

## Tips for mental health carers

This fact sheet contains information and advice about coronavirus (COVID-19) specifically for people in New South Wales (NSW) caring for a family member or friend who is living with mental illness.

### Follow NSW Government guidelines

Official advice is changing constantly, so carers should refer to the [NSW Government website](#) for up to date information about what the current rules and recommendations are in NSW. It is important that carers observe official NSW Government guidelines to prevent transmission of the virus to themselves, those they care for, and the broader community.

- Wash your hands regularly for at least 20 seconds
- Stay 1.5m away from other people whenever you can
- Get tested if you have the symptoms

### Support is available

Essential services still remain available to people living with mental illness and their carers. Many community, public and private mental health services have transitioned to telehealth based services, with some services continuing to offer in person support. Some are still offering limited face to face support within physical distancing guidelines.

If you are already accessing services, phone your service provider to find out how they are adapting to the challenges of COVID-19 and how they can help you and the person you care for. If you are not getting the support you need, you can contact:

- [Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service](#) on **1800 512 348**
- [NSW Mental Health Line](#) on **1800 011 511**
- [Carer Gateway](#) on **1800 422 737** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 5pm).
- [Lifeline](#) on **13 11 14**
- [Suicide Call Back Service](#) on **1300 659 467**
- If you or someone you are with is in immediate danger, please call **000**.



### Stay well

- **Maintain a healthy diet:** A good diet will improve your physical health and give you strength and stamina. Eat a healthy, balanced diet and eat at regular times each day.
- **Try to find time to exercise:** Exercise eases both physical and mental stress. Remain physically active in a way that you enjoy (walking, yoga, stretching, or jogging). Remember to keep a good distance from people walking around you and wash or sanitise your hands when you return home. If you can't get out, explore the many free online workouts and classes.
- **Get a good night's sleep:** Avoid coffee or tea in the evening and explore ways to wind down before bed. Meditation, listening to music or reading can help if you have difficulty falling asleep. [headspace](#) offers a number of free programs to help you sleep and meditate.



- **Practise relaxation techniques:** Close your eyes and breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose and out through your mouth. Repeat ten times. This is a way of switching off, even if just for a few moments.
- **Make time for you:** Do something that you enjoy doing. It could be reading a book, spending time in the garden, cooking, meditating, listening to music or going for a walk. Taking time out to do an activity that you like helps to recharge the batteries and allows you to better cope with stress.

If you develop a cough, sore throat, a temperature of 38°C or higher and shortness of breath seek medical advice. Healthdirect Australia has developed a [COVID-19 Symptom Checker](#), an online self-guided tool to help people find out if they need to seek medical help.



## Stay connected

- **Explore the many free digital methods** for maintaining individual and group catch ups, such as video call platforms like [Zoom](#), [FaceTime](#) and [Facebook Messenger](#). Visit the [Carer Peer Connect](#) website to read more about the digital platforms available and how to use them.
- **Call or text your loved ones regularly** on the phone. Reach out when you need to talk, and schedule reminders to connect with those who may be feeling isolated or anxious.
- **Write a card or letter** to someone you care about. You can post it to them, or if they live near you, drop it in their letterbox while you exercise.
- **Create a gift**, like a picture or a drawing, and share it with someone special.
- **Connect with other carers online** through the Carer Peer Connect [Carer Hangouts](#) or Carer Gateway [Carer Forums](#).

## Keep your body and mind active

- **Structure your time:** Develop a daily or weekly routine that includes time for exercise, times to connect with friends and family, times for leisure activities that you enjoy, and times for undertaking jobs around the house.
- **Try something new:** Cook a dish you have never cooked before, start a new puzzle or book, learn a new skill, or reach out for support in a way you have not done before.
- **Record your experiences** of this challenging time in a journal or through creative activities.
- **Revisit good memories** by looking at old photo albums, sharing funny stories and taking up old hobbies.
- **Spend time outdoors** when you can do so, while still following hygiene and physical distancing guidelines.

