VAMT COVID-19 Mental Health and Wellbeing Pack

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1. Introduction

Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil (VAMT) is the County Voluntary Council for Merthyr Tydfil. We are currently working with Community Support Groups, Volunteers and Individuals to offer support across the County Borough.

VAMT have a Community Advisor who can provide support to all Covid-19 Volunteer Community Groups. If your group would like any help or support contact hilary.edwards@vamt.net. If you know people who would like to volunteer then please direct them to frances.barry@vamt.net.

VAMT have a Community Coordinator who can work with individuals to identify their needs and help find the most appropriate support for them. This could be shopping, collecting prescriptions or befriending support – someone to call regularly to check on someone, and to cope with feeling lonely and isolated. If you or someone you know needs support, please get in touch with Claire.williams@vamt.net

VAMT recognise that the last few weeks have been an anxious and unsettling time for everyone. As a Community Support Group or Community Volunteer you will have seen an increase in the number of people you are supporting who are struggling with their mental health.

The coronavirus pandemic we are currently experiencing may well be having an impact on how you feel as a result of:

- Not feeling physically well
- Worry about the impact of the pandemic on friends and family
- A drastic change in people's daily routine and large amount of time spent at home
- Not being able to see family and friends
- Family tensions as people are forced to stay at home under one roof
- Financial worries
- Feeling lonely and isolated

It is important that we keep a look out for how people feel and offer support for both physical and mental wellbeing, especially for those people who do not have a network of friends and family to keep in touch. Not having daily contact with another person can quickly lead to some people feeling sad and anxious. Those people who already experience mental health issues are more likely to be affected. If people do not receive support, they may quickly become worse and require support from their GP or other health professional.

This document aims to help you by providing useful information, coping techniques and resources, as well as what to do when you become concerned about someone – there is help out there!

2. Self-Care

So how can we deal with stress during the outbreak and protect our mental health?
There are a number of activities you can do in order to take care of your mental, emotional and physical health – good self-care is key to improved mood and reduced anxiety.

Below are some useful self-care techniques and resources:

Grounding Techniques

Grounding techniques help distract you from negative or unwanted feelings by helping you refocus on what is happening in the present moment. Examples of activities you could do are; breathe deeply, listen to music, recite a favourite poem or sit with a pet. You will find more examples of grounding techniques and tips and hints at:
Grounding Techniques

Practice Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a technique that helps you focus and maintain a moment-by-moment awareness of your thoughts, feelings, sensations and environment. The practice will help reduce stress and calm you, by lowering the heart and respiratory rate, blood pressure and muscle tension.
MIND, the national Mental Health charity, have a really useful webpage with more information about Mindfulness including exercise and useful tips.
Mind - Mindfulness

There are also a number of App's that can be downloaded to your phone to help you in the practice of mindfulness, some examples are:
www.stopbreathethink.com

www.calm.com

www.headspace.com

Make time for yourself

There are often so many things we need/want to achieve in a day that we sometimes forget to take time for ourselves! But the more we push our basic needs to the back of our priority list the more we risk making ourselves unwell, worried and depressed. Don't treat it as a 'luxury' but as a priority!

The below link has some useful self-care tips for managing your mental health:
Your Happy Place

Blessing Manifesting, an online support group who help promote self-care and have a number of resources which you may find helpful:
www.blessingmanifesting.com
    f Blessing Manifesting

Stay connected with people

Increasing numbers will join those already in self-isolation, so now might be a good time to make sure you have the right phone numbers and email addresses of the people you care about. As well as calling your friends and family, you can stay in touch with them in other ways such as text message, Skype, WhatsApp or social media, for example.

Elefriends is a supportive online community chat room where you can be yourself. We all know what it is like to struggle sometimes, but Elefriends is a safe place to listen, share and be heard.

There are also local organisations who are currently offering telephone befriending services to help those who are feeling particularly isolated:

Hafal, a charity for people with mental health and their Carers, have introduced a new online community Clic. Which is a safe and positive online space to; chat and make friends, give and receive support to others with similar experience and get helpful information.

