



THE

# PULSE

Winter 2021 Edition

## Your wellbeing matters

A toolkit of new ideas and tips on how you can improve your own wellbeing and resilience. For all managers and employees in the public sector



Share your thoughts at  
[info@wmemployers.org.uk](mailto:info@wmemployers.org.uk)



# Welcome

by Rebecca Davis, Chief Executive, WME

This issue is for every member of the Local Government workforce in the West Midlands, all 210,000 employees that work across the 33 Councils in the Region. We know how hard you are all working and we hope this issue gives everyone at least 2 or 3 'take away' ideas of how to improve your wellbeing and those of your teams.

Once again we find ourselves in a national lockdown, working hard to keep our loved ones safe as we work to deliver services and support the vulnerable in our communities. The question we have been asked repeatedly by Councils is 'what's next' on wellbeing, how do we do even more to support people at a time when spirits are low and people are managing anxieties both at home and in the workplace.

The truth is, we don't have a magic answer but what we do know is that wellbeing is complex and there is a wealth of best practice and great ideas out there. Often its small things, done consistently that make a real difference to people. There is also a degree of trial and error, different things work for different people and we all have needs, even those that seem to be coping well.

At WME we promote a 'One Health' model of wellbeing. This model shows wellbeing as an 'umbrella' term for all the different components of wellbeing that can impact on all of us to differing degrees and need different strategies and approaches to address. We focus on Spiritual Wellbeing, Emotional Wellbeing, Physical Wellbeing, Financial Wellbeing and Mental Wellbeing.

We've created this issue of The Pulse in five chapters to reflect the One Health model and packed it full of ideas and examples that can hopefully help you find 'what's next for you' on wellbeing.

**Take care, stay safe.**



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# Mental Wellbeing

This section provides articles and resources to help you improve your mental health both day to day and when things get tough.

# Wellbeing Check-Up

We are often concerned about other people's mental health and can sometimes fall into the trap of neglecting our own. It's important we also check in with our own mental health to understand our own emotions and take simple steps to address those feelings and improve our mental wellbeing.

**Mental Health First Aid England** offer a range of **training** to empower people to spot signs of mental ill health and offer first aid support. They have a fantastic Wellbeing Check-Up they recommend we all do each week.



**Try using this list each week to check in with your mental health**



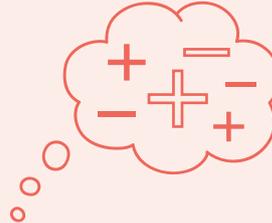
### Where's my mental health today?

- How do I feel today?
- Mentally?
- Physically?



### Looking after my wellbeing

- Am I drinking enough water and eating a balanced diet?
- How did I sleep last night?
- Did I feel rested when I woke up?
- Is there anything I can improve?



### How's my thinking today?

- How are my thoughts making me feel?
- Am I having unhelpful thoughts?
- For free resources on spotting and challenging unhelpful thoughts, visit [getselfhelp.co.uk](https://getselfhelp.co.uk) or the [NHS Apps Library](#)



### My Stress Container

- How full is my container?
- Am I using helpful coping strategies?
- LAre the working?
- Learn about your stress container here: [mhfaengland.org/mhfa-centre/resources](https://mhfaengland.org/mhfa-centre/resources)

[#addressyourstress](#)

# Building Personal Resilience For 2021

**Author: Jackie Lawlor, WME associate**

This coming year, our aim should be to be sustainably resilient. That is, not maintaining exhausting routines, but spending time planning for mental, physical and emotional health and wellness for our whole lives. Organisations should be looking at ways to support their staff to work at their best in the still unfolding COVID-19 context as we move into 2021. Here is a free resource which may help [Employers | Good Thinking \(good-thinking.uk\)](https://www.good-thinking.uk).



What can we do to maintain our own resilience? Opposite are some steps you can take, along with some links to find out more.

Don't aim to take on the whole list, this is not about creating extra things to do. Instead, choose the one or two you are most drawn to, and create way to make these part of your routine.

Why not share this too and encourage others in your work team or in your wider life to do the same.



## Resilience

Using the word Resilience, let's consider a number of ways you can develop your own resilience



### Respiration

Deep breathing is a core resilience tool. Just taking a moment to take a few deep breaths, in through your nose and out through your mouth actually changes your brain state if you notice yourself start to feel overwhelmed. Breathing exercise for stress - NHS ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk))



### Exercise

Getting outside in nature is one of the best things you can do to lift your mood during your day. Any nature will do, from walking round the block and noticing the variety of birdsong in the air to taking yourself to a park or local greenspace or nature reserve. Notice the difference it makes as you move around connecting with natural sights, sounds and smells. [How Does Nature Impact Our Wellbeing? | Taking Charge of Your Health & Wellbeing \(umn.edu\)](#)



### Sleep

Sleep is a key part of maintaining resilience. Having good sleep hygiene includes not using your bedroom as an office, and if you need to do that, putting everything work related away and out of sight at the end of your working day. I recommend buying a cheap alarm clock and not using your phone as an alarm clock. [blog-9-sleep-well.pdf \(reading.ac.uk\)](#)



### Interests

Many interests are mindful. By that I mean that when you do them, time just disappears as your full attention is on the activity. Doing something you enjoy brings relaxation and absorption in the activity, your mind is held in the moment, and any worries or concern disappear. Interests can be many and varied and here are a few examples. Baking, bonsai, writing letters, woodwork, reading or doing the crossword in the paper. [Why Hobbies Are Important? \(kettering.edu\)](#)



### Listening

Listening to the cues your body gives you and noticing some of your triggers which let you know you are feeling overwhelmed, rather than overriding and trying to control by doing more.

## Symptoms of Exhaustion | 10 Warning Signs (womenshealthmag.com)

### Are You Exhausted? How to Spot the Signs and Symptoms (menshealth.com)



#### Incorporate boundaries

Have a defined working day, take your lunch. Say no when you need to, say yes when you need to. Ask for what you need from family and friends and at work. [How to Set Healthy Boundaries: 10 Examples + PDF Worksheets \(positivepsychology.com\)](#)



#### Energy

Manage your energy, not your time. Where you can, choose your best times of day for your hardest pieces of work. Tricky report to write? Notice at what time of day you are most alert and focussed and do it then. [How to Discover Your Best Time of the Day to Work | TeamGantt Blog](#)



#### Notice

This one is key. What you notice is where your energy goes. Energy follows attention. If you focus on all the things which aren't good or going well it will have a big impact on your energy and wellbeing. Instead, each day, first notice what has gone well or what you are grateful for that day. You can then go onto also notice what hasn't gone as well as you would like and then consider what you can do to remedy that for next time. Where you put your attention affects the quality of your life. <https://youtu.be/7XFLTDQ4JMk> Getting stuck in the negatives and how to get unstuck - Alison Ledgerwood, TED Talk.



#### Connection

Build and maintain (even a small) network of positive people you can go to and who will listen, encourage and support you and you, them. Talk to those people, share how you are feeling. Both positive and negative. Ask for evidence-based feedback on what you are doing well, what's not going as well as it might and what you could do to make that even better. Seeing yourself through others eyes can really help you to build self-awareness, self-knowledge and resilience. Accept feedback when it is offered. Give good quality feedback to help others to know the difference they are making.

At work, if you are struggling, share how you feel with someone you trust, ask for help when you need it and do remember your workplace employee support provision if you feel things are getting too much. Many organisations have counselling, debt advice and Occupational health support available [Four Ways Social Support Makes You More Resilient \(berkeley.edu\)](#)

Enjoy the present moment. Look for the little moments of joy. The Art of Now: Six Steps to Living in the Moment | Psychology Today

# A New Year's Revolution

## How to kick start your mental Health journey

**Author: Dr Andy Cope, Art of Brilliant**



We're all familiar with New Year's resolutions. Big, bold promises that we make on the 1st and break by the 4th.

## So, in this brave new world, we're calling for a New Year's REVOLUTION!

No petitions, pitchforks, placards, protest marches or toppling of statues required. This is a wellbeing revolution. An uprising of human flourishing and a raising of the bar from mental health to mental wealth because, bottom line, there's a world shortage of happiness right now.

