Many people, even those used to high pressure environments, will feel the stress and strain of the ongoing COVID-19 situation. Most people will be used to coping with different kinds of stress but very few people will have experienced this type of ongoing pandemic situation. Whilst the situation is different, there will be some common responses:

This doesn't mean everyone will need or want support, managing without support is ok too and recognising this can be an important way to validate someone’s individual coping style.

**Normalisation of experience**

- A key principle in early psychological first aid, especially when incidents are ongoing, is normalisation.
- Finding ways to express that whilst experience is unique, thoughts and feelings are shared and common
- Normalisation doesn’t dismiss how difficult the experience is, but is about taking away the feeling that someone is unusual for having negative thoughts and feelings.
- People often do not want to mention thoughts and feelings that they believe are abnormal or unusual. This may include thoughts about death, dying, and loss of loved ones. In reality this is our brain’s threat system playing out scenarios in a normal way to try and keep us safe. An example of normal negative automatic thoughts is the ‘I wonder what would happen if I drove my car off this bridge’ thought which most people have had at some stage.
- Normalisation helps to connect us to others, feel a shared sense of experience, and feel ‘normal’ again
Tips for providing psychological first aid over the phone

**Listen**

- **Normalisation is crucial**
  - Don’t ‘debrief’ or press too hard for further details if they don’t offer these
  - Use active listening e.g. curiosity, verbal responses, repetition of key/last word(s) of a sentence can help someone to open up e.g. ‘I just feel really angry’, ‘why angry?’
  - Avoid making discussion about you but shared experience is good. Instead of “That happened to me last week as well”, try “It seems like a lot of people are feeling that way”.

**Protect**

- Help them to feel safe and facilitate a sense of control. What can they do?
- What do they think they need right now?
- How do they normally manage their own self-care?
- Can they access a safe environment with low stimulation?

**Connect**

- Help them to feel connected to their support networks
- Encourage prioritising things we know are helpful e.g. contact with family members and friends (even virtually), establishing routines, self-care such as diet, exercise, sleep.
- Direct them to self-help resources available
- Encourage continued connected to co-workers including this call and future contact.
- If helpful signpost towards further connections e.g. 1v1 contact with occupational health, staff support psychology team, managerial support for practical issues, NHS staff support programmes, chaplaincy etc.

**Worst case scenario**

- Most people worry about someone disclosing self-harm or suicidal thoughts
- These, like other thoughts, can be normalised. Recognise how difficult it must be to be having those thoughts, but also how understandable it is when things are so difficult.
- You will **never** cause someone to have or act on suicidal and self-harm thoughts by asking about them
- Look for protective factors e.g. family and social connections, plans for the future, coping mechanisms
- Offer further support e.g. connecting them to the staff support psychology team, occupational health team, or the mental health liaison team. If in doubt drop an email to psychstaffsupport@srt.nhs.uk
- If someone needs immediate support via mental health (i.e. they are very worried about their thoughts or making active plans to harm themselves), the mental health liaison team are currently based in Meadowbrook and are happy to see people. They can be contacted by bleeping 3411.
- This type of disclosure is **very** unlikely but there are plenty of support mechanisms available if this were to happen. You handle this like you would for any patient we were very concerned about. Make sure you check in with someone else if this does come up and ensure you have all the support you need yourself.