Please click on https://vamt.net/en/coronavirus/ for a full list of the Community Resources across Merthyr Tydfil which you may find useful.

Talk to someone you trust

Being able to talk to someone you trust, whether it be friends or family, can help make you feel better. Whilst it can sometimes feel difficult to speak to someone so close, they may be concerned and will welcome the opportunity to understand how you are feeling and offer you support.
Sometimes you may feel more comfortable talking to someone outside of your immediate social circle and find it more appropriate to speak to an organisation that offers help and support:

The Samaritans - If you need someone to talk to, a Samaritan is there to listen 24/7 offering free confidential emotional support to anyone experiencing feelings of distress or despair including those which may lead to suicide
Call Free on: 116 123 or contact: jo@samaritans.org

The C.A.L.L. Helpline - is a dedicated mental health helpline for Wales, which provides confidential listening and emotional support and will help you contact support available in your local area, including voluntary and charitable organisations.
Contact : 0800 132 737 or by texting 'help' to 81066.

Social Media

Social media can be a great way to stay in touch with friends and family and at this moment of time. There are some great online support groups for people who are feeling anxious and worried.

- Blossom **:** A Mental Health Support group providing a safe place for people to share their feelings, thoughts and anxieties, and access to online support.

- The Calm Collective **:** tools, tips and strategies to keep calm over the coming weeks.

However, it is important that you monitor the amount of time and use of social media. Excessive use of social media can create a negative, self-perpetuating cycle of loneliness, anxiety and depression.

The attached article looks at the impact of social media on our mental health and offers some useful tips to modify our social media use to improve mental health:
Social Media and Mental Health

Look after your physical health

There are some key things you can do to help look after your physical health that will have a huge impact on your mental health and wellbeing:

- **Get a good night's sleep**
A good night's sleep is vital to our physical health and emotional wellbeing. That is why the benefits of good sleep should never be underestimated and getting a proper rest on a regular basis is not just a good idea, it is an essential one.
Mental Health Foundation

- **Look after your personal hygiene**
Maintaining personal hygiene is necessary for many reasons, personal, social, health and psychological. Keeping a good standard of hygiene helps prevent the development and spread of infections. Keeping your body clean is vital in combating and preventing illness -- both for yourself and for those around you. Washing your hands can prevent the spread of germs from one person to another.

- **Wash your hands but not excessively**

Advice about hand washing can be a huge trigger for people with OCD and some types of anxiety, being told to wash your hands constantly can be especially difficult at this time. Charity OCD Action says the issue to look out for is the function - for example, is the washing being carried out for the recommended amount of time to reduce the risk of spreading the virus - or is it being done ritualistically in a specific order to feel "just right"?

International OCD Foundation

- **Eat a healthy diet**

Eating well is fundamental to good health and well-being. Eating well and being active while social distancing during COVID-19 pandemic can boost your immunity, suggests Nutrition experts.

Mind – Mood and Food

Tips on Eating Healthy

- **Keep active**

A new study from the University of Bath in England is highlighting the importance of regular, daily exercise during quarantine. "People should not overlook the importance of staying fit, active and healthy during this period. Provided it is carried out in isolation—away from others—then regular, daily exercise will help better maintain the way the immune system works, not suppress it," says Dr. James Turner from the Department for Health at the University of Bath. Experts say that regular, moderate exercise can strengthen the immune system, which is more important now than ever before.

Mind – Physical activity and Mental Health

The Mental Health Benefits of Exercise

🔲 Hapi **:** Newydd Housing Association's Hapi Project are currently offering free online exercise classes

- **Avoid recreational drugs and alcohol**

As feelings of anxiety, depression, or sheer boredom mount due to the growing pandemic of the coronavirus and COVID-19, the desire to turn to drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism could become more problematic.