The mass uprising of wellbeing has to start somewhere, and we're suggesting the best place is with you. Most of us have tried feelgood strategies of one sort or another. Meditation and journaling are in vogue. You're up at 4am to create your 'miracle morning'. You become a kindness ninja and a grand master of gratitude. You yoga yourself silly. Diet; tick. Sleep hygiene; tick. You breathe and smile and work super hard at being positive. You master the power of now. You define your purpose, discover your strengths and get into a flow state. You set goals. You visualise. If you've read *The Secret*, you chant mantras in an effort to 'manifest' things into your life.

## And yet...

... the Ferrari never arrives. The nagging doubts remain. Whatever was missing is still missing.

## So here's our deal for 2021; it's time to try less hard

Breaking News: You can't cure the world. Caring with a passion is noble and well intentioned, but it will also make your knees buckle. Instead, why not treat yourself to some 'subtractive psychology'. Jettison some responsibility.

Shed some thinking. Let go of tired old habits. Park your negativity. Drop the guilt. Off load that nagging self-doubt. With that excess baggage gone, the spring returns to your step, a smile to your face and, bizarrely, the world becomes much more "doable".

At Art of Brill, our advice is to look around at what everyone else is doing and NOT do that! In a world where we've already got enough to do, it's our belief that the solution is not only to try less hard, but to also do less.

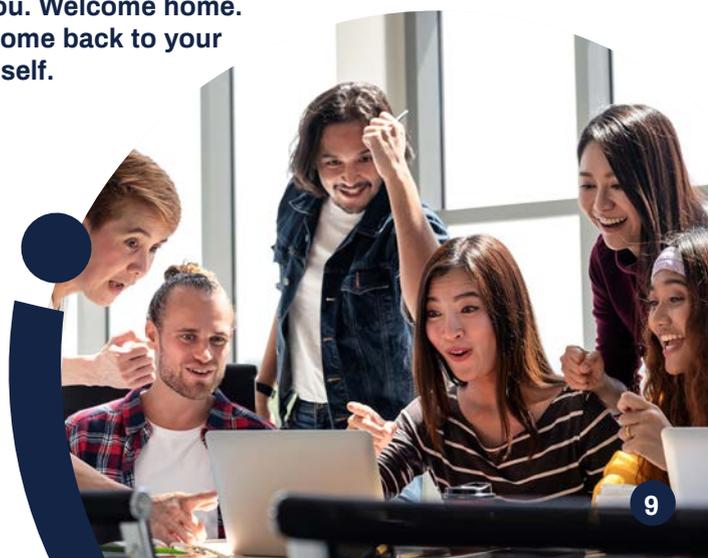
## Do less, but be more

Humanity has somehow managed to worry itself sick. In which case we think it must be perfectly possible to un-worry yourself well. Let the good times roll. Quite simply, we want you to sign up to being your best self. Consistently. And while that might not change THE world, it'll certainly shape yours.

2021 represents a brand new partnership between WME and Art of Brilliance. Our wellbeing webinars have been delivered across the world and we're now bringing 15 years of expertise in human flourishing to the WME portfolio. It's our belief that culture change isn't top down or bottom up - its inside out. It's about switching people back on.

We'd therefore like to raise a glass and propose a simple toast:

**To you. Welcome home.  
Welcome back to your  
best self.**





## Domestic Abuse: Supporting Employees And Work Colleagues Who Are Victims Or Survivors

**Author: Richard Long, Development and Policy Lead, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Warwickshire.**



If Domestic Abuse was a disease like COVID-19, it would be classed as an epidemic. The statistics are staggering.

- Almost one in three women aged 16-59 and one in six men, will suffer domestic abuse in their lifetime
- Almost 2 million people experienced domestic abuse in the UK in the last 12 months alone
- Two women a week are killed by their partner or former partner in just England and Wales

Domestic abuse can be experienced **irrespective of gender, age, sexuality or ethnicity**. The human cost is immeasurable. For the victim-survivor it can be devastating and life-affecting.

That alone is enough for us to want to support employees and work colleagues. However, there is also a financial cost to business in terms of decreased productivity, lateness, time off work, lost wages and sick pay, which is directly attributed to domestic abuse. This is estimated to be over £2 billion a year in the UK.

So while employers have both a moral imperative and a legal duty of care to provide a safe and effective work environment for their staff, there are also strong business reasons to support employees who are victims or survivors of domestic abuse. With one third of a working adult's life spent in the workplace, employers are in a unique position to create a supportive environment with a positive culture that encourages disclosure of this critical health and wellbeing issue.

But how do you start? What should you do? What else might you need to put in place for home working during any period of lockdown due to COVID-19?

Fortunately there is a range of excellent help and guidance for employers and businesses, some of which can be found here:

- [Managing and Supporting Employees Experiencing Domestic Abuse: A guide for employers \(CIPD/EHRC\)](#)
- [Domestic abuse: A toolkit for employers \(BITC/PHE\)](#)
- [Domestic abuse and the workplace: Infographic \(BITC/PHE\)](#)
- [Responding to colleagues experiencing domestic abuse \(SafeLives/DoH\)](#)
- [Model Employment Policy: Domestic Abuse \(LGA\)](#)
- [Support in the workplace for victims of domestic abuse \(ACAS\)](#)
- [Advice to help employers deal with domestic abuse and stigma \(HMG\)](#)
- [Domestic abuse: get help during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak \(HMG\)](#)

Many Trade Unions also have well developed guidance on supporting employees and work colleagues who are suffering Domestic Abuse.

In addition to the above guidance and as part of providing support, it will be important to signpost your employee or work colleague to an appropriate specialist support organisation. Which one will be a personal choice for them, but you can help by highlighting what is available and giving them the time and space to make that first contact in a safe environment.

## Domestic Abuse Codeword scheme

The Home Office is launching a new 'Abuse Codeword Scheme' on Thursday 14 January. The scheme provides a simple and discreet way for people experiencing domestic abuse to signal that they need immediate help from the police or other support services, using a codeword in their local pharmacy.

This scheme is designed to complement existing national campaigns and communications materials that can be used locally will be available after the launch.



# A Good Night's Sleep

## Using mindfulness to improve the quality of your sleep

**Author: Paul McKenna, Dean Lathbury - Senior Consultant - Resourcing, WME**



Easier said than done sometimes. Something that can be taken for granted and something I'm sure a lot of us have had problems with at some point. Sleep is the bedrock on which everything else we do is built. To some, a solid night's sleep is a truly wonderful, aspirational thing, akin to a golden unicorn that cannot be found.

I'm aware that there are many reasons for sleep issues and also a multitude of sleeping remedies out there. However this is a very personal story and one that helped me specifically, but due to our differences as human beings it may not necessarily be successful for everyone.

Until a few years ago I struggled with sleeping and this had been with me for many years. This affected me physically and mentally in the anxieties I carried with me and the bags under my eyes (amongst other issues).

Sleeping issues are varied and may generally relate to difficulties getting to sleep, staying asleep or getting quality sleep, -my issue was getting to sleep. Simply put my brain would not stop when my head touched the pillow and progressively this became a pattern where I would see bedtime as my brain's opportunity to replay and analyse events and make plans for the next day. The less I slept the more frustrated I became, and this frustration added to my anxieties and created a vicious circle.

I had tried many things to improve this but a birthday gift from a family member has been the tool which helped me most. This is the Paul McKenna book and is perhaps the best gift I've ever had.

Anyone who knows me personally knows I am a generally a sceptic, and my first reaction to a book by someone I initially dismissed as a "TV hypnotist" was not positive.

The book came with a hypnosis CD of soothing sounds and words. I recall playing this CD the first night, I heard it start, I heard all the content and I heard it end... and I was still wide awake. My wife on the other hand was asleep in what seemed like a nanosecond! -like I said what works for some may not work for others!

The book however was something else, it introduced making changes to habits and your environment and then offered psychological techniques to install habits of success in your mind, which in turn allows you to go to sleep and stay asleep longer and deeper.

Paul McKenna states that your mind is like a computer and when you learn to do something you store it as a programme in your unconscious mind. Inability to sleep is the fault of your "programming" and the techniques he provides are to break bad sleeping habits and replace them with positive behaviour for your unconscious mind to store and "run" so leading to an improved sleep cycle.

The book deals with sleep disrupters, enhancers and how you can optimise your environment to maintain improvements. Improvement in sleep is unlikely to happen in isolation as improvements to other areas of your life, such as diet and Exercise Can all impact on your ability to sleep well and the author also offers some tips on these.

