

Covid-19: what you need to know – staff mental health and wellbeing



- 1** This is a worrying time. The pandemic doesn't just impact on physical health; your mental health can also be affected. If you already experience poor mental health, you may find your condition has worsened. Even if you have never been affected, you may be struggling. All education staff are key workers. Depending on your circumstances, anxieties about your family's health and wellbeing may well be compounded by on-going concerns about safety issues.
- 2** There is much we can do collectively and individually to alleviate concerns and many resources are available. As a member of the NEU puts you are well-placed to help yourself and colleagues through this difficult time and get support from your workplace reps or branch officers.
- 3** Many schools and colleges have trained Mental Health First Aiders. These colleagues will be alert to signs that others are struggling and will be able to signpost you to sources of support.
- 4** If COVID-19 protocols or new working practices in your workplace are unsafe or causing distress, don't put up with them. The nation is depending on education staff more than ever before and, in return, you have the right to be treated fairly. Your employer must negotiate new protocols with staff and not seek to impose them. Adaptations to working arrangements must happen in consultation with NEU reps and members.
- 5** Expectations around workload must be both reasonable and negotiated. Access to regular breaks is essential. Despite the crisis, there must be agreement that no-one should be constantly available or expected to respond to messages within unrealistic timeframes, or at evenings and weekends. If there is no reasonable email protocol in place in your school/college, discuss with fellow NEU members what you think is reasonable, and then raise this collectively with management. For example, you may decide that there should be no expectation to read or reply to emails before 8am and after 5pm on working days. At this stressful time, when there is an even greater need to rest and relax, it might also be worth having an understanding that work-related emails and group messages, eg on WhatsApp, will not be sent by anyone outside of set times.
- 6** Working with fellow NEU members and members of other unions in your workplace, you can tackle collectively some of the issues which are causing concerns. For example hygiene issues, refusal to follow union guidance to allow vulnerable people to work from home, refusal to pay those self-isolating, employers pressing ahead with redundancy procedures and other employment procedures such as disciplinary and capability and refusing to postpone restructures.





- 7** If working from home, for example as a result of self-isolation, or because of remote learning, try to ensure that your work environment is separate from your living space and is as comfortable as possible. See [NEU guidance on working safely at home](#) for more details.
- 8** In order to avoid isolation, it's important that colleagues who may struggle with new ways of working receive support. If you are struggling, you are unlikely to be alone. A colleague may be able to help, or you should be provided with on-line training.
- 9** Look after your own wellbeing when you're not working. There are simple steps we can all take to look after ourselves. You may be struggling with loneliness or, in the event of further lockdowns or school closures, may be finding it hard to be cooped up with your family.
 - Keep in touch digitally with family and friends and consider reconnecting with those with whom you've lost touch. Talk about your worries. And focus on what you can control rather than what you can't.
 - Look after your body by staying active and busy – sit less, dance, walk up and down stairs, clean your home or have a clear out, or a digital clear out!
 - Keep your mind stimulated – read, listen to podcasts, watch films, do puzzles and jigsaws, but limit your intake of news if this is upsetting you.
 - Find ways to relax and be creative, eg DIY, arts and crafts, yoga, listening to music, exploring new recipes.
 - Try to stick to your normal sleeping and waking schedule.

10 Accessing further support

Check what is on offer from your employer. You may be able to access free, confidential wellbeing or counselling services.

Help and advice

[The Education Support Partnership](#)

supports the mental health and wellbeing of education staff in schools, colleges and universities. Call the helpline on **08000 562 561**.

Some staff, particularly leaders, will sadly need to offer support to children who have lost a loved one or who have a family member who is seriously ill. [The Charity Winston's Wish](#) provides guidance and resources for schools.

[Mind has published useful guidance on coronavirus and wellbeing](#)

[Government advice is here](#)

[Contact details for Samaritans](#)

If your query is not addressed in our coronavirus or advice information, contact the AdviceLine via email at advice@neu.org.uk or by telephone on **0345 811 8111**.

[Mental Health First Aid \(England\)](#)

includes resources for includes resources for teachers and for working remotely. If your symptoms don't improve, contact your GP surgery.

GPs are still offering telephone and video consultations throughout the coronavirus crisis.

