

## *Personal Tool - Redefining support for ourselves*

To reduce the effects of stress and to control the wild thoughts that sometimes take over our brain, it would be lovely if there were clear concrete strategies like social distancing and hand washing that yielded results. If stress, anxiety and feelings of depression are becoming a little more unmanageable, it is important to take note of these symptoms as they could be your body's alarm system going off. In times like a pandemic, it can be hard to tell what is a false alarm and what is real. Finding ways to relax, unwind and stress less are much easier said than done when there is no end in sight.

During the initial stage of the pandemic, almost everyone had a goal: keep everyone safe. Now almost six months later, it isn't easy to sustain the motivation, commitment and clarity that may have been present in March. Many people report that they miss connecting with others, the time spent in the workplace and neighbour friends smiling and saying hello. Often well-meaning colleagues and managers ask their staff how they can assist and support in this time of COVID-19. How can we respond in a way that we feel safe to share without impacting our jobs, or putting our burdens on others?

**Define what it is that you mean by support.** When asking for help, be as clear as you can. Is it physical, emotional or environmental? Being clear, according to Brene Brown, is being kind. Asking the right person for help (or taking the redirection) can be crucial in moving forward.

**Develop a routine** with regular breaks throughout the day, plan time for engaging with others, schedule exercise time or going out for a walk. A routine provides structure and allows us to feel a sense of control, even if we need to be flexible or agile. If there is something unexpected or unplanned, once it is managed, it can be looked at and incorporated into our routine to plan accordingly.

**Practice self-compassion.** Be kind and fair to yourself and to others. Think about what is ok and what is not ok around your work, personal relationships and family. Be kind and clear on how you are feeling and bring your most compassionate self forward to deal with the issue.

**Be kind and patient.** It is about remembering that each and everybody is trying their best, and each situation is different. It would be great if we all could ask more questions, rather than interrupting or simply waiting for the other person to finish talking.

**Recognise that this is a demanding time.** You may have a demanding schedule or work expectations and asking for another person's understanding can be worrying but needed. The mantra that "everyone doing their best" especially those in essential services can be very helpful here.

**Acknowledge** that there is going to be high anxiety levels that exist now, rather than ignoring it. This means avoiding trying to juggle too many demands and minimising emotions. It takes just as much energy to be upset and angry as it does to be calm. Choosing calm may mean that you get to the other side in a less burnt out or run-down state.



**Reach out** if you are lonely, live alone or simply want more connection with others. It can be tempting to think that other people can mind read your needs; however, there is no evidence to support this.

**Look for the win-win** in the current situations and try not to take things personally during these heightened times.

Remember everyone is trying to do a good job just by asking for help; they are moving one small step closer to completing a task, we are winning. Finally, try not to overthink things and focus on what is important right now and what you can control, shift your thinking from loss and blame and focus on moving forward. 2021 will be here before you know it.

Remember, as your EAP, we are here to support you whatever the nature of your concerns. For a confidential conversation with one of our experienced clinical professionals, please contact **AccessEAP** on **1800 818 728**.