The book also highlighted accidental patterns of thinking, usually about concerns or worries, that keep people awake - very much my issue. The book offers methods to calm your internal voice and physical exercises such as a tapping exercise to reduce stress or anxiety. This tapping exercise in particular was hugely beneficial for me and as a result is now bookmarked in my copy, so on the odd occasion when I cannot sleep, I refer back to it to "reset my programming".

The influences on good sleep are varied and this book may not be a remedy for everyone, however if you are experiencing insomnia or sleeping issues, it may be worth a read.

The book with CD or download code is available from Amazon [here](#) or other book retailers.



## Is silence really golden?

### How noise affects your mood and what you can do to create the right atmosphere

**Author: Lesley Shore, Director Of Corporate, HR and Membership Services, WME**



If “you are on mute..” was the catchphrase of 2020, one of the other things we will have also become accustomed to is the change in background noise when we are working from home.

Think back to your normal time in the office, the background hum of conversation, the moments of humour, drama or gossip. The opportunities to overhear a conversation where you have knowledge which puts a different spin on the situation or helps colleagues come to a speedier solution.

At the start of the pandemic when many people had children at home, long quiet days may have been dreamed of as a luxury. But as children are in and out of school the tensions between background noise and the quiet of working alone has come to be a reality for many.

In psychological terms there are distinct differences between what is termed “quiet” and “silence”, and the way in which we manage the type and level of background / ambient noise can radically alter our mood, our concentration levels and ultimately our overall performance.

**Quiet** has positive connotations and looks to something we seek out - moments of calm, space to think and recharge, or periods of rest from over stimulated stressful environments, whether they are work or home related.

**Silence** however has much more negative overtones - think of solitary confinement or being given the “silent treatment” - the sensory deprivation from being in enforced silence, particularly when we are more used to being in an environment full of background noise, open plan offices and social spaces, can be as disruptive to our sense of wellbeing as the noisiest environment.

Have you ever wondered why authors are often depicted writing in busy coffee shops instead of in the quiet of their own home? Or why artists like to paint outdoors where the breeze and the sound of mother nature seemingly infiltrates their creative zone? According to a paper published by the Journal of Consumer Research, the ideal work environment entails a little bit of background noise.

In the study, a team at the University of Illinois separated volunteers into four groups and asked each to complete a test for creative thinking. Each group was asked to work in differing levels of volume: 50 decibels, 70 decibels, 85 decibels and complete silence. Researchers found that the participants that had been working in an environment with 70 decibels of background noise performed significantly better than their counterparts. The author of the study states that: “getting into a relatively noisy environment may trigger the brain to think abstractly, and thus generate creative ideas.”

For some people - and I count myself among them, listening to music or having the TV on in the background whilst working is just not an option, its too distracting and almost jarring to have that level of background intrusion, whilst for others they could not get through the day without their favourite music station playing away in the background as “company” whilst working alone.

Studies by the American Psychological Society have shown however that whilst listening to music is helpful for certain types of activity and improves mood, it reduces comprehension and attention to detail when reading.

We need to learn to recognise our own personality type and noise triggers, and just like making sure we stand up and stretch, have some time away from the screen or change tasks to refresh us, having a change in background noise might also “reset” our minds to work in a more productive and creative way.

When you are getting a bit tired of the repetitive music on the radio, why not try these creative background noises, and note your thoughts down in a journal to track and see how they impact your mood, performance and wellbeing.

**[The Sound of Colleagues](#)** or **[I Miss the Office](#)** are virtual office backgrounds, with the usual sounds of chatter, laughing, sneezing and general hubbub of the office as an easy ambient background

**[coffitivity.com](#)** is an ambient coffee shop- with choices of busyness or even what country you take your coffee in - just to make you really miss your European weekend breaks!



# Improve your mental health in 2021

**Author: Sara Rawstron, WME Associate**



We're hearing so much at the moment about the need to be resilient - the need to keep going in difficult circumstances, the need to adapt to changing ways of working, doing different jobs, the need to bounce back if we experience adversity, whether that is getting COVID-19, going through a re-structure at work, a family member losing their job etc. These are all situations requiring us to **draw on our resilience strengths**.

We all experience difficulties in life at one time or another. Reminding ourselves of what we did to get through can help you to draw on strengths developed in the past.

Recognising when you could do with some **support** is one of the key resilience strengths. Telling someone you're not OK takes courage. I have seen a change in leadership throughout the Covid19 pandemic. Managers and leaders have taken time to find out if their team members are OK. They have demonstrated more care and concern than we have ever seen before. Telling your manager that you're not OK, enables them to get you the support you need, and doing this early on, will help you to bounce back quicker. Looking out for ourselves, our colleagues and our managers and leaders is everyone's business, and in some instances, can save lives.

We might feel that we have no control over what is happening, and to some extent, that may well be true, but knowing what you have **control** over can help you to exert **influence** in a way that can help you to be more resilient. Highly resilient people have a strong internal locus of control, i.e. they see the control sitting within themselves. Everyone has complete control over their thoughts, their behaviour, how they conduct themselves. You can look to see what influence you have to affect a particular situation, and you can also reflect on how you are thinking about it, how you are behaving in relation to it. If you have absolutely no control over a situation, you can choose



to let it go, choose to spend your energy on something else, investing your time and thoughts into something that brings you joy, relief, peace, connection and so on.

Some of the most resilient people I have come across have developed a **mindset of adaptability and optimism**. They challenge themselves to find the best way out of a difficult situation. They look at how they can make the situation work for them, even if it means going in a very different direction to one they had planned. 'Post traumatic growth' is a term I once heard in relation to resilience. We can learn very powerful lessons from difficult or painful experiences and use that for self-growth. Our mindset is paramount to our experience. If you find yourself thinking very negatively, notice that you are doing this and practice forcing yourself to spot the positives/opportunities. Write down the 3 best things in each day to help develop an 'attitude of gratitude'. This has known benefits in terms of your mental wellbeing and happiness.

And finally, **purpose**. Having a purpose, meaning, goal can help you to direct your energies and maintain your resolve when encountering 'choppy waters'. It may be a goal of survival, or a goal within your career, or a recreational goal, but having a goal provides a path to follow, which in turn, brings a sense of purpose and achievement.

Whatever challenges 2021 brings, and it will bring many, reminding ourselves of what we can draw on to maintain/build our resilience can help us to meet these challenges. The trick for workplaces is to offer leadership and management that creates 'good work' and supports and enables team members to successfully meet these challenges.



## It's Good To Talk!

### The benefits of volunteering on your mental health

**Author: Chantelle Wooldridge, Principal Consultant - Resourcing, WME**

Did you know that one in four adults struggle with their mental health? Take a moment to think about that. How many people would that mean in the organisation you lead, the team you manage and the colleagues you work with could be suffering with their mental health? Even though we know this, it can be really hard to know how to help and what to do. Yet sometimes all people need is to be heard and listened to.

The Samaritans have recently released a guide to support with how to start conversations, listen and encourage others to share how they are feeling.



They use the acronym **SHUSH** as a reminder of the key techniques of good listening.

#### Show you care

Give the person you are talking to your full, undivided attention.

#### Have patience

It may take several attempts before someone is ready to open up. Effective listening is about showing compassion and creating trust, and patience is key. They shouldn't feel rushed or they won't feel it's a safe environment.

#### Use open questions

Opening up about a problem can be difficult. Someone might start by telling you about a smaller, separate issue they may have been having, or talk about what they're going through, but initially downplay how they're really feeling.

Try asking them: "How are you feeling today?", and then following with, "Tell me more about that".

#### Say it back

Check you have understood, but don't interrupt or offer a solution. Repeating something back is a good way to reassure someone they have your undivided attention.

#### Have courage

Do not be put off by a negative response and don't be afraid of any silences.

You do not have to fill the gaps in your conversation. Sometimes it can feel intrusive or counterintuitive to ask someone how they feel. But you will be surprised by how often people are willing to talk, and how, sometimes, being asked how they feel is exactly what somebody needs to be able to share.

Talking about your feelings can help you stay in good mental health and deal with times when you feel troubled.

