news before going to bed.

Information can be reassuring if it is rooted in facts. It is often the intolerance of uncertainty that perpetuates anxiety rather than fear of illness itself.

- Use breathing meditation to control your focus and stress levels. At times of anxiety, hyperventilation is a common physical response. Use slow, regular breathing to offset the flight or fight response and prevent nasty physical symptoms from starting a chain reaction that often begins with your breathing. You could also consider the 4-7-8 technique for breathing as it is considered to be beneficial for reducing anxiety. A full explanation and tutorial can be found here -  
<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/324417#how-to-do-it>
- Physical exercise can help reduce the excess adrenaline build-up associated with anxiety. It can also give much needed perspective. If it's hard to get outside, try at least walking around your home instead of sitting in the same place for too long.
- If possible, don't isolate yourself. Personal relationships are crucial in maintaining perspective, elevating mood and allowing distraction away from concerns that trouble us. You may be isolated at home, but combat loneliness by talking to people online and keep talking – for example, via Second Life, social media, video chats and so on. Remember that social distancing only pertains to avoiding public/crowded areas or maintaining distance from others. It does not mean to cut off communication and relationships. Keep in touch with family and friends via social media. This is the perfect way to stay in touch and voice out your concerns regarding COVID-19.
- Keep yourself busy. This is a great time to catch up on your reading or Netflix list, or start a project you've been putting off like writing a novel or doing some home redecorating. Try to see this as an opportunity to do things you normally don't have the time to get done, especially things in your home if you're usually at work. Also take advantage of having any loved ones more available if they're taking time off work.
- Avoid the herd mentality. Be aware that many people take action that doesn't help. Don't jump on a bandwagon just because other people are wearing masks or performing intense new cleaning rituals or drinking warm water (unless those things are recommended by official bodies). Otherwise, your actions could prove to be unhelpful—or perhaps even destructive.

- Keep practicing your self-care. It's more important than ever to keep up with your coping mechanisms for alleviating whatever anxiety disorder you suffer from. If this is an area you struggle with, get in touch with a mentor. We have a whole folder full of useful tips and suggestions to help build a healthy routine and self care.
- Too much stress weakens the immune system. Although COVID-19 is alarming, you need to take care of your own body in order to build/maintain strong immunity. Eat healthy, hydrate, get enough sleep, exercise, sanitize (especially high-touch surfaces, including your keyboard, mouse, and phone), be mindful of your surroundings, stay home if you're feeling ill and seek medical attention. Even though it is easier said than done, it is also important to keep calm.
- Try to keep your routine as normal as possible. Routine can be an important part of maintaining your mental health and shifting too much outside of this can increase anxiety. If you are self isolating, for example but feel physically well - during hours you would normally be working, you could try and tackle more practical chores and separating those hours out from your usual leisure time.

## Bipolar and Borderline Personality Disorder

- It is very common with both bipolar and BPD (along with other mental health conditions) for people to disassociate. A common form of dissociation is to hyper focus. You need to be mindful of this during the outbreak. Hyperfocusing on the coronavirus is a very sure fire way of becoming more anxious, more depressed and seeing a decline in the state of your mental health. Follow your local recommendations but try to find other interests to focus on instead.
- Be Prepared - Make sure you are up to date on your medication. If services are shutting down in your area consider asking your doctor for a 60 - 90 day supply if you usually use a 30 day supply. Your doctor will know if this is a good idea for you or not. If you feel like a decision has been made for your care incorrectly, consider challenging the decision at least 3 times. As policies change as the outbreak continues, you may find that your care plan can be altered where it previously could not be.
- Plan to stay home. Write yourself reminders in a way that you feel you may respond to in a manic phase. Anything that you've put off doing, any household chores or spring cleaning - now would be the perfect time.

## Depression

- We know a lot of people are under self isolation or quarantine but that doesn't mean you are alone. You are never alone. Reach out to friends, family, your support system and of course, SOS. You have an entire community of people who care about you, just because you're you.
- If you are feeling particularly low, have a history of suicidal ideation, suicidal crisis or you're even slightly worried that it could be a factor for you, consider removing potentially dangerous items from your home during isolation or even just before a potential mental health crisis. If you are keeping a stock of medication because of difficulty getting to your doctor during the crisis, consider asking a friend or family member to keep your medication for you and bring you enough for a week or so.
- Consider also stocking up on things to do. This is a great time to begin a new hobby such as knitting, sewing, model building or learning to cook.
- If you are currently employed, check with your employer about their work from home policy so that you can begin to plan a routine. Consider your work hours and how you'll separate them out from your leisure time. Also make sure you add in some online/phone socialising time so that you can make sure you do not end up feeling cut off or emotionally isolated.

## Self Isolation/Quarantine.

Self Isolating can be especially painful for people with all mental health difficulties. Isolation is known to be psychologically difficult to cope with. We assembled some very strong coping techniques from people who self isolate as a standard part of mental health difficulties they cope with. Consider adapting a few of these.

- Remember, this is temporary. Keep telling yourself that. This will not last and you will not be in this position long term.
- Take time to work on house-hold projects such as home repair or cleaning. Get a jump on your spring clean!
- Consider doing a little gardening. Seeds can be ordered online or gardens can be tidied up. Working outdoors or with some indoor planters can be a great way of dealing with that boxed in feeling.
- Try painting, arts and crafts and some other new hobbies or skills. Youtube is full of tutorials and how to's as well as some really crafty 5 minute projects. You never know, you could find a new hobby that you love long after the epidemic is over.

- If you live in a more rural area, go on hikes and walks. Wooded paths and trails are a great way to stay active if you know of places that have a low population.
- Isolated with kids? Try indoor camping parties! Build tents, make it a fun play time for the whole family!
- Do you have a garden? Wrap up warm and try a few outdoor grilling sessions. You could try a new recipe every day!
- Keep in contact with family, friends and your support system. Make sure that your loved ones know you have gone into self isolation.
- If you're feeling unwell, follow your local recommendations and make sure to take very good care of yourself. Go at your own pace. If you feel like you need to be in bed - stay in bed.

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## DID - Dissociative Identity Disorder

- If all your people have good communication, it may be best that the person who is most calm "fronts" for a while, if that's an option for you.
- Consider writing any health advice out and put it in a place where every person is likely to see it so everyone stays up to date.
- For those of you who are not as in touch with your "others" as some, consider checking the news less frequently, make good use of your coping skills, Close web browsers, play PC games and use distraction techniques to take your mind off the source of any anxiety that could possible trigger a decline in your mental health.