



STAYING MENTALLY HEALTHY

**DURING COVID-19
& BEYOND**

TĒNĀ KOUTOU KATOA

This resource from Scripture Union New Zealand (SUNZ) is designed for pastors and youth pastors. It includes some basic advice to help yourself, your youth leaders, your youth and their whānau stay mentally well. It was developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, but the advice holds true for other times of crisis, isolation or anxiety. We hope it will be a useful summary of some of the things you can practice daily to positively impact on mental health.

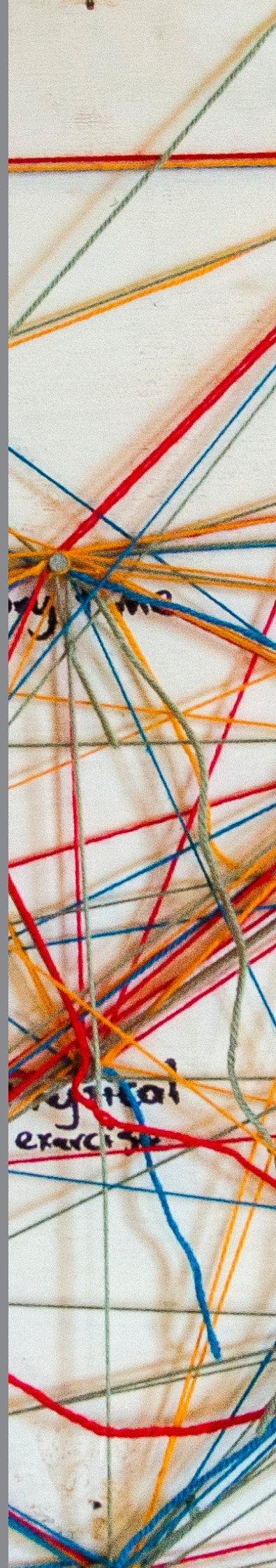
At the end, we have included a list of useful websites with more in-depth resources.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you want to ask any questions, clarify anything or are looking for other support.



**Neville
Bartley**

SUNZ National Youth Team Leader
neville.b@sunz.org.nz



**WHEN WE ARE FACING
A CRISIS, THE FIRST
THING THAT GETS
NEGATIVELY AFFECTED
CAN BE OUR MENTAL
WELLBEING.**

**THIS,
IRONICALLY, IS
ALSO THE FIRST
THING THAT
WILL HELP US
ENDURE AND
SURVIVE THE
SAME CRISIS.**

“You can’t go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.” CS Lewis

It is important to remember that there are things we can control and things that are completely out of our control. We hope this resource helps you identify and begin to change some of the things you can control.

In crisis mode, our brains instinctively reduce the higher functioning we use for long term planning and shift our thought process to a primal, more immediate threat response. If threats recur or persist, the brain’s ability to self-soothe is diminished.

Recognizing when we are living in crisis mode is the first step to bringing balance to our thinking and our health. Then, we can counter with soothing, calming and effective problem solving, doing all we can to turn on higher brain functions and access the parts of the brain that will guide us through the crisis.

**SO LET’S LOOK AT SOME
OF THE BASIC THINGS
WE CAN DO.**

STRATEGIES FOR ALL —



STRUCTURE your days

In times of uncertainty, creating a routine will help to give some sense of normality to everyday life.

Some sort of daily schedule or plan is important for us all—no matter how much of a free spirit you think you are. Structure and routine help with our mental wellbeing and can aid the mental wellbeing of those around us.

The routine doesn't have to be strict, but an outline of the day will help us get through. Whether or not they like to admit it, even teenagers are used to the routine of school, so adding some routine to their day too will help them and their whānau.

**STICK TO A ROUTINE EVERYDAY,
GET UP IN THE MORNINGS,
TAKE A SHOWER AND GET
DRESSED AS IF YOU WOULD
BE GOING OUT**



STAY CONNECTED with others

Staying connected is important during times of physical or social isolation, but take time to assess whether the way you are doing that is helpful and effective.