You can find out more about active listening [here](#)

# Resilience

## The AWARE approach

**Author: Kirsty Ramsbottom, The Development Alchemists**

[www.development-chemists.com](http://www.development-chemists.com)



## What is resilience?

At this moment in time and along with ‘unprecedented,’ the word resilience is read and heard everywhere. A useful definition of resilience is flexibility in response to changing situational demands, and the ability to “bounce back” from negative emotional experiences; in effect, bending rather than breaking. Some of us are of course more flexible than others, however this ability to withstand altered circumstances is only part of what resilience may mean. It can also be divided into recovery, resistance and reconfiguration. Recovery is the return to normal functioning, that after a trauma we can return to the way we were; and resistance is our ability to not show distress due to what we are going through. Reconfiguration is the establishing new ways of being and working, which may be better than the way they were before the trauma occurred.



## Why is resilience important?

Resilience is the ability to cope and learn from trauma, tragedies or significant sources of stress and can result in profound personal growth. Being resilient involves learning to regulate our thoughts and emotions as well as removing the tendency to see obstacles as a personal threat, seeing them rather as occurrences which can be overcome. Having a resilient workforce is clearly beneficial, as resilient people are more self-assured and speak up and contribute. They handle change and transition better and are open to innovation. A resilient workforce does not allow negative thoughts and emotions to cloud their judgement. Instead, they address problems calmly and logically. Resilience allows a person to focus on solving the issue at hand rather than placing blame. A resilient workforce is less likely to suffer from burnout and absenteeism.





## How can we build a resilient workforce?

Managers can create an environment which encourages emotional wellbeing, facilitate a healthy work-life balance, and set the tone for friendly relations among colleagues. These kinds of practices are investments in a resilient workforce. Chronic stress and its impacts should be understood as different from acute stress; Acute stress occurs over a short period, and we recover from it pretty quickly. This includes traffic jams, minor disagreements with coworkers or a small one-off disappointment at work. Chronic stress, on the other hand, occurs over an extended period and is more difficult to recover from, such as daily traffic jams, regular disagreements with coworkers or bosses and numerous disappointments or failures at work. Whereas with acute stress our heart rate, breathing rate, blood pressure and levels of muscle tension return to normal relatively quickly, with chronic stress a new normal is created within the body at these higher rates and levels which can result in health problems. It is important to note that while resilience is an essential quality to develop, it is vital that distinctions be made between a challenging work situation and one that is hostile or has long-term adverse effects on your mental health and wellbeing. Take the time to identify the source of stress and make the necessary changes to recover from it.

Resilience training should also address our tendencies and emotions during conflict. How do we typically respond to conflict? Common mistakes include exaggeration of the issue, personal attacks, suppressed feelings, overthinking or an inability to empathise with the other person. It is important, to **be honest about our reactions in order to trade these bad habits for resilient ones** resulting in long-lasting effects for our personal and work lives.

A final tip for building resilience is positive thinking coupled with learning from the past, which helps us re-centre after experiencing something outside of our control. Positive thinking means visualising a **positive outcome or interaction with a client, coworker or boss**. This optimistic outlook will empower you to behave in a way that matches that positivity. Positive thinking is also helpful for learning from the past. Instead of reliving a problematic situation, envision what you would do differently in the future. This technique allows you to rise above the past with purpose and vision.

For much more on resilience and many other key concepts crucial to modern management, have a look at AWARE. It's a management development programme with practical inputs which get to the heart of organisational issues today. This "inside out learning" begins with who you are, what you believe in and how you want to be perceived and understood.

## AWARE consists of 5 modules



### Module 1: **APPRECIATIVE**

It explores positive leadership and how Appreciative Inquiry helps to identify what is already working, how to build on strengths and recognise and appreciate contributions from the team and individuals.



### Module 2: **WISE**

Here, managers learn how to read their environment and cultural context. Power dynamics and organisational culture are addressed, as well as political awareness and how to build trust.



### Module 3: **ACTIVE**

In this module managers learn how to improve personal efficacy by listening actively and behaving assertively. It also addresses positive and effective communication and how to instil a coaching style of management.



### Module 4: **RESILIENT**

Here, managers learn how to strengthen their ability to face change, transition or trauma calmly and effectively. Managers are introduced to a psychosocial model that helps address a range of situations and people.



### Module 5: **EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT**

In this module, managers develop the core aspects of emotional intelligence; the capacity for social awareness, self-awareness, self-management and relationship management. They will learn how to manage with greater empathy and efficacy.

AWARE can be organised as in-house programme, designed for a team of up to eight managers from the same organisation, or as an open programme with participants from different organisations.

Each manager is given a personal, private online development board for each module to study, consider and apply and they can study when and where they wish.

At the end of each self-study module the managers come together in an action learning set, remotely or face-to-face, to discuss the content of the module and how it applies to them

As well as their boards, Managers are also provided with a participant's guide which contains all they need to know to get started... and the phone number of a REAL person in case they want extra support.

**For more information about AWARE contact:**  
[info@wmemployers.org.uk](mailto:info@wmemployers.org.uk)

Finally, as author Robin Sharma reflected of Development Alchemists

“With higher levels of AWAREness, you can make smarter choices. And the more clarity you get as to who you want to become, the quicker you can start making the choices you need to get you there.”



# Physical Wellbeing

This section has lots of resources to keep your physical wellbeing on track

# Eating Well To Stay Productive

## How your diet affects your physical wellbeing

**Author: Nicola Warner, Consultant, Resourcing, WME**



As we move into 2021, we have been hit with the hard news of Lockdown 3, so we will all be in our 'working from home phase' a little longer than anticipated.

Needless to say, it's becoming harder to stay energised and productive during the working day. After a few hours on a Monday morning, you might already be longing for the weekend where you don't have to sit engrossed in a virtual world.

Our well-being is more important than ever and creating and maintaining routines is essential. With that being said, many of us can underestimate how our food choices affect us. The choices we make around food can have a massive impact on our energy levels, our health, well-being but also... our mood.

The decisions we make around what drinks and food we choose to consume can be the difference between feeling energised, positive and ready-to-go, to experiencing a dip in our peak performance and displaying an elite level of procrastination.

By developing more positive eating habits, we can help defeat the factors which have negative effects of our productivity and move to a better way of managing our moods. No doubt it is easier said than done, but we can make simple and effective changes to boost productivity - starting from now.

## Get your drink on

Staying hydrated throughout the work day, although obvious, is an important cog in the productivity machine.

We all know we should be drinking enough water throughout the day and have been privy to 'water facts' - from your school days; a ritual induction to biology is being shown a picture of the human body and the teacher stating matter of fact "the human body is made up of two-thirds of water" or remembering Bear Grylls quoting the survivalist fundamentals; "3 minutes without air, 3 days without water, 3 weeks without food" - without water, we wouldn't be able to function properly - so why skip something so fundamental to our well-being?

Dehydration can lead to a number of symptoms which can curb your productivity - fatigue, weakness and dizziness, and is believed to be a contributing factor to some headaches with the most common being tension-type headaches and migraines... those work tasks you think are giving you that headache could be the water you are missing in your body.

For those of you who want to eat healthier and have a better relationship with food - people can often mistake dehydration for hunger. Clinical studies have shown that **37% OF PEOPLE** mistake thirst for hunger, because thirst signals can be so subtle. So rather than grabbing that trusty snack, you may want to grab a glass of water first. If your 'hunger' persists, then grab for your snack.

By staying hydrated, this can curb any hunger cravings, keep you alert and help with your digestion which is a great fundamental for staying on track for the day.



## Eating carbs is ok!

The facts are simple; carbohydrates are one of three macronutrients that form most of our diet. When you consume carbs, they are broken down into glucose before being absorbed into your blood stream. As most of you know, glucose is a form of sugar, which is responsible for providing your body's main energy source. Carbs are the fuel, and your body is the car so as part of a balanced diet, you need them to keep you going. What happens if you stop putting fuel in your car? It won't get you anywhere.

When your body is low on glucose, your body starts to break down other elements, such as stored fat to convert this into energy. As this is upsetting to the natural order of your body, when this is happening it can cause that feeling of weakness, feeling sick and dizziness, so getting those carbs into your diet is a good habit to have.

The good news is that you can get your carbs from many different sources. Fibre rich foods such as fruit, vegetables wholemeal grains. Starchy foods, such as bread, rice,

potatoes and pasta, and also sugary foods, such as biscuits, chocolate and breakfast cereals.