- Experts advise against using substances such as marijuana or alcohol to help reduce stress, anxiety, and loneliness while social distancing during the COVID-19 outbreak.
- In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, these behaviors can present additional problems.

- Marijuana and other inhaled substances including cigarettes and e-cigarettes or vaping devices can be acutely dangerous because of the stress they place on the pulmonary system.
- Alcohol use can affect the general health of the body, leading to potential outcomes like sleeping less, and a weakened immune system.

Fortunately, there are a lot of great options that people can try at home that are healthier coping mechanisms than drugs and alcohol. There are a variety of different mindfulness and meditation exercises or relaxation techniques, which can be found on the internet or via different apps

If you or someone you know does need support, Barod, a charity who specialise in substance misuse, host a Drug and Alcohol Single Point of Access (DASPA) for advice, information and an easy route into services for those affected by substance misuse in RCT and Merthyr Tydfil.
Call Free (from a landline) on: 0300 333 0000

Other useful resources:

Looking after your mental health during the Coronavirus outbreak

Mental Health UK

BBC

Coping with anxiety about coronavirus

Self Help Resources for Mental Health

3. Supporting Others

Carers

This information is for anyone who is a Carer of someone who lives in the community with a severe mental illness. By 'Carer' we mean an unpaid Carer, such as a relative or friend. Being a Carer for someone living with a severe mental illness can be challenging at the best of times. However, the current coronavirus pandemic could create additional problems. Everyone is now affected by government 'lockdown' measures.

Your relative might be supported by an NHS mental health team. If they are, you can contact them to ask what support they will give your relative if you can't see them face-to-face.

If your relative has a care co-ordinator, contact them as they are responsible for helping with your relative's care. If your relative has no care co-ordinator, you can contact the person they normally deal with. But it might be difficult for your relative's mental health team to provide your relative with their normal level of support. This is because of the effect of coronavirus and how the virus impacts on staffing levels. But the team can tell you what support they can give to your relative.

As a Carer you need to know that if an emergency happens, replacement care can be arranged as a priority. You may need to make a contingency plan around supporting your relative or friend:
Rethink Mental Illness - Planning for the future

Carers UK - Planning for emergencies

*Please note some of your and your relative's rights about social care have changed. This is because of emergency coronavirus legislation.

Find further information for Carers here:
Cares – Keeping connected while social distancing

Rethink Mental Illness – Advice for Carers

The government have issued advice about what you should do if the person you live with is showing symptoms of coronavirus. You can find these here.

Supporting children and young people

Coronavirus is going to affect everyone's daily lives regardless of their age, this may be a difficult time for children and young people. With a change to routine, exposure to the news and such uncertainty they may display negative reactions such as worrying thoughts about loved one's health, problems sleeping, avoidance and even physical symptoms.

It is really important at this time to take care of the family's mental health. There is lots of information and support available but some examples of what you should do are; take care of your own mental health, listen and acknowledge their concerns, provide clear and age appropriate information, speak regularly, create a new routine and try and limit what they are exposed to:

There is some really useful guidance from Public Health England Gov UK guidance for parents

Young Minds is the Children and Young People's Mental Health Charity and provide advice and support about what to do if you feel anxious about Coronavirus.

Anna Fraud National Centre for Children and Families is a children's mental health charity and have really useful advice and tips for Young People and Parents and Carers.

There are also local services that can be accessed to support Children and Young People at this time:

Meic Cymru is a bilingual helpline service for children and young people up to the age of 25 in Wales. You can access current information and advice from their website or speak to a real person who can provide support through their; online chat, free-phone number or text from 8am to midnight, every day of the week.
Call on: 080880 23456 or text : 84001

Tips for Parents and Carers

Parents, educators, and other caring adults can also help to create strategies to support anxious children. These can include;

Butterfly Breath Individuals of any age can benefit from learning deep-breathing techniques such as the "Butterfly Breath." Follow the instructions on the link to teach your child how to feel calm and manage tough emotions through focused, deep breathing.