Not everyone enjoys being connected regularly and not everyone likes using social media. Some people love video formats because they can see the person they are talking to, whereas others get anxious and would rather just hear a voice over the phone or computer, or even just receive a message.

Ask yourself what method of connection others would prefer and then endeavour to use those. If you have decided to use something like Zoom for large group gatherings, make sure you explain why you are using this method. Work out which styles build you up and which ones drain you, and have a plan for coping with those.

As you connect with people you will be able to gauge how often you need to touch base. Some will need a connection daily, others every couple of days, and maybe some only once per week. We do not want connection to become a negative thing when it is needed to help support people's mental wellbeing. And don't worry if people don't always reply.



Connect WITH GOD

It is vitally important for our mental wellbeing to spend time connecting with God as well as with other people. Alongside your usual routines, try new things which will help to add variety to your day and your connection with God.

Even if we are in physical isolation, it is important to worship with others, so figure out how you can do that—whether in your household or online with others.

Having someone to share with and receive prayer from is vitally important to your walk with God, your journey as a leader and your mental wellbeing, so identify at least one person who you can connect with for mutual prayer.

**A CONNECTION CAN BE AS SIMPLE
AS A SMILEY FACE EMOJI :)**



Take TIME OUT

Time out is also important, even if you are a raving extrovert. We need time out when we are forced to be in close proximity with others—and they need time out from us. During the day, take opportunities to be away from everyone else, and make sure at least one of these periods is of 20 minutes or longer.

Choose something that will energise you, and help you to relax and just have a space for yourself. Be aware that introverts in a household self-isolation situation may feel crowded by extroverts continually seeking interaction.

SWITCH OFF FROM SOCIAL MEDIA INTERMITTENTLY DURING THE DAY



EXERCISE regularly

Fresh air and moderate exercise are vital for mental wellbeing. Exercise can be as simple as walking around your section or going for a walk around the block.

Be deliberate about planning to break up your day. Encourage everyone to take a break every hour for at least 10 minutes and do something physical, either on their own or with someone else in the household. If you can get outside, then head outside. If there are others in your household, use a mix of solitary and group exercise.

REGULARLY STRETCH AND EXERCISE

There are many types of exercise to choose from such as dance, walking, fitness classes. Be creative! I have heard of people walking with others online—they go outside for a walk at the same time and video call each other and share their walk. Whatever you choose, try to make one session a day at least 20 minutes long with an elevated heart rate.



EAT well

Try and keep your diet healthy with plenty of vegetables and fruit every day. Keep up regular fluids throughout the day, but watch your caffeine and sugar intake as too much can increase your anxiety levels.

KEEP SOME TREATS ON HAND TO HAND OUT AT TIMES



Try SOMETHING NEW

Now is a great opportunity to try and learn something new. It could be a language or some other creative expression like playing an instrument or building something. Think about what you might like to do and, if you have the resources, give it a go.

FIND 'HOW-TO' VIDEOS ONLINE TO HELP LEARN A NEW SKILL



ASK for help

Remember we are all in this together. Try and remain calm and reach out to others for support. If you are going through a difficult time, share your struggles with a mentor, supervisor or professional. Keep up any regular supervision arrangements you have and don't be reluctant to connect with your doctor, therapist or counsellor. If you are not sure who to talk to then just call or text 1737 and someone will be there 24/7 to help you.

HELPING TEENS

SOME TIPS FOR LEADERS AND PARENTS

The general strategies we have already talked about apply to teenagers, as well as the rest of us. But there are additional challenges facing the leaders and parents looking after teens in times of crisis or uncertainty.

The best thing you can do is to let your young people know that you are there and available to support them. Stay connected so they know they are cared for and loved. Don't think you are failing if they don't always reply.

Do not overstretch yourself or promise things that you can't provide. You need to be mentally well to be able to support them—so don't over commit. Look after yourself too.

I highly recommend *A Survival Guide to Self-Care* from Grow Counselling (follow the link in the first resource referenced at the end of this document). This can be used by leaders and young people and is also a good resource to send through to parents.

Here are some extra tips for you.

What might anxiety look like?