The bad news is that when your body consumes more sugar that it is used to, it produces insulin at a speedy rate to try and keep your sugar levels in check. What this means is that it causes your blood glucose to drop, which - you guessed it - is when you'll find your energy levels hit a low and you experience what is commonly known as a 'sugar crash'. This is what happens when you eat too many of your sugary favourites in a short space of time.

Starchy carbs are those which are slow releasing and will keep you going without the consequence of wanting a mid-afternoon nap when you know you have tasks to complete.

With this being said - having a couple of biscuits with your cuppa is sometimes a much-needed break from the virtual world; all in moderation!.

## Did someone say “breakfast”?

We've all been guilty at some point of skipping breakfast. “I'm not hungry”, “I'm running late” or “I'm too busy” are all internal excuses we've sounded to ourselves to rubbish our need for breakfast. Or simply - “I can't be bothered”. Breakfast is commonly referred to as ‘the most important meal of the day’ and there's a reason for this - some studies suggest that eating breakfast ‘jump starts’ your metabolism, or how you burn your food energy. The glucose you need to fuel your body? Breakfast replenishes your supply which boosts your energy levels and makes you more alert - think of eating breakfast as revving the engine of your well fuelled car. Eating breakfast will make you ready and raring to go - and being alert is handy for those Zoom calls!

## The power of protein

Another one of your macronutrients is protein, which is responsible for the structure and building blocks of your body - it is not a coincidence that ‘protein’ comes from the Greek word ‘proteios’, which means ‘primary’ or ‘holding first place’.

Protein helps make antibodies that fight off infections and illnesses and helps keep cells healthy, whilst creating new ones. We all know the worry surrounding our health during these times, so it is vital that we do what we can to take care of ourselves.

Protein has an array of health benefits - according to an article at [healthline.com](https://www.healthline.com), it reduces appetite and hunger levels, reduces cravings, boosts metabolism, whilst increasing fat burning and lowers your blood pressure. What's not to love?

Protein can have a negative connotation as people shy away from consuming protein in fear that it will make them bulky or gain weight. But eating too much of anything can have these affects as you may be consuming too many calories in comparison to the amount of activity that you do.



You can get your protein fix from lean meats, fish, eggs, and dairy products. And it's not all about meat; the British Heart Foundation have an article on [how to get protein without meat if you are vegetarian, vegan or just thinking about cutting down on meat.](#)

# Top tips for keeping your healthy eating on track

**Author: Natalie Clutterbuck, Personal Trainer and Nutritionist and founder of NC FITNESS**



Weight loss comes from decreasing your calorie intake and changing your diet by making healthier food choices.

Talk to your doctor or a registered dietician for help with making healthier food choices and setting a nutrition plan that works for your lifestyle. If you're looking for some tips, check out these suggestions.



**1** Keep accountable - Track what you eat using an app or a journal to keep yourself to it

**2** Find out what drives you to eat (stress, anxiety, sadness, using food as a reward when you feel happy...) and find something else to do instead. Take a walk or call a friend and reward yourself for making a different choice (just don't use food as a reward)

**3** Limit added sugars (sugars in cookies, cakes, etc. not the naturally occurring sugars in fruit)

**4** Cut out liquid calories like alcohol, soda, and juice and drink water or sugar free squash instead

**5** Choose whole grain breads and cereals

**6** Eat more frequently, have 5-6 mini meals instead of 3 large meals (and don't skip breakfast)

**7** Include lean protein (fish, lean meat, poultry, nuts, beans, and more)

**8** Choose carbs that are low on the glycaemic index (asparagus is much lower than a potato)

**9** Eat more fibre to help you feel full (foods high in fibre include artichokes, green peas, lentils, broccoli, and lima beans)

**10** Enjoy small amounts of good fat (found in fish, nuts, seeds, and olive oil)

**11** Be Consistent. Being good all week and then having a treat day really doesn't work!

**12** It's all about Balance- have a pizza but making sure the rest of your day is nutritionally balanced

# Yoga Toolkit

A basic introduction  
to get you started



**Author: Julia Daker, Calm Armour Studio**

WME have been collating some expert advice on a variety of physical activities providing you with some ideas for quick workouts and stretches which can easily be done at home, to break up your day, give you an energy boost and help prevent physical and mental fatigue. Why not try out some yoga as introduced by yoga teacher Julia Daker.



## Why yoga?

Yoga is great because unlike most “exercise” it keeps both the body and the mind healthy. You don’t need to do your class and then spend an hour talking to a counsellor - it’s all rolled up in one and that is because yoga is about uniting your mind, body and spirit. Now, that last bit might seem a bit mad but what we mean by “spirit” is actually the thing that makes you, you. In yoga we call it “prana” or the “life force” which at its most basic means energy.

Let’s address some of the myths about yoga:

- **It’s a class you do online or in the leisure centre for an hour a week**

Yoga is a set of techniques for healthy living - the poses (or asanas) are just one small part of it. You can get some benefits from yoga without ever attending a class.

- **It’s for slim, flexible people**

Yoga is for everyone - there are even special classes (and teaching qualifications) for people who are pregnant or elderly. You can do yoga if you have a physical disability, if you are tall, short, overweight or have incredibly stiff muscles or even arthritis.

- **Its only for people who are healthy and fit**

Ditto the above - lots of people do yoga because it helps their health problems and it is a low impact exercise which helps them to be fitter.

- **Its only for vegans and vegetarians**

I know a lot of yoga teachers who eat meat!

- **You have to do lots of silly faces and say “OM”**

Every yoga class is different and there are many different styles of yoga. You will be able to find one which suits your personality and style.

- **It takes up time I could spend doing “proper” exercise**

As above - you can “do” yoga while waiting for a bus or sitting in your chair - you can blend it with your life which is not possible with many other types of exercise.

I didn’t always do yoga so I understand why people might think the above and much more.

## How can yoga help me?

At the moment many of us are having to deal with much more than we are used to: work is stressful; the customers or colleagues we deal with every day are more impatient; the kids may be at home and we may have to teach them or ensure they attend online lessons; our family members may not be coping well; we can't just go to the pub and see our friends or go on a "date night" to unwind; we may have to wear PPE every day which is just one more thing to cope with; maybe our job has changed and we are constantly having to learn new things. It's no wonder that some of us are drinking more alcohol and comfort eating with all of the issues those things bring. You may feel at times that you are just ready to explode!

While we cannot eliminate all of these negatives from our lives we CAN choose to use coping techniques which will lessen or even eliminate all of the bad effects they produce.

This ensures that when something stressful happens, we aren't still reeling from the last thing that upset us. When we allow our body's reaction to unpleasantness to keep building up in layers, that is when we start to become "stressed". We may lose the ability to concentrate, our sleep patterns may start to suffer and we might wake up feeling tired every morning. Eventually the effects of stress on the body and mind can lead to illness and there are many studies which indicate that stress causes long term, serious health conditions and can even take years off your life.



## Breathing Techniques

Controlled breathing (or Pranayama) is an essential element of yoga and rightly so, because it is the only way we can deliberately alter the operation of our body's autonomous nervous system. When we react to stress, several things happen - our breathing becomes shallow and rapid, our heart rate increases and our body produces adrenalin because it is reacting in the way it was designed, which is to gear up for combating an attacker or for running away from one! Its known as "fight or flight" and is caused by the operation of our sympathetic nervous system.

The problem with this, is that we often don't need to run or fight and we don't get the blast of exercise which would naturally calm us down. While we are under the influence of these chemical reactions in our body we cannot concentrate - the body thinks it is dealing with a potentially life threatening experience and there is no time to think! While our body eventually returns to an equilibrium we might automatically reach for something comforting, a cake, a coffee or a cigarette - adding sugar, caffeine or nicotine into the mix.

Learning to use breathing techniques means we can deal with the effects of stress head-on. We may not be able to stop what we are doing immediately, but we can perhaps take ten minutes in our next break and instead of the coffee or chocolate bar we can maybe find a quiet corner and try this.

## The Square Breath



- Now close your eyes and if you can visualise a square shape.
- Inhale and as you do so, count slowly to four. You may like to think of this inhale as the top part of the square.
- Now hold your breath for the same four counts - this is the right hand side of the square.
- Exhale for four - this is the bottom of the square.
- Lastly hold for four as you trace the last line so that the top and bottom sides are joined up.
- Do this at least five times making sure that your breaths are equal in length.

