



*Transforming
lives for stronger
communities*

Self-Care and Coronavirus:

A Guide for Practitioners working with vulnerable clients

Family Life has created this document to guide effective practice and contribute to knowledge leadership across the sector. Family Life welcomes your use of this document and encourages you to reference the original version.

This self-care guide has been developed to support Family Life practitioners during the Covid-19 pandemic. Self-care is essential for practitioners who are also providing intervention and support to clients. This guide provides a means of taking an inventory of your relationship to each pillar of the Family Life Theory of Change and offers some practical tips for self-care. It also includes a short mindfulness practice.

Taking an Inventory of our Relationship with Community, Family and Children

Capable Communities

- How connected do I feel to my community? (leisure, work, culture, social spiritual)
- Have I lost important community connections and, if so, can I create new connections in different ways? (eg. digital technology)
- Are there safe ways I can continue to participate in my community?

Strong Families

- How have my family connections and relationships changed during recent times as a result of Covid-19?
- What can I do to maintain positive family connections, knowing that my family may not always be my biological family?
- How can I connect with and support my most vulnerable family members at this time?
- How does my family cope with stress and can we plan ahead to manage the challenges that will come our way during this time?

Thriving Children

- Who are the children in my life and what are their current concerns regarding Covid-19?
- How can I activate play with the children in my life?
- What are my concerns for my children?
- Do I have the information I need to communicate with my children about Covid-19 and am I able to access resources to support with information, activities and healthy development at this time?
- Finally, listen to your 'inner child' and what needs may be unmet — what can I do to create space for fun, compassion and nurture for myself?

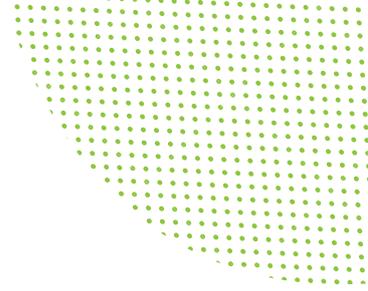
Warning Signs

Within the context of Covid-19 we may not have been able to focus on the above connections. We may be experiencing a sense of loss or worry. Many will be needing to care for others as well as continue client focussed interventions. You may need to step up self-care activities if you start to notice key warning signs which can include amongst other things:

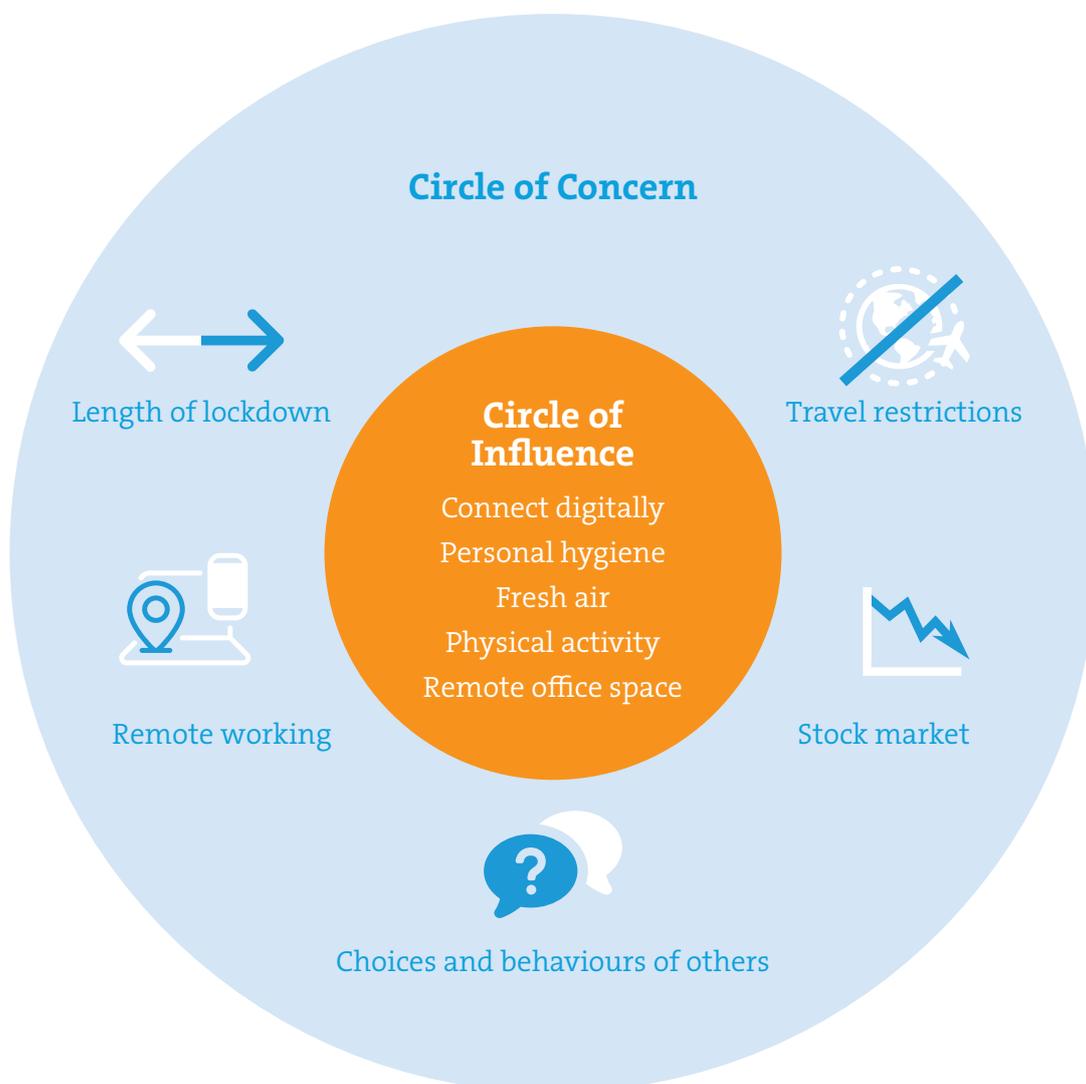
- Stress responses may present as anger or frustration and irritability;
- They can also present with a flatter effect — e.g. loss of energy, depressive symptoms;
- Traumatic stress may present as memory loss and difficulty with focus and attention.
- Feelings of hopelessness;
- Feelings of guilt when engaging in self-care;
- Unbalanced time spent on things — e.g. noticing spending too long at work;
- Tension in the body;
- Suppressed or stimulated appetite;
- Sleeplessness;
- Hypervigilant states and panic attacks;
- Repetitive thinking about the issue or experience.