Anxiety can show itself in many ways. Sometimes it appears as avoidance or fear of separation. You might hear lots of 'what if' questions because having information can help us feel as though we can control what happens. Trouble sleeping is common as an anxious brain likes to get busy when things are quiet.

Physical symptoms might include a sick tummy, nausea, headaches, sore muscles, or butterflies. These can feel awful, but they are evidence of a strong, healthy brain working as it should to get ready to deal with the threat—it is just working a little too much. These tips can help to keep it under control.

BE DELIBERATE ABOUT CONNECTING

Even if you are in the same household make sure you make deliberate connections. Don't just rely on incidental connections that will happen throughout the day.

LISTEN AND ACKNOWLEDGE

Give teenagers opportunities to share, and use different methods to help them share: for example, talking, playing, writing, painting, gaming or other creative methods. If and when teenagers share, give them your full attention and acknowledge that their feelings and fears are normal.

PROVIDE CLEAR INFORMATION

Keep up-to-date with what is happening so you can speak with some form of certainty in an uncertain time.

LIMIT EXPOSURE TO MEDIA AND TALK ABOUT WHAT THEY HAVE SEEN AND HEARD

Encourage teens to stay up-to-date with the facts too. However, suggest that they just use one trusted source for this information and that each time they engage with information that they talk about it with an adult. Encourage them to check up on the facts just once a day.

Maybe decide what you will all listen to or watch, and then discuss what you have just heard. Also encourage teens to share with their trusted adult anything else they may have seen or heard online or from friends.

BE AWARE OF YOUR REACTIONS

Young people often take their emotional cues off the significant adults in their lives. Be careful to manage your responses and keep calm while you listen to and acknowledge their concerns. Speak kindly and answer their questions honestly.

HELP TEENS DISCOVER THEIR STABILITY ROCKS

A stability rock is something that adds reliability to daily life, especially when it feels like we don't have any control over things at all. Identifying stability rocks helps teens to realise that they do have some control over their own lives. Some examples of stability rocks could be:

- waking up at the same time every day
- eating regular meals
- going to bed at the same time
- doing some form of exercise every morning
- taking an afternoon tea break
- reaching out to a friend each day.

INVOLVE TEENAGERS IN PLANNING ROUTINES

Plan your household routines with the young people and give some flexibility. Get them involved in the creation of their meals and if possible let them be involved in your meal planning.

OFFER REMINDERS THAT IT'S NORMAL TO BE FEELING STRESSED

Feeling stressed is an understandable response to the current coronavirus pandemic. Teenagers might be worried about catching the virus, about how their loved ones will cope, about the disruption to their studies and routines, and about whether their parents still have a job and enough money. These stressors, along with the constant media hysteria and dealing with disappointment (travel bans, events being cancelled etc.), add up to a pretty difficult time. As hard as things are, it can be comforting to know that they are not alone and that others share their feelings.

DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THOUGHTS AND FACTS

It's important to understand that we are not our thoughts. Thoughts may come into our head for a whole bunch of reasons. By accepting that our thoughts are not necessarily facts, they lose some of their power to upset us.

One idea, that can work for teens who feel in a tough situation, is to acknowledge the words going through their head by writing them down. After that, read the words back as if they were written by someone else. This can help reinforce that thoughts don't define a person, and allows thoughts to be seen for what they are: just thoughts. If your teenagers are open, they could even share the thoughts they have written down with you.

ENCOURAGE CONNECTIONS WITH OTHERS AS WELL AS TIME ALONE

Staying connected to friends and family members helps us to express ourselves, laugh, cry and show love. However, also remind teens to take time out for themselves and encourage them to set aside a time each day away from technology.

REMIND TEENS IT'S OK TO REACH OUT AND ASK FOR HELP

It is worth reminding young people that sometimes things can just be a bit overwhelming. Sort out a plan of who they will connect with if that happens. Have several options just in case an option is unavailable for some reason.