# The “HA” Breath

This is may be one for when you come off your shift and return home. It's great for getting rid of any pent up stress before your relax:



- Stand up straight and lift the crown of your head. Stand still for a few moments and notice your breath coming in through your nose and out through your nose. Don't try to force anything, just stand and breathe deeply, in and out for about one minute. You may wish to close your eyes.
- Now raise your arms as you breathe in deeply, hold for a moment and as you exhale sharply through your mouth simultaneously say the word “HA!” and swan-dive forward from the hips ending with your hands in the air, fingertips pointing backwards.
- Return to standing and repeat this exercise five times.

## Physical exercises

Here are some warm up techniques used in yoga that you can use as a stand-alone exercise when you have a spare moment or you can do them all, in the order they appear for a mini yoga practice.



### Neck Rolls

Sit in a comfortable position either on a chair or cross legged on the floor. Make sure you have a nice straight spine, inhale deeply and turn your head to the right. Keeping your spine straight as you exhale drop your chin towards your collar bone and move your chin along your chest until it reaches the opposite side and lifts away from your collar bone to look towards the left for a moment. Inhale and on the exhale do the same in the opposite direction - try this five times without straining. You should feel a stretch in your neck and collar bones but not any pain or discomfort.

This is just a tiny movement but it helps the neck to release tension which can often build up in muscles of the upper spine due to poor posture, shallow breathing and stress.



### Shoulder rolls

- Straighten your arms and lift them to shoulder height keeping them parallel to the floor.
- Bend your elbows and place your fingertips on the front of your shoulders. Your thumbs should rest lightly on the back of your shoulders.
- Bring your elbows together in front and then keeping the fingertips in place rotate your elbows down, up and around in one direction. You are making circles with your elbows.
- After five rotations, change the direction and do five more.
- Ensure that you are breathing deeply while you do this exercise to make it more beneficial.



## Spinal Flex

- This is best done while sitting on the floor (in cross legged position) but you can also do it while sitting in a straight backed chair (such as a dining chair). If you are sitting in a chair sit forward so that your feet are flat on the floor.
- Place your palms on your knees or your thighs, tighten your abdominals and as you take a deep inhale, arch your spine forward and squeeze your shoulder blades towards each other.
- On the exhale, pull your belly button in towards your spine and allow your back to curve forward so that your body forms a “C” shape. Your shoulders will come forward.
- Continue with the inhale, chest expanding and the exhale, shoulders forward.
- Try to keep your head as still as possible and make sure each inhalation and exhalation is deep and long. Try doing this for at least three minutes.
- This is a restorative exercise for the spine and can improve your posture. It is great for backache and general stiffness.



## Cat/Cow

- Using a slightly padded surface which is not going to move - a yoga mat or secured rug or thick carpet, come down onto your hands and knees.
- Position yourself so that your shoulders are stacked over your wrists and your hips are stacked over your knees.
- Your palms should be flat on the floor and your toes can be tucked under or flat on the floor.
- Deeply inhale and as you do so raise your tailbone and your head and let your belly fall towards the ground. Your spine is curved downward like this:
- Exhale and tuck your tailbone and your head downwards while bringing your belly button up towards your spine. Your spine is curved like this:
- Continue this with five inhales and five exhales. Breathe deeply.
- This is a great, all round stress relieving exercise which is good for the spine and also helps to stimulate the abdominal organs helping them to work more effectively. It's great for toning up the core too.



## Warrior 2

- Stand up keeping a straight spine and the crown of the head lifted. Look forward.
- Take a large step back with your right leg and turn your back foot so that it is 90 degrees to the front foot (think of a T shape).
- Shift your hips so that they are facing front (in the same direction as your back foot). Straighten your arms bringing them up to shoulder height, parallel to the floor with your palms facing down.
- Turn your head to look towards your middle left finger.
- Finally bend your left leg so that the knee is over the ankle.
- Take five breaths in this strong pose.
- Repeat on the other side.
- In this pose you are stretching your arms, shoulders and working the muscles of your legs. The very strength in this warrior pose will help you feel resilient.



## Forward Fold

- Stand up straight with your feet hip-width apart. Make sure your spine is straight and the crown of your head is lifted with your eye gaze forward.
- Put your fingertips on your hips and bend forward from your hip bones and come to wherever you feel comfortable.
- The backs of your legs should be straight with our knee caps slightly lifted.
- Let your head and arms hang down as if there are lead weights attached to them.
- Continue to breath in and out through the nose enjoying this stretch.
- After five breaths come up slowly letting your spine unfold vertebrae by vertebrae.
- If you feel slightly dizzy just take a few moments in a standing position to settle.
- This pose is very restorative and can help with back pain and tension.



## Childs Pose

- This is a yummy pose which is often used as a rest pose in yoga. It's great for stress and preventing headaches and is very nurturing.
- Come down to kneeling (if possible use a yoga mat or other slightly padded safe surface) and bring your knees wide with your toes touching.
- Placing your palms to the ground walk your hands forward until they are stretched out in front of you and your chest is closer to the floor. Allow your forehead to rest on the floor - or on a cushion placed in front of you.
- Take some nice deep breaths in and out and enjoy this stretch through the front and back of your body.



## Mantras

A mantra is a short phrase or “saying” that has a beneficial effect on the mind and spirit. It is usually a positive statement or a small nugget of wisdom. Mantra’s are used in yoga towards the end of the class when the body and mind are most relaxed and receptive.

Try sitting in a comfortable position, closing your eyes, breathing deeply and repeating these to yourself slowly for a few minutes. Maybe try to visualise the words or a pleasant colour or scene in your mind while you do so. You can find lots of mantras online.

- As with everything, this too shall pass.
- I am the architect of my life and I choose inner peace.
- My negative emotions flow out of my body with every breath that I take.
- I have the power to accept that I cannot control everything.
- Nothing lasts forever, including the way I feel now.
- I accept myself, including my flaws, and I will not allow anxiety to define me.
- I let go of the things that no longer serve me.
- I am enough.

If you wish to recite something ancient and traditional here is the “solemn vow” called Sankalpa:

I commit to make myself into a healthy, peaceful, joyful and loving human being.

Through every action of mine, I will strive to create a peaceful, loving atmosphere around me.

I recognise the unity of all there is.

I strive to break the limitations of who I am right now, and include the entire world as my own.

I recognise the kinship of my own life with every other life.

## In conclusion...

Hopefully you can see that yoga is a lot more than just a fitness routine. It really is a toolkit for a happy and enriching life. As with most things, it takes practise and may feel a little strange at first. If you persevere you will find that the benefits grow and grow.

If you want to learn more about yoga or join an online class check out my website at: [www.calmarmouryoga.com](http://www.calmarmouryoga.com) or my Facebook page at: [www.facebook.com/calmarmour/](https://www.facebook.com/calmarmour/) If you wish to recite something ancient and traditional here is the “solemn vow” called Sankalpa:



**Want something more energetic than Yoga?**

**Try this 5 minute Zumba routine**



**Or a high intensity cardio workout**

**No equipment needed**

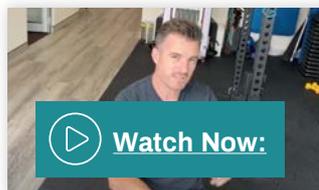


## High intensity 25 minute cardio workout\*

Author: James Snape, Fitness Trainer

Pick **ONE** exercise from each box below for the duration of this workout and alternate exercises each workout:

Exercise A	Warm up		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Burpee</li> <li>• Squats</li> <li>• Lunges</li> </ul>	3 minutes of light movement from any of the exercises in a or b above		
Exercise B	Workout part 1	Workout part 2	Workout part 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High knees</li> <li>• Push ups</li> <li>• Mountain climbers</li> </ul>	20 seconds - Exercise A	20 seconds - Exercise A	20 seconds - Exercise A
	10 seconds - rest	10 seconds - rest	10 seconds - rest
	20 seconds - Exercise B	20 seconds - Exercise B	20 seconds - Exercise B
	10 seconds - rest	10 seconds - rest	10 seconds - rest
	20 seconds - Exercise C	20 seconds - Exercise C	20 seconds - Exercise C
	10 seconds - rest	10 seconds - rest	10 seconds - rest
Exercise C	20 seconds - Exercise D	20 seconds - Exercise D	20 seconds - Exercise D
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crunch</li> <li>• Plank</li> <li>• Flutter kicks</li> </ul>	10 seconds - rest	10 seconds - rest	10 seconds - rest
	20 seconds - Exercise A	20 seconds - Exercise A	20 seconds - Exercise A
	10 seconds - rest	10 seconds - rest	10 seconds - rest
Exercise D	20 seconds - Exercise B	20 seconds - Exercise B	20 seconds - Exercise B
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jump jacks</li> <li>• Tuck jumps</li> <li>• Lateral leap jump</li> </ul>	10 seconds - rest	10 seconds - rest	10 seconds - rest
	20 seconds - Exercise C	20 seconds - Exercise C	20 seconds - Exercise C
	10 seconds - rest	10 seconds - rest	10 seconds - rest
	20 seconds - Exercise D	20 seconds - Exercise D	20 seconds - Exercise D
	3 minutes active recovery (continue moving)	3 minutes active recovery (continue moving)	
<p>Always use the options where required</p> <p>*recommended three times per week with good rest period in between</p>	Cool down		
	3 Minutes of light movement and stretching of 20 seconds per muscle		



[Watch Now:](#)

If you need to stretch out after a long zoom call why not try some physio exercises.



