

**Coronavirus (COVID-19)**

**&**

**Keeping Mentally Well**

**Practical Tips on Understanding the Effects of Anxiety & Isolation**

**for**

**Children, Adolescents, Adults & Seniors**



**WellSense**

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Hello & Welcome,

I wrote this resource booklet in response to a high number of my clients, family and friends stating that theirs and other's anxiety was escalating during the COVID-19 pandemic.

My purpose is to use my health professional, consultant, speaker & mental health facilitator career, which has spanned twenty-years working in mental health and wellbeing to enable you to understand the heightened anxiety in this time of the COVID-19 virus and beyond, for others to reach their best potential in life during this very difficult and confusing time.

Over the past 20 years I have successfully worked with a varied range of individuals, companies, Government and Mining Industries in Australia & Internationally to educate, consult and mentor on a wide range of mental health issues. These include workplaces and education settings where there is a rising need to educate on anxiety, depression, substance use & gambling, psychosis, suicide prevention, eating disorders, adolescent development, relationship attachment styles and inter-personal dynamics and developing healthier places where people work, live or study. All of these issues exist within people in all walks of life and can have negative effects on how they live, work and interact with others. As an engaging and knowledgeable professional I work with empathy, integrity and a purpose in helping people to lead their lives with less stress, better relationships enabling them to realise and acknowledge their personal and professional potential within themselves and others.

For further information on **Well-Sense** services Contact Cath Ashton at:

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*Warm regards*

*Cath Ashton*

**Disclaimer:**

This resource pack is intended only as a guide and is not a medical, psychological or judicial document.

Well-Sense takes no liability for any advice undertaken should it be of harm to the reader who initially purchased the document. All information in this booklet is a general guide to understanding anxiety & well-being and is to be undertaken at the reader's discretion. Any person under 16 should seek permission from the purchaser of this document prior to reading or putting the information into personal action.

The mental health disorder of anxiety is managed differently by each individual and Well-Sense is not advising that any prescribed medication should change unless it is discussed directly with each person's medical professional.

Should the reader have any medical or psychological issues prior to, or after purchasing this document, they should seek appropriate professional support of their own volition and cost.

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## Coronavirus (COVID-19), Isolation & Mental Health

Each of us, in our own way, are dealing with an unprecedented shift in our daily lives due to the Coronavirus–COVID-19 pandemic. Whether we are well-prepared for the uncertainty or just about understanding the impact of the virus on yourself, family and communities, it can be a very worrying time for many.

**It is vital that each of us takes absolute responsibility in adhering to the advice from responsible sources to each try to mitigate the virus and keep ourselves, and others, healthy.**

**Please check in with the following official websites for updates. Seek immediate advice from a health professional should you have any of the symptoms of Coronavirus.**

<https://www.australia.gov.au/>

[https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/A\\_E/Coronavirus](https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/A_E/Coronavirus)

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

### Getting the Best from this Resource Pack

I have developed this resource pack in response to many of my clients, friends and family saying that their anxiety is escalating to the point of some having panic attacks, not sleeping well (if at all) or their anxiety having a negative effect on their daily lives due to COVID-19.

However, I believe with practical information to manage the rise in anxiety in children, adults & seniors, there may be a possibility that you can better understand the effects of anxiety when you are feeling stressed in a globally uncertain time.

**Each section is specific to age-related areas; Adults, Children, Adolescents and Seniors. Each of these life stages brings with its various anxiety related to age, vulnerability and support structures.**

You may have one or more of these generations in your own life or it maybe you're a single person. Whatever your life situation, you are equally important and your anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic is as important as another person who may be feeling anxious also.

My aim is for this resource pack to help you, in some way, to put strategies whether they be practical, spiritual or holistic in place to for yourself or someone else. It is for you to gain an understanding to see each day as an opportunity to look at reducing anxiety and the positives of how, as a community, we can support each other even in the smallest way whilst looking after our own and other's mental health.

## Isolation and Anxiety

Humans need to have a sense of connection. Whether it is person-to-person, voice-to-voice, virtual or the written word. Even the most introvert people at some stage have to connect! With **'Social/Physical Distancing'** there may still be the need to physically connect. Usually, this isn't a problem but at present the World Health Organisation is requesting at least 1.5 meters distance from people in a social/physical situation or area (*check with the websites listed in this pack for regular updates on COVID-19 information*). Connection with others, whether it be physical or otherwise imbues a sense of value and inclusivity

Research indicates that a 6-20 second hug releases a surge of the natural bodily chemical **Oxytocin**. Oxytocin is also known as the **'Cuddle Hormone'** because it promotes a feeling of love, social bonding and well-being.

