

Helping you cope with the mental health impact of COVID-19

These are challenging times for us all. The current coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has plunged the world into uncertainty and it is only natural to feel stressed, concerned, angry or anxious.

We know things can feel even worse when you are far from home, friends and family.

You may be feeling particularly low or frustrated because you are overdue sign off due to the latest restrictions and don't know when you'll be able to return home, or you may be understandably concerned for your loved ones or feeling guilty that you cannot be with them.

On top of the practical steps you should take, there are some things you and your crewmates can do to help manage your anxiety during these tough times and to support each other through.

Here are our top ten tips:

1. Challenge your self-talk:

The way we think influences the way we feel and can result in anxious, depressed and out-of-control feelings. These worse-case feelings often exaggerate danger and underestimate your ability to handle it. Be conscious of your thoughts and steer them in a positive direction.

2. Plan worry time:

Not worrying is easier said than done! Schedule ten minutes of 'worry time', indulging in all your concerns. Write them down or give them a name, as verbalizing your fears can help alleviate them. Once this is done, make a conscious effort to substitute worrying thoughts with positive memories. If this is hard, identify your fear, make a mental note of it and schedule some 'worry time' to handle it. Now shift your focus.

3. Facts minimise fear:

With headlines blaring at us and media outlets competing to break the news first, having the right facts is crucial. Misinformation catapults anxiety. Seek information from reliable sources (such as those listed below) and use it so that you can take steps to protect yourself and those around you. Look for information updates at specific times to avoid feeling overwhelmed or confused and consider muting some of your social media channels.

4. Take a social media holiday:

While social media is a great for keeping connected to our families, it can be detrimental when everyone is in panic mode and intensify our feelings of missing out on family events. Take a break for a few hours or even a day and try to see some beauty in the situation that you are in on board your vessel.

5. Strike up a conversation:

With the global nature of the coronavirus, chances are that your fellow crewmates are experiencing the same thing. Talk to them and express your anxieties and fear. Knowing that you are not alone can do a great deal! **Be a change agent by shifting** the narrative on your vessel from the number of deaths toward the number of recoveries.

6. Slow breathing:

Anxiousness causes faster and shallower breathing. Try to take a short break from your work on deck, bridge or in the engine-room and intentionally slow your breathing. Count to five while inhaling slowly – and then do a countdown as you blow out your breath.

7. Muscle relaxation exercises:

Find a quiet and peaceful place on your vessel. With closed eyes, start from your toes and slowly tense and relax each of your muscle groups from your toes to your head. Hold the tension for a count of five seconds and then slowly release it, by again counting to five. Muscle tension is often a sign of anxiety and dealing with this, helps release your fears. You may also find meditation or prayer helpful. Meditation apps such as Calm and Headspace have both released free digital sessions or you could participate in an online worship service.

8. Keep in mind that you are more than your emotions:

Your social, emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual wellness plays a role in your mental health. If you have free time between shifts, consider each of these aspects and think how they can assist you with a positive outlook.

9. Body and mind work together:

Try to eat healthily and make time to exercise. Take a run or a walk on the deck. Exercise releases endorphins in your bloodstream and can elevate your mood.

10. Be kind to yourself:

You are WAY more than your emotions. You are not your fears and anxiety. Give yourself a break. You are of great value!

Remember, you are not alone. Sailors' Society is here to help.

We have supported seafarers through many crises, including two world wars, and we will do whatever it takes to support you through this crisis today.

- You can contact us for welfare advice and support via <https://sailors-society.org/chaplains>
- You can also access our dedicated coronavirus page at <http://https://sailors-society.org/guidance-on-coronavirus>, where we'll be adding new resources including physical and mental health information.
- Or join our Facebook coronavirus support group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/CoronavirusSeafarerSupport/>

Sites you might like to visit for reliable information are:

- <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
- <http://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/HotTopics/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>

*Written by Johan Smith, Sailors' Society's Wellness at Sea project manager
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