[Watch Now:](#)

If a variety of cardio exercises is what you are looking for then check out this video from a personal trainer.

# When Our Morning Commute Moved From Miles To Metres

## How to make your home work space safe

**Author: Ruth Wilkinson, Head of Health and Safety, IOSH**



In his summary of 2020, the BBC's New York correspondent, Nick Bryant, observed the jolt it had given our daily routines. He described a widespread move to homeworking, where "to many, the morning commute came to be measured in metres, not miles", and "our workplaces would come to fit very neatly in the palms of our disinfected hands."

The retreat to our home offices all happened very quickly, especially for those not previously geared up for homeworking, those whose domestic desktops would have to evolve on the go in a hurried adaptation to a temporary working arrangement or, indeed, a 'new normal.'

But whether workers continue to operate on site or join the workplace exodus to homeworking, employers still have a duty of care to ensure safety, health and wellbeing risks are properly managed. This requires risk assessment for work activities, whether they're being undertaken in the workplace to ensure it's Covid-secure, or if they're being carried out at home. This should be approached in a sensible and proportionate way.

For example, when it comes to Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessments, the need for specific assessments for individuals will depend on whether they are 'temporarily' working from home or whether it has become their new way of working.

Where homeworking becomes permanent or long-term, formal DSE assessments must be carried out and sensible risk controls put in place; these may be carried out on a self-assessment basis. Likewise, assessments and controls will need to be in place for homeworking to cover other significant risk factors, such as lone working and mental health.

If work from home is temporary, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has advised there is no requirement to undertake a formal assessment of DSE since those workers are not at increased risk. However, the following support measure should be seriously considered:

- Advice on set-up - utilise the guidance available from credible, authoritative sources such as IOSH and HSE
- Provision of equipment - These currently trying circumstances have often meant that getting some or all necessary office equipment to newly converted remote workers has proved a challenge. To help with this IOSH has advised employers on how they can help workers modify their own facilities and equipment to do as much as possible to ensure worker safety.



# Homeworking checklists

## How can home workers create a temporary workstation if they don't have the necessary equipment?

Anyone without access to sufficient equipment, can try modifying their workstation by using household equipment:

- ✓ Use items such as books or boxes to raise a laptop to eye level
- ✓ Use items such as a box as a leg/foot support
- ✓ Use a kitchen worktop to create a standing workstation
- ✓ Use a flat surface such as a dinner tray to sit a laptop, if there is no access to a table
- ✓ Clear a workspace to ensure there is enough space to enable effective work

Home workers may not be able to eliminate the risks completely, though they can take realistic and practical steps in the face of not all organisations being able to purchase new office equipment for those working temporarily from home.

The important thing is that employers collaborate with workers on how to work safely, reducing risk by ensuring workers know how to spot potential dangers and that safety, health and wellbeing controls are practical and are carried out.

The HSE also offers a [DSE workstation checklist](#) that gives a graphically illustrated guide to:

- Correct keyboard use
- Safe use of the computer mouse/trackball
- Maintenance and correct use of display screens
- Suitable software
- Best use of furniture
- Creating the right work environment.

## How do home workers ensure they are not putting themselves at risk of back strain or MSDs (Multi-Skeletal Disorders)?

Create a routine that suits their workload:

- ✓ Do work in short bites
- ✓ Take regular breaks
- ✓ Alternate the type of work - screen work, phone calls, reading
- ✓ Do stretching exercises
- ✓ Change position - avoid static postures

Whether temporarily working from home or doing so permanently, good communication is essential. Managers need to stay in close contact with home workers and give them regular opportunities to tell them how they're feeling, both from a physical and mental health point of view.

It's important to guard against isolation, particularly through the current winter lockdown. Managers should monitor workloads and expectations and encourage their team members to look after themselves by taking regular screen breaks, going outside to take in the sunlight and exercise (within current restrictions), eating healthily, getting enough sleep and so on.

And, of course, home workers have a responsibility to look after themselves. Here's a useful checklist for those working from home...



## Environment

- ✓ Is there sufficient task lighting?
- ✓ Does the lighting or windows cause glare on the computer monitor?
- ✓ Is the heating and ventilation acceptable?

## Electrical

- ✓ Are the electrics in good condition eg no damaged sockets or wiring?
- ✓ Are there any faults with portable electric equipment? Does the employee know how to look for possible faults?
- ✓ Are there enough sockets?

## Fire

- ✓ Are flammable materials (eg paper) and ignition sources (eg cigarettes) kept to a minimum?
- ✓ Is there an escape plan in case of fire?
- ✓ Is there a smoke detector or fire alarm? Is it regularly checked?



## Workspace

- ✓ Is there enough space to work comfortably?
- ✓ Does the workspace provide enough privacy and freedom from disturbances?
- ✓ Is there enough storage space?
- ✓ Is there adequate segregation from non-workers (eg children, pets)?
- ✓ Are there any slip or trip hazards?

## General

- ✓ Are there any concerns about work/life balance?
- ✓ Is there easy-to-access help on using computers and other equipment?
- ✓ Is there any need for a manual handling assessment?
- ✓ Are there any security concerns?
- ✓ Any other concerns?

Further help and information can be found at:  
[IOSH remote worker H&S checklist](#)  
[IOSH ergonomics of home working](#)  
[HSE's DSE workstation checklist](#)



## Covid 19 Reflections...

**Covid affects people differently – here we share 3 personal experiences**

**Author: Steve Maxey, Chief Executive, North Warwickshire**



The last 12 months has been a terrible year. There's no getting away from that and there is no need to get away from it. I won't recite the statistics as we've all spent this time pouring over charts and graphs. It has changed our country, our Councils and our way of life and we will take an enormous amount of time to recover.

But I refuse to consider it a 'lost year' despite this, given that amid the gloom there have been gains – globally, locally and personally – and the terrible year will become a lost one if we fail to capture those gains. Place and organisational recovery plans have been written (and will be re-written by the time the end place of this outbreak becomes known) but the Christmas break led me to think about what my personal recovery plan was. A bit of personal background is perhaps appropriate.



I started work in local government on a 6 week 'summer cover' Scale 1 contract and decided to stay on! In August 2019 I became a Chief Executive and in a year with three full elections, two of which were unexpected national ones, and lots of political tussle, I could be forgiven for hoping for a year to focus on the Borough's priorities and personally to allow me to realise the vision I had for the organisation, built up during the journey from Scale 1. That excitement got somewhat blocked however!

Three elections in a year proved to be good preparation for the first wave of the outbreak which broke in March. On election night I've always found there comes a time when everything is happening at once and it takes all your energy to focus on the detail, whilst maintaining an overview of how the process is shaping up overall. 2020 felt like that for 12 hours a day.

By the summer I was tired, disorientated and at the point of being overwhelmed. I got a break, but it didn't touch the sides and I just ploughed on into the autumn. The second wave of the outbreak felt more local, and therefore more personal. Lots more data meant more comparison and when my Borough's cases rocketed I felt a real pressure to 'sort' it. The national lockdown in November broke that trance and gave me the opportunity to properly reflect on how I was doing.