However, when people who usually love to hug, high-five, man-hug (you know the type guys do when they 'bear hug' then slap each other on the back!) are told they can't do this, it can lead to anxiety and even a sense of anxiety, sadness and rejection. Interestingly, rejection can have the same physical effect as if we are punched or hit, which is why rejection hurts so much. I believe that if you are rejected, in a relationship, job, family or friends, even though it is so difficult, it is also an opportunity to see it as a change, cross-roads in life and a chance to re-learn.

So, when we have to pull back from social interaction and physical touch when we are comfortable being tactile, we may then become anxious and sad which can sometimes lead to depression.

There are varying types of people who have social needs:

**Introverts** tend to enjoy more time to themselves, are very aware of their internal thoughts and re-charge more in solitude. Introverts like their own company and may get anxious in crowds or social gatherings.

**Extroverts** can be just the opposite. Extroverts are often more outgoing and love being around other people. They may mix well in crowds but may feel anxious when spending time on their own.

I have heard anecdotally that this is a great time for **introverts or the socially anxious**. They don't have to defend their actions of staying home and not being tactile (hugging or handshaking) – in fact, it's almost a gift having to isolate themselves socially for a while!

However, for those who enjoy social interaction this can exacerbate a sense of loneliness, isolation and increased anxiety. They may feel a sense of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and may also feel that they need to be in touch more with people via social media. The problem with social media is it can send the wrong information and increase isolation. Regardless, in these uncertain times it is very important to have some 'social distancing and safe connection' to help us feel that we are still in touch in the best and most responsible way.

## Anxiety and the Effects on the Body & Behaviours

**Anxiety** is fear based. It is what we feel when we are worried, tense, threatened or afraid, particularly about things that are about to happen, which we think could happen in the future or may trigger us from the past. Anxiety is a natural human response when we perceive that we are under threat whether actually in our lives or via external sources (news outlets, vicarious effects or social media). It can be experienced through our thoughts, feelings and physical sensations.

**Cortisol** is a chemical which is released in response to actual or perceived fear or stress by the adrenal glands as part of the fight, flight or freeze mechanism of our body.

Without getting too technical there are two types of **stress** that can lead to anxiety -especially distress, which in turn may negatively limit our abilities, thinking and reactions.

### **Eustress**

This is a healthy type of stress and a **positive form of stress**. It can have a beneficial effect on health, motivation, performance and emotional well-being.

You know, when you have a report due, sporting competition, a deadline in life to meet or be somewhere on time? This is a healthy 'kick in the butt' to get us going!

### **Distress**

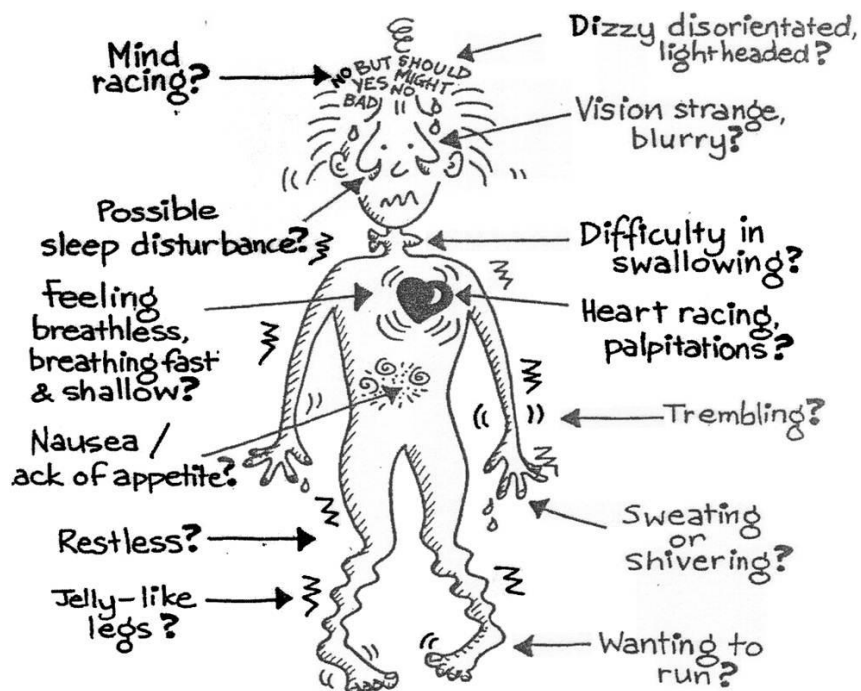
We are all, on a daily basis sub-consciously ready to be vigilant from threats – from crossing the road to driving or going through daily life, from the moment we wake up until we go to sleep. Once the alarm to release cortisol has sounded, the body becomes mobilised and ready for action. It helps to keep us as safe as possible in various situations. For example, imagine in pre-historic times when a dinosaur may be coming towards you. You could choose to Fight and defend yourself, run (Flight) or stay where you are (Freeze)- chances are, if your freeze it isn't going to end up well!