Soothing with our senses is a way to help feel more calm and relaxed. You can use one or more of your five senses to help you. Using the link as your guide, think of things you find soothing at home, school or any place you might feel stress or worry.

Something that was highlighted earlier was for parents and Carers to look after their own mental health so please do re-visit our Self-Care section. Also a number of parents will be expected to work from home whilst caring for their families. breathe have produced some useful information to support parents on How to Work From Home with Kids.

4. Keeping People Safe / Safeguarding

It is unacceptable for anyone to be put at risk of neglect or abuse of any kind. For further information about reporting serious safeguarding concerns, please visit Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board.

- To report concerns about a child or adult at risk in MT call: Merthyr Tydfil Social Services: 01685 725000

- Social Services Emergency Out of Hours Merthyr Tydfil : 01443 743665

4. Keeping People Safe / Safeguarding

5. Local Support

Community Coordinator

VAMT have a Community Coordinator to support people to access third sector organisations, services and community groups for practical and emotional support. Focusing on 'what matters to you' and taking a holistic approach to people's health and wellbeing, she can work with you to identify your needs and help find you the most appropriate support. Email Claire.williams@vamt.net

Local support groups

There are a number of local support groups and online services that have been set up to help people. Groups can't meet face-to-face at the moment, but can offer telephone befriending and use things like Facebook and WhatsApp, to provide a support service.

VAMT currently have a Help and Support Services List which is regularly updated to show what is available in the community – see https://vamt.net/en/coronavirus/

6. Further links, helplines and support

For additional support with managing anxious feelings during the coronavirus pandemic, you may find the following resources of use:

Name and brief description	Contact Details
Cwm Taf Morgannwg Mind A local mental health charity working in communities across Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr and Bridgend.	Online counselling : 07399347745 Primary care service : 07399347745 Housing services : 074946887 Mind Infoline : 0300 123 3393 (Monday – Friday, 9am to 6pm), text 86463, www.mind.org.uk
Hafal A mental health charity supporting and helping those affected by serious mental illness to recover.	01792 816 600 / 832 400 www.hafal.org
Platform A mental Health Charity.	www.platfform.org
Valleys Steps Access to self-help information, mindfulness and stress control, online audio & downloads via website.	www.valleyssteps.org http://www.valleyssteps.org/resources/downloads/
BEAT For people experiencing eating disorders themselves, for people who may be supporting someone through recovery and for people who may be worried about someone - a loved one, friend, relative, pupil, colleague etc.	Helpline: 0808 801 0677 www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk
Citizens Advice A local charity supporting communities, offering free advice money matters, debts and debt relief orders, employment, housing, mental health and welfare benefits	Tel: 01685 382188 www.citizensadvice.org.uk citizensadvice.org.uk/wales/health/coronavirus-what-it-means-for-you/
Cruse Bereavement Care The UK's bereavement charity	Free National Helpline on 0808 808 1677

Domestic Abuse Resource Team Providing adults and children affected by domestic abuse with support.	Telephone: 01685 388444 https://www.smt.org.uk/projects/domestic-abuse-resource-team-dart/
Community Mental Health Teams	Keir Hardie Health Park Telephone: 01685 351100 Emergency outside of office hours ring: 01443 849944.

The Crisis Team is there to help if and individual feels they are going to harm themselves. Crisis Resolution and Home Treatment Teams Direct Number: 01443 443443 ext 4388 24 hours per day.

For advice on scams visit
https://www.nationaltradingstandards.uk/news/beware-of-covid19-scams/

Information about Coronavirus, including the latest guidance is available on the Welsh Government and Public Health Wales websites:
https://gov.wales/coronavirus
https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/

New DWP landing page for Coronavirus and claiming benefits.
https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/coronavirus/

Mental Health RCT and Merthyr : This page promotes Mental Health Services, events and activities locally in Rhondda Cynon Taff and Merthyr Tydfil. Please note this page is not a support group or crisis helpline service, it advertises these types of service.