Tips for My Own Self Care

- Ensure your basic physiological needs are being met: shelter, food, water, clothing, sleep and social connection. Plan ahead to meet these needs;
- Engage in activities that bring you into the present and support you to remain grounded, for example mindfulness;
- Restrict unhelpful coping behaviours including ongoing constant exposure to media related to Covid-19 (consider switching off social media alerts and 'turning down the noise');
- Access Covid-19 related information from credible government sources;
- Re-establish consistent and predictable routines for yourself that comply with the current social distancing requirements;
- Seek and provide compassion and nurture to self and others - engage with yourself empathetically;
- Promote self regulation - breathing, distraction, groundedness;
- Use grounding and self-compassion techniques to target lower parts of the brain - it may not be appropriate to target the 'rational' cortex..... yet;
- Use statements, not questions - express your needs;
- Good enough is good enough - don't be hard on yourself;
- Be proactive: incorporate ways to maintain connection with colleagues when working from home, take frequent breaks to move, stretch and obtain fresh air;
- Set yourself regular activities: commit to regular activities and ensure that you have a routine in place. Avoid activities that will hinder this healthy routine such as substance misuse;
- Consider your circle of influence.¹



The diagram below illustrates both our ‘circle of influence’ and broader ‘circle of concern’. In times of crisis we may be focussing on the things over which we have no control e.g. how long the lockdowns will last and what might happen if we get sick. When we move from this broader area of concern into the ‘circle of influence’ we are able to focus on those things over which we have some control, e.g. observing good hygiene practices and utilising digital technology to connect with those we may be physically distant from.



A Daily Check-In

The Sanctuary Model is a trauma informed model structured to support healing and recovery. The concept of “SELF” provides a compass for supporting connection with self and others and can be used as a daily check in tool:

- S - Safety:** How am I travelling? Do I feel physically, culturally and emotionally safe?
- E - Emotions:** What are the key emotions or feelings I am experiencing today?
- L - Loss:** How is loss impacting me right now?
- F - Future:** What are my plans and hopes for the future - beyond this time of rapid change and uncertainty? What goals can you set within this context that continue to align with your values?

Mindfulness

Mindfulness supports us to accept painful thoughts and feelings in a balanced way. In particular, it is, for most of us, a healthier way to deal with both the stress and fear surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic. Mindfulness offers a way to turn toward our anxiety and fear so we don't become overwhelmed by it.

First and foremost, mindfulness involves being in the present. It has been said that the present moment is all we have. The past has already occurred and the future is yet to be. We can become so lost in our fears about tomorrow that we miss the present.

A Mindfulness Exercise

- Sit comfortably and close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths and begin to notice what it feels like to be in your body. Just be aware of and be with the physical sensations in your body as they come and go.
- You need not pay attention to any particular sensation but if you do notice or feel something, just feel it and let it go. Perhaps you feel a warmth in your hands or a tightness in your shoulders. If it is a pleasant sensation, feel it and let it go. If it is an unpleasant one, also feel it and let it go. Just notice whatever feelings or sensations arise. Take your time.
- After about five minutes, gently open your eyes. You may or may not notice that you are more in the present or more connected to your body. The point of this beginning practice is to help you become familiar with the practice of mindfulness.

There are many helpful applications that can support mindfulness by guiding meditation, yoga, tai chi etc. See if you can carve out time for this and exercise every day.

Supporting Others While Maintaining Self-Care

- Recognise that those around you will react to Covid-19 through a very individual process. Don't take on their stuff and plan how your support will be offered — set clear goals together, basic needs might need to come first.
- Be aware that others may remain in a hyper or hypo-vigilant state and this can trigger further issues. You may be responding to a coping behaviour in someone rather than the person themselves. The person is not the problem.
- When communicating with others, account for the stress that you or they may have experienced. This means information will often need to be revisited.
- Maintain boundaries — unpredictable changes in a relationship can elicit further stress responses.
- Encourage children to determine their own recovery and try to provide space for creativity, expression and play.
- Be conscious about the use of absolute language such as 'never', 'always', etc. and avoid describing complex situations in binary ways.

Your health and wellbeing is so important. Please prioritise connection with others and sharing of the tips and tools you have found most useful in caring for self. This sets you up to effectively care for others.



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