## Symptoms of Anxiety

### Physical Symptoms:

These can also be called Psycho-Somatic, this translates to 'Ache of the Body' which can be caused by internal conflict or stress

- Headache.
- Insomnia or other sleep issues (waking up frequently, for example)
- Weakness or fatigue
- Rapid breathing or shortness of breath
- Pounding heart or increased heart rate
- Sweating
- Trembling or shaking



## Psychological Symptoms

- Palpitations, pounding heart
- Accelerated heart rate
- Sweating
- Trembling or shaking
- Sensations of shortness of breath or smothering
- Feelings of choking
- Chest pain or discomfort
- Nausea or abdominal distress
- Feeling dizzy, unsteady, lightheaded, or faint

## Behavioural Symptoms

- Problems with concentration, or difficulty with staying on task
- Memory difficulties
- Distressed in social situations
- Depressive symptoms such as hopelessness, lethargy, and poor appetite
- Avoiding situations, social gatherings or meetings
- Obsessive Compulsive Behaviours or Catastrophising
- Increased use of alcohol or other drugs
- Increased risk of depression or suicidal thoughts



## Helpful Tips to Reduce Anxiety



### Identifying Anxiety

- Recognise the Physical, Psychological and Behavioural symptoms listed above
- Call on a trusted adult to talk these feelings through with you. If no-one is available go to a mirror and use some of the **'Self-Talk'** tips listed below.

### When the anxiety starts to build up

- Say *'It will not last for long if I talk positively and kindly to myself'*
- Anxiety is like having a messy house-mate-you can either live with it or make changes!
- One step at a time, this can be overcome
- Anxiety is not a good friend- I am in charge here not anxiety!

### The 5, 5, 5, Method of Mindfulness A simple & Effective Way to Help Anxiety

Stay Still for 5 Minutes, Take a Deep Breath in and Try the Following

**5** things you can **SEE**    A bird, Clouds, The sky

**5** things you can **HEAR**    The wind, A bird singing, Your breath

**5** things you can **FEEL**    The weather, Your body temperature, Your heartbeat

**Positive Self-Talk – Make notes after each tip and underline which ones work best for you**

- Not all is at it seems
- What is triggering me? (Triggering is another word for what had to happen to make the anxious thoughts occur)
- I **CAN** get through this / **I AM** strong / It isn't always going to be like this
- Right now, I do feel uncomfortable but I will take 10 deep breaths
- Slow down my breathing, use the
- Check where I am, what do I need to do for the next ten seconds?
- Stand still in a safe place and focus on a tree, the sky, the clouds
- If you are driving the car, sing, make an '*aaaaaaahhh*' or '*ommmm*' noise
- Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth

**When the anxious moments have passed (and eventually they will with the right support techniques)**

- Pat yourself or the person who is anxious on the back and say '*Well Done, I am proud of you*'
- I am getting better at this and I will get better each time
- I did the right thing by acknowledging the anxiety
- Make a note of what worked well and what didn't
- Place affirming words on your bathroom mirror, fridge, car dash-board even on the back of the toilet door! Things like - '*You are strong*', '*You can do this!*', '*You are good and loved*' (even if it's by yourself/the cat/the dog)

### Make a 'Grounding List' (grounding can help to take things back to basics)

When things are becoming anxious for you or someone else try these tips:

- Take your shoes off and walk barefoot, try the grass, sand, carpet or anywhere that is soft. It really does help with feeling grounded.
- Wiggle your toes and rotate your ankles- this loosens up anxious or tight muscles
- Dance! Put your favourite upbeat happy song on and sing out loud, shake your booty and dance like no-one is watching (and if they are watching, just smile and say *'It's all about me for now!'*)
- Carry something like a pebble or smooth rock in your pocket when you go out- hold it tight and feel how strong and unbreakable it is. This is a good 'Anchor' to hold on to
- Set your intent every morning – Just 3 things...it could be 'I will do some deep breathing', 'I will give gratitude every hour for just getting through today', 'I will finish one task today'
- If you need to remember something put a large note on your house/car keys or tape it to the door
- Learn to say **NO!** When we over-commit it causes anxiety and stress. You could say *'I would love to help out but I genuinely can't at the moment'*. Don't feel guilty for saying no as the person asking isn't living your anxiety when you say yes.  
If they persist, try to explain that you feel overwhelmed and need to cut back on things and you are not being mean or unhelpful and you will help another time.

## Tips on Dealing with Isolation & Anxiety

### Adults

If you are self-isolating you may be getting on with **your day-to-day work or coming to terms with reduced hours or even job loss**. Working from home may be sitting at your laptop as you usually would but not in a typical office setting. The problem with this is may be that you may be used to the structure of getting ready to go to work, the usual noise and banter in the office, meetings or going for coffee and lunch with colleagues. You may like the environment you work in as it gives you some release from your home-life. Alternatively, you may dislike your office set-up and love working from home!

If you are under pressure due to job changes or job loss, Job loss feels like rejection and can increase anxiety, lack of self-worth and confidence. Keep in touch with your financial institutions to work through financial issues. Check in with your health professional, Employee Assistance Program via your workplace if it offers EAP, or counsellor should your mental health decline. It is also worth thinking about not using substances (drugs or alcohol) as alcohol is a depressant and can make anxiety worse.

Whatever the situation, try to keep to a daily routine. Some examples may be the following:

- **Buy your food with the intent of eating healthily:** However you are buying your food, try to buy fresh fruit (the brighter the food colour the more vitamin C), salads and vegetables to keep your health at optimum level.
- **Set your alarm for your usual waking up time.** Sleeping later than usual for the first few days may be great as you don't have to factor in your travel time. However, try to use this time to plan your day ahead and even, if possible, start earlier so you can finish earlier!
- **Keep up with your hygiene** and 'Casual Friday' clothes. If you slouch around in your couch potato wear you will sub-consciously feel 'slouchy'- believe me, I have done it and it made me want to watch daytime TV in my usual working hours! Psychologically, if we are dressed for the office, we usually work like we are in the office.
- **Make your lunch the night before.** It's easy to get into the habit of snacking all day as the food cupboard is only a few footsteps away! If you make your lunch as you may usually

do, it sets a precedence for the other working at home days (and helps you diving into the biscuit jar or looking down the back of the couch for that long-lost chocolate bar!)

- **Do virtual coffee & lunch breaks with colleagues.** Try to do your daily routine of checking in at coffee or lunch breaks. It's amazing how the feeling of connection can be if you 'down tools' and check in with each other. My friend's workplace has a weekly competition which add some fun and breaks up the day/week.
- **Keep Social media to a set-time limit per day and keep perspective.** It's easy to get lost in cyber world for hours. Try turning off your phone for one hour at a time if possible and limiting your viewing to the main points of the news from a reliable media source.
- **Take regular breaks where possible.** Easy to say when you're confined to home. But if you don't have a garden or balcony, open the windows and breathe some fresh air. Try some stretches (injuries allowing you where possible and check with your GP first).
- **Positive Thinking.** You are what you think. If you get caught up in 'catastrophising' (a view which is deemed worse than it really is), ruminating or continual negative thought patterns, these can increase anxiety. Consider meditation or yoga along with gratitude.
- **Limit your exposure to the news and media.** By limiting your time online, tv and newspapers you may not be saturated by negative news. Check reputable Government and media links only.
- **Holistic & Spiritual Tips.** Spend time being alone if possible, meditate, reflect, journal. Have an '**Attitude of Gratitude**'...be thankful for every little thing. Positivity breeds positivity! It works, believe me! Gratitude is a habit which is healthy, purposeful and life-changing. If you repeat in your head several times a day or say out loud 'I am grateful for waking up, my bed, my friends or family, my pet etc.,'
- Make a list of what you are **grateful** for and are happy that you have in your life

## Information on COVID-19 for Children and Adolescents

For younger **Children** try to limit the information and graphic details of COVID-19. This could upset and scare them which may result in heightened anxiety, nightmares and behaviours not usually associated with them. Ask them what they already understand about COVID-19 and talk with them acknowledging their anxiety.