TOP LINKS FOR YOU

- 1. A Survival Guide to Self-Care. How to Thrive During Uncertainty** (Self-care tips and daily journaling guide from GROW Counselling) <https://growcounseling.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/A-SURVIVAL-GUIDE-TO-SELF-CARE.pdf>
- 2. Hauora Supporting You** (Put together by 24/7 Youth using Te Whare Tapa Whānau) https://www.supportingyou.nz/?fbclid=IwAR0vuwrSgraXtF_o8hbbltZZ6G4oRvcbWq7tURP7yEwi06T2B634LGdDbpQ
- 3. All Right?** (Kiwi resources to help you with well being. AllRight? is a collaboration between Canterbury DHB and the Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand) <https://www.allright.org.nz>
- 4. Ara Taiohi** (National youth workers page for COVID-19) <https://arataiohi.org.nz/home/navigating-the-pandemic-together/>
- 5. Nathan Wallis** (Facebook page and Youtube channel New of New Zealand neuroscience educator) <https://www.facebook.com/nathanwallisxfactorededucation> <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUeT25tE-IXTp55fcT41ZsQ/videos>
- 6. Soul Tour** (SoulTalk video resource to help Church life-groups go deeper with each other and grow in their understanding of several important mental/emotional health topics. You can email Soul Tour for advice.) <https://www.soultour.co.nz/soul-talk>
- 7. EC 2020 Anxiety seminar with Belinda Stott** (A short talk Belinda did on Anxiety for online Easter camp) <https://www.facebook.com/Centraleastercamp/videos/232614527853162/>
- 8. Live for Tomorrow** (A Zeal project - www.zeal.nz) <https://www.livefortomorrow.co/join>

MORE REFERENCES

- [Coronavirus and mental health: your wellbeing can be someone else's survival | Voices of Youth](#)
- [COVID-19: Combating social isolation through photography and community | Voices of Youth](#)
- [Download Youth Ministry | Coronavirus and Covid-19 Response – Guidance for pastoring students in person or online during the Coronavirus / Covid-19 crisis](#)
- [Youth Ministry Insights: Reaching Youth During COVID-19 | Catholic Star Herald](#)
- [Coronavirus: A youth ministry liveblog | Youthscape](#)
- [Covid 19 coronavirus: 10 tips to help your wellbeing during lockdown - NZ Herald](#)
- [How to help pre-teen kids in a coronavirus lockdown — Quartz](#)
- [COVID-19 Lockdown Guide: How to Manage Anxiety and Isolation During Quarantine | Anxiety and Depression Association of America, ADAA](#)
- [The family lockdown guide: how to emotionally prepare for coronavirus quarantine | World news | The Guardian](#)
- [How to take care of your kids during Covid-19 | Stuff.co.nz](#)
- [Mitigating Psychological Effects of Lockdowns](#)
- [How to Strengthen Children & Teens Against Anxiety After News of a World Trauma](#)
- [Coronavirus: Neuroscience educator on how families can survive lockdown](#)
- [How to Pause Lockdown Anxiety and Actually Get Work Done | Psychology Today](#)
- [5 tips to mind your mental health during the coronavirus outbreak](#)
- [Resilience | Anxiety NZ website](#)
- [Coping with COVID-19 | Depression and Anxiety](#)
- [Looking after your mental wellbeing | Unite against COVID-19](#)
- [Get help with anxiety, fear or panic - NHS](#)
- [Guidance for parents and carers on supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak - GOV.UK](#)
- [Coronavirus and your wellbeing | Mind](#)
- [the mental health charity - help for mental health problems | Mind, the mental health charity - help for mental health problems](#)
- [How to Talk to Kids and Teens About the Coronavirus | Psychology Today UK](#)
- [Quarantined: helping teenagers cope with lockdown | Parent Zone](#)
- [How to look after your family's mental health when you're stuck indoors | Parent Zone](#)
- [5 Ways to Help Teens Manage Anxiety About the Coronavirus - The New York Times](#)
- [How teenagers can protect their mental health during coronavirus \(COVID-19\) | UNICEF](#)
- [What Do Anxious Teens Need? | Harvard Graduate School of Education](#)
- [How to deal with uncertainty during coronavirus | Coping with COVID-19 | ReachOut Australia](#)
- [How to talk to your teenager about coronavirus - ReachOut Parents](#)
- [Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) COVID-19 Corona virus](#)