

Advice for Relatives and Carers

of people struggling with unusual and distressing experiences (psychosis)

You can find lots of advice on our NHS website, www.likemind.nhs.uk There is a specific section for carers, relatives and friends here, with lots of advice, and a downloadable booklet for friends and family <https://www.likemind.nhs.uk/resources/resources-for-family-and-friends> There is also a forum on there where you can ask questions, or even share advice with other people like yourself.

What is coronavirus?

Covid-19 or coronavirus is a type of very severe flu. You can catch it if you are close to another person and they have the virus. The main symptoms are a cough and temperature. It can cause severe breathing problems and death in some people. This is why people are being asked to stay at home and only go out for food, medicines or to exercise and only once a day. It is affecting people all over the world, and is a major problem. Something like this has not happened since the first world war in 1918! Everyone in the NHS is changing how they work and who they see, to try to cope with all the people who have the virus. This is a time of uncertainty and we don't know how long it will last.

You and your family member may be dealing with greater difficulties than usual. We have provided some suggestions below that might help **BUT if you feel that your situation is unsafe, or that you, your relative, a family member, a neighbour or a member of the public is in danger right now** because of your family member's mental health – It is important that you make yourself safe, and then call the emergency services or emergency mental health helpline.

How might coronavirus affect me and my relative? what can I do to help myself and my relative?

You may find that your family members' care co-ordinator or team aren't able to meet them in person. They may be in touch less often than normal and may stay in touch by telephone or arrange to speak through a video conversation on a computer, i-pad or phone.

Some people who struggle with unusual distressing experiences, may be suspicious about speaking on the phone, and may be even more suspicious about speaking on-line with a video-link. They may find it hard to set-up the technology.



If your family member is suspicious, you could try to reassure them: **The NHS will only use safe, confidential methods of communication.** If they are still reluctant, you could offer to speak on their behalf, or in your own right to convey any concerns. You could help to set up technology too.

You may feel that you don't have the usual support for your family member's mental health. NHS staff across the country are currently in high demand. It's possible that this may affect the level of routine care that your family member receives. At the same time, extra stress can make mental health symptoms worse.

You can support your family member, by listening to their worries, without challenging them, and by helping them to consider the best ways to cope with their experiences. These could include activities and treatments that are in their care plan, and activities that help them to relax, distract, feel positive and keep a healthy routine around sleep, eating and exercise.



It's tough right now, being inside most of the time. You may be living on top of each other, and with not enough space. This may be especially difficult if you have fewer rooms, no outside space, larger families, children and teenagers.

Try to have some space and independence. Remember that this time will pass. It's good to spend time together, and talk to each other, so that you understand each other's needs, but it's also important to spend time in separate spaces, use headphones and earplugs to have a quieter time, and exercise or use outside space at different times, especially if you have younger children.

Substance use can be an issue in times of stress. Your family member may be drinking or smoking cannabis at home, more than normal or around children. They use this as a way to cope, but this may be a challenge for everyone else. You may be worried that their mental health will deteriorate as a result, but arguing may make things worse.

Focus on minimising harm in the short term. Avoid confrontation and battles right now. Explain your concern to your family member. Aim to reach a compromise that you and they can live with – such as using cannabis outside only, using substances after a certain time of day, and not around younger children. Have a look at the talk to frank website below for more information.

Supporting a family member may be especially stressful just now. You may find you're more down, worried, irritable or frustrated than normal. At the same time, everyone's mental health is likely to be better if the atmosphere is calm and relaxed.

It's really important that you look after your own mental health too. Focus on what you can do and what you can control. Let go of the things you can't. Below are some suggestions that might be helpful

- **Stay connected and informed**
 - Speak to friends and family on the phone or on a video app.
 - Listen to the radio, music, TV or enjoy the quiet
 - Keep up to date with national guidance from trusted NHS/Government sources to stay safe but DON'T listen to the news all the time.



- **Do things that you normally enjoy or that help you to relax.**
 - Give yourself a treat or try something new or creative.
- **Make a list of things you can control and things you can't.**
 - Focus on doing and achieving things that are in your control.
- **Find positive ways to cope**
 - Limit alcohol and substance use - avoid using them to cope
 - Draw on your strengths and things that have helped in challenging times in the past
- **Get a basic routine going:**
 - Get up and go to bed at the same time each day – try to get a good night's sleep
 - Remember to eat regularly
 - Go out for a walk every day if you can (but stay home if you're ill)



Remember - you can find lots of advice on our NHS website, which is especially designed for carers, relatives and people who have unusual and distressing experiences There is also a forum on there where you can ask questions, or even share advice with other people like yourself

www.likemind.nhs.uk

You can find out more about substance use and how to manage it here:

<https://www.talktofrank.com/>

You can also find out more facts and advice about coronavirus/covid19 from these trusted websites:

<https://www.sussexpartnership.nhs.uk/coronavirus-covid-19-what-you-need-know>

<https://www.sussexpartnership.nhs.uk/coronavirus-covid-19-and-your-mental-health>

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>