If it is a younger child you may say *'What have you heard that older grown-ups talk about the sickness that is going around the world'*. For older children you may say *'Do you talk about Coronavirus in your classroom with your teacher?'*

**Set a tone of calmness** and try to not have a conversation with or around a child if you are feeling anxious yourself. Younger children may be clingier, require soothing and a lower tone of voice to calm them. They may require more sleep as **anxiety uses up to 70% of our bodily energy stores**.

Try to limit the news, social media and COVID-19 talk. Instead, **make it fun to** learn to wash children's hands reciting the alphabet, counting to 20 or playing a sight game like 'I-Spy'.

Having said that, it is not about completely ushering children away from age-appropriate information in segment sizes. Information in the right form actually hard wires children for **resilience**. Just don't be too overt with details and if you see them upset try some distraction tactics such as colouring in, scavenger hunts, writing, playing outside where possible or reading a book they like. Have a day of themes- board games, Lego, jigsaws or hide and seek.

**Routine** – It is easy to get 'out of synch' when anxiety and the current COVID-19 climate is saturating us all from every angle and we are confined to smaller spaces.

If you are working at home and children or adolescents are with you, set some check-in times. Try to stick to these times so you all have a routine. Eat at regular times, ask each person to talk about a positive thing that happened to them the last week or recall a funny story.

Hold positive Skype chats family, friends and especially older members of the family or community. Maybe get seniors to tell about how they grew up and tell heartwarming stories to the younger member of the family.

### Lead by Example

You are probably already instilling **good hand hygiene** with children and another good way to do this is to wash hands together every 20 minutes, have **fun**, make up a rhythm, sing the alphabet, or a song or blow bubbles for the required minimum of 20 seconds for handwashing. You could even record it and share a virtual copy with friends or family!

Tell younger children that doctors and hospitals are ready to help everyone who gets sick and do their best for everyone.

If you are anxious, try not to discuss this when your anxiety is high. Think of the 'oxygen mask' analogy, try to be at your best before you can help others.

Try to set up a reward system if they don't touch their face (on average people touch their face about 25 times per hour which can increase during anxiety and distress). A reward system could be a watching their favourite age appropriate movie, choosing what to have for dinner or a gold coin reward along with a home-made certificate for trying hard!

## Children in Home Isolation or Feeling Anxious

During the COVID-19 social distancing and lock-downs, the majority of **sports activities and spending time with friends** may have been severely limited or have stopped completely.

This can have a significant effect on children and adolescents as they have limited outlets for their energy, frustration and anxiety.

Children and adolescents deal differently to adults when experiencing anxiety. Because their brains don't fully develop until around the age of 25, they may react to their anxious thoughts in a varied manner of behaviours, speech and thoughts which adults view as childish or recalcitrant.

Try to be aware that they may be working through this in their own way and may not be their usual selves. Their understanding of the world is usually via social media which can be a narrow global lens for inappropriate and skewed information. They may feel that they are invincible on the outside but may hear peer-led scare stories which can undermine their well-being, make them afraid of the outside world and exacerbate anxiety.

**Internalising** - These are negative behaviours that are focused inwardly. This can be expressed through anxiety with crying without explanation, over-dramatising, self-injuring, eating disorders, OCD and depression.

**Externalising** – These behaviours usually manifest negatively in hitting out, shouting, vandalism, throwing objects, anxiety, depression or using alcohol or drugs. Boys tend to use externalising behaviours as a way of coping with anxiety but be mindful that they may also internalise.

Both Internalising and Externalising behaviours can swing between both genders, so it is best to not categorise them for boys and girls specifically.

## Adolescents

The adolescent years can be confusing in the most clam of times. However, if adolescents are using significant amount of their time on **social media** and recalling graphic details it may be mindful to have a quiet conversation about the effect on the people around them and anxiety provoking stories. **Hygiene** may not be at the top of their list (boys at the age of 14 have a surge of 800% testosterone) and girls may be starting menstruating which in itself brings extra hygiene vigilance.

Adolescents are wiser than we think and their brain may be 'offline' at times, especially the pre-frontal lobe (which takes a large of the brain space and is placed at the front of the brain). It is responsible for emotional regulation, judgement, social skills and is literally the 'emotional brakes' of the brain. Ask adolescents what their thoughts are on COVID-19 and their understanding from reputable news sources. They may surprise you with their understanding! Remind them of social & physical distancing, keeping healthy both physically and mentally and how important it is for themselves and their growth as an individual.

