

Carer Chatter

Special edition May 2020

Bendigo Health Mental Health Services, Carer Support Team
Newsletter for families and carers of people with mental illness

Hello

Many people are finding this a difficult and frightening time. Being apart from friends and loved ones, fear of the virus, economic insecurity, grocery shortages caused by panic buying, and anxiety about when it will end can be stressful and exhausting. The emotional strain is even greater if you are also a carer for someone with mental illness and have to support their emotional needs as well as your own.

Balancing caring responsibilities with the equally important need to look after your own well-being is not easy but it is vital. Acknowledging your feelings is a good place to start. Once you have done that you can begin looking at ways to manage them and regain a sense of control.

One great strategy for managing your feelings is to reframe your thoughts. Instead of thinking to yourself "I can't go out and see my friends and family", say "I'm going to stay home and keep myself and the people I love safe". Although the actions you take are the same, focusing on the positive outcomes of your new lifestyle will help you stay motivated and happy. It also helps to remind yourself that this is not forever and that the slowing rate of infection in Australia shows that our actions really do make a difference..

The new social distancing rules are one of the most challenging aspects of the pandemic. However, you can still maintain connections and support. Distance needn't mean isolation. We are fortunate to live in an era when we have a range of ways to keep connected: phone, email, mail, social media, photos and video links can all be used to stay connected with important people in your life. Getting outside for a walk around your neighbourhood can also be a great way of keeping connected to your community. Smiles and friendly greetings can brighten a day and remind you that you're not going through this on your own.



Try to avoid checking the news too often. It's easy find bad news and worrying statistics. Acknowledge them but don't dwell on them. Instead, focus your attention on what you can do in spite of them. It might be as simple as cooking a new dish or doing an hour's gardening, or it might be fulfilling a long held dream and learning a new skill, such as how to knit or crochet, cook, do puzzles or even learn another language. You can even join or set up an online group.

Move frequently. Exercise plays an important role in physical and emotional health. Walking, stretching, housework and gardening all contribute to keeping you active, which in turn helps with stress management. This can be a great opportunity to clean out those cupboards. A special note on gardening which has been proven to have a range of health benefits. You don't need a big garden, pot plants can be lovely, and even sitting in a garden or looking at a garden can lift your spirits.



Laugh loudly and often. When you laugh it works your lungs, increases blood flow, reduces cortisol (a stress hormone), reduces inflammation in your body, and strengthens your immune system by increasing T-cells. Make a point of laughing every day - watch funny shows or video clips or read a funny book. Everyone's sense of humour is different so find whatever tickles your funny-bone and laugh without restraint.



Kindness is more important now than ever. It helps both the giver and the recipient. If you know someone who is feeling a little lonely or struggling to do their shopping or gardening, offer to help. It's amazing how much better you will feel when you focus on doing a good deed.

Focusing your attention on a puzzle or craft is a great way of calming your mind and bringing a sense of purpose back to your life. We have a small number of Spotlight vouchers, jigsaw puzzles and games available for carers. If you would like one please contact our support team.

You can contact the Mental Health Foundation Australia helpline for support between 9am and 11pm, 7 days a week on 1300 643 287.

You can also contact our support team between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday. Phone 5454 7612 or email carersupport@bendigohealth.org.au

Above all - stay safe, stay well and stay connected.