Adolescents may feel that if their schools are closed in their last few years of education that may have a huge impact on their choice of career. Remind them that support is available via their school, youth services or further education institutes.

I mentioned earlier about the development of the adolescent brain and that it doesn't usually develop fully until the age of 25. The adolescent years are a time for **Individuation** (finding their own way in life which means distancing themselves from their caregivers and moving closer exploring their own personal growth and maybe to their peers for validation).

**Adolescent anxiety** on the rise globally, this may be due to social media, peer pressure and comparison of self with others. Some of the indicators of adolescent anxiety may be moodiness, withdrawing from family, friends, activities they once enjoyed and spending more time alone. (Also refer to the Psychological, Physiological and Behavioural signs of Anxiety)

Let adolescent know that should they become anxious that there are some excellent youth services available which offer online and telephone **counselling** to support them through difficult times of uncertainty.



## Seniors

As indicated through Government and World Health Organisation sources, seniors and the most vulnerable in society are at higher risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus. This in itself can imbue a further sense of **anxiety and hopelessness** in some seniors. Conversely, there may be a sense of collegiality among old friends which can help reduce anxiety also.

Senior's vulnerability may be heightened by prolonged exposure to news and media updates along with possibly living alone or separate from their families or **support networks**. As we know, not all seniors have caring family or friends and this in itself can have a significant effect on their health and outlook. Even if you leave a friendly note, some food or provisions this can imbue a sense of feeling valued, included and cared for and this can have a huge effect on feeling better even for a short time.

In the Western world we don't always value our seniors as much as some other countries and maybe now is an ideal time to pay forward some **compassion and kindness** among our older generations.

If a senior has anxiety it may have a knock-on effect on other physical or mental health issues which may have serious consequences. Always check in with their health professional if you are concerned.

It is always best to be **honest and open** if they are asking questions and are concerned but not always necessary to give in-depth information if you see that they are becoming upset or anxious.

Asking what they know already about the virus and the need to be extra vigilant about hygiene can help others to alleviate any anxiety. Let them know that the health professionals are there to help them with services available.

It may also be worth **putting positive statements** around their place of residence and talk about things they can look forward to. Even a fresh flower on their doorstep with a note of kindness can help lower anxiety

If a senior is anxious it is best not to overload them with information, questions or suggestions as this may confuse and upset them even more.

A good tip is to speak slightly slower (but not in a patronising tone) with more silences in-between conversation. This allows for the elderly person to process the information and take time consider their responses.

Help the senior to feel valued and acknowledge how they are feeling and asking their opinions on COVID-19. It may help to reflect on how they were resilient in other times during their life when communities were doing it tough. You may find out things about them you didn't know as their lives may be a rich tapestry of untapped **knowledge and wisdom**.

As the social distancing may exclude younger children (as children may forget about not being able to hug during this time) it may be that you show familiar photos from past holiday together, videos from other family/neighbours. Any of these strategies may lower the anxiety of the senior in your life and help them be distracted from any anxiety about COVID-19.

If possible and where distancing measures apply, try out some board games, bingo, singing, gentle movement (where health restrictions apply), art and creativity. All of these are distractors and also keep a positive spin on their daily lives.

Should the senior's mental health begin to decline be aware of negative talk, them not wishing to be here anymore, saying 'what's the point', not wanting to get out of bed, take their medication if they have to take medications, eat or wash. These are major indicators of declining mental health possibly related to anxiety.

Should these occur it is important to notify their health professional as soon as possible.

## **Final Notes About Support**

**If you are concerned about an individual or it is a life-threatening situation, call your local emergency number.**

As this is a document being disseminated in various countries globally, Well-Sense is not able to list all emergency service numbers or mental health contacts.

Wherever you are based, if you have concerns for anyone it is important to check with a health professional.

There are many support and help-lines available in your local areas along with emergency numbers which are available online or in your community.

### **Additional Information**

**Well-Sense offers a range of Mental Health Training & Consultancy Services Including:**

**Mental Health Training for -**

**Workplace, Government, Schools/Tertiary, Mining, Communities**

**Full Day/Half-Day/Lunch & Learn Sessions**

**Workplace, Standard or Youth Mental Health First Aid**

**Healthy Workplaces, Schools, Adolescent Mental Health**

**Suicide Prevention**

**Inter-Personal/Relationship Mentoring**

**Podcasts & e Newsletters**

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