On the recommendation of a friend I tried a short 6-week CBT based course and it unlocked a lot. I realised I was 'fighting and resisting' the new environment and missing out on the opportunities arising from not being tied quite so much to the office and traditional work rhythms. I now feel comfortable with trying to arrange my diary around how I work at this time – I'm quite happy to work early and late and for a session at the weekend, in return for which I can get outside when my head hurts after 5 Teams meetings. The realisation that some webinars and 'non participation' calls can be done outside is really refreshing and is allowing me to remain resilient.

This remains the toughest period of my life (trying not to get too X factor dramatic but I think that's right) but I'm in such a better place from October. I didn't want to acknowledge where I was, but I've come to realise that it would actually be an issue if this level of crisis didn't lead to a personal response. I have a new respect for those who seek some sort of help (even Andy Murray has a coach and all that) and an even bigger respect for those who provide it. I resolve to be more real and truthful with myself in 2021. If I can manage it, that may be amongst one of the biggest COVID gains.



## My Covid-19 Story

**Rebecca Davis, Chief Executive, WME**

It was not the start to 2021 I had hoped, first restrictions were tightened which, whilst understandable, was still disappointing when the announcement came. I am probably not alone in feeling low that evening as Boris took us all back in time to the spring. A few days later I tested positive for Covid-19, as did my whole family, and so started a rather daunting time for us, I wanted to share some of the things I learnt about this illness in the hope it can help others.



### **You're first symptoms might not be a fever, cough or loss of taste/smell**

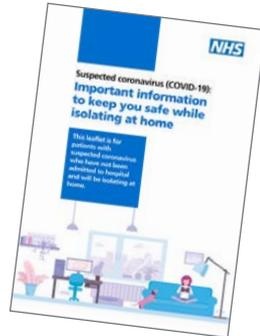
In the days that followed Boris's announcement, work was understandably busier as a result and the back-to-back Zoom calls from 8am to 5pm left me feeling exhausted, more so than usual. My eyes felt like they were shutting,

and I was struggling to focus. I was cold, shivering and aching all over for several days, going to bed early and finding it harder to get up and get moving in the morning. I had no fever, no cough and no loss of taste or smell, no classic Covid-19 symptoms so continued working and putting it down to being busy and run down. However, after a few days, I felt worse and by the end of the week had a fever and felt very unwell, it was at this point I booked a test, and it came back positive.

I would urge anyone to get a test if you have any sign of illness. None of my family members who also tested positive had classic Covid-19 symptoms, all felt a little under the weather and my daughter had a streaming cold (but no fever). They probably would not have had a test if I had not had a positive result. The virus affects people very differently and I would encourage people to get tested if you display any of the broader, less common, Covid-19 symptoms.

## Check Your Oxygen Levels - know what your 'normal' is

I developed a cough after a few days, it was not what I would describe as continuous and it felt like a 'tickly cough' rather than a dry one. I was very aware from what I had read about the virus that breathing can get worse, so I regularly checked my oxygen levels. My normal level was at 98% and the advice is to call for help if your levels drop below 92%. My levels dropped at periods to 96% despite me not feeling in anyway short of breath. Many people report of oxygen levels rapidly dropping so it is important to be prepared to monitor at home and in order to put your mind at rest. You can buy a pulse oximeter online from Amazon for about £20 and it could be a vital piece of kit along with a thermometer to have in your cupboard at home in preparation.



## Don't underestimate the Virus - take each day at a time

I found the symptoms come in waves, a bit like 'whack a mole' to be candid, different ones pop up and take you by surprise. I had periods of feeling largely fine, where I would overexert myself and do too much, and then I would feel wiped out. I have been working throughout having COVID-19 and I am thankful my symptoms have been uncomfortable, but largely mild, I know that is not the same for everyone. Its important to take time to recover and I recognise even with a mild case you are at risk of complications. After 7 days since starting to feel unwell, I still had symptoms and many people report the second week can be the worse, so I was very mindful of that and took my time to step the number and frequency of meetings down.

## Be prepared

Like many other families we have had to self-isolate before, but each time it still takes you by surprise. We have been fortunate to keep a weekly online delivery slot and have a milkman and local company deliver fresh food, so we did not have to worry about not being able to get to the shops. If, like us, it affects others in your wider family at the same time, people you may have relied upon to get you supplies, it can be difficult. My advice is to make sure you have a 'Plan B' as it will take some of the initial panic out of the situation if you have to get tested and then isolate, especially if you rely on medication or other supplies. The NHS track and trace team contacted us straight away and asked if we needed any help and whilst we did not need to rely on this, it is reassuring to know there is help there if we had needed it.





## My First Hand Experience

**Author: Steve Cooper, Head of Corporate Landlord Services, Dudley MBC**

For the employer there are a number of priorities which sometimes conflict, there is the concern for the individual and their welfare, the need to cover and manage the workload during the initial absence and the need to manage any ongoing absence balancing all of those duties of care and obligations.



Steve Cooper, Head of Corporate Landlord Services at Dudley MBC also has first hand experience of a positive test, he says:

I tested positive for Covid-19 at the end of October and my initial feeling was that of guilt. I'm one of the lucky ones and have never really been sick so haven't taken any time off work for years. I suppose I thought of myself as someone who simply got on with it. I honestly felt like I was cheating the employer even though I was very poorly. As the first week progressed I felt I was improving and assumed I'd be back at work the week after, so it was a bit of a shock to then deteriorate so quickly.

In terms of support from the 'employer', my line manager was superb in terms of keeping in touch without it feeling as though she was checking up on me and not just

pointing me towards information, but actually retrieving it and sending it to me. In the second and third weeks of my illness, when it was obvious I was really quite poorly, she also knew when not to contact me, as by that stage even I had realised it wasn't a quick fix. The other crucial support I was lucky enough to receive was from my colleagues who not only kept in touch on a personal level but also took care of business which gave me time to recover. You never really know how someone will cope until they need to, and my colleagues really stepped up in terms of clearing my diary, sharing out tasks between them, making decisions etc. I was not only grateful to them but I feel really lucky to work with such great people.

So, what are the practicalities of managing COVID-19 sickness in the workplace? Since the onset of the pandemic WME have produced guidance and a series of FAQs which can be found on the dedicated COVID-19 microsite [here](#). We have continued to support each other through regular network groups, sharing experiences and seeking answers to problems which until now have been unfaced.

The principles of dealing with a COVID-19 related absence are the same as managing any sickness absence and then some (albeit that the time off may not count towards your sickness absence triggers).

You need to establish the framework for contact, that balance between checking in with the employee and the space for them to rest and improve without feeling overwhelmed by work. This may vary between individuals, for example those who live alone may feel that daily contact is needed, so that first conversation is key to establishing what is mutually acceptable. The organisation should however set some parameters around minimum periods between contact, for example after 7 days, when a medical certificate is required contact should be made again. There may be some cases where GPs are not issuing fit notes and this needs to be picked up as soon as possible and a way forward established. Managers may need support with the softer skills during this time and think about putting together some key questions which could guide their conversations, as we know "how are you?" is not enough:

## First Conversation

- How are your symptoms today?
- How are you being impacted by the illness?
- How are your family/household members?
- Are you experience any difficulties getting food or other essential supplies?
- Have you been contacted or offered any support for any such difficulties?
- Is there any work you need to handover urgently?
- Do you need any other support immediately?
- Agree a contact plan (daily email/text about they are feeling and frequency of telephone contact). Agree the next date and time for a conversation.

## Don't forget these handy tips to help the process run smoothly

- Ensure you block out 30-45 minutes for the conversation
- Show empathy and concern this will build the trust with the employee to be more open
- Where you are using Teams or similar - Maintain good eye contact and close down other apps and screens to not get distracted in the conversation
- Try and summarise what they are saying so they feel understood
- Reassure them that you are there to support them and sign post any resources that they may find helpful

Ultimately if absence extends beyond the first week, then normal management of long term absence will need to apply to these “long COVID-19” cases, but there are extreme sensitivities around coronavirus absence that we haven't experience in HR before. There may be a feeling from the individual that as this is part of a worldwide issue the employer can't, or won't be able to take any steps in relation to managing the absence, and it is merely accepted that “I'm off with coronavirus”. As an employer you may be seeing staff who have otherwise had no health issues take extended sickness absence. Establishing the principles for your organisation to ensure consistency and fairness are more important than ever. In reality those with long COVID-19 will be at the start of the journey for long term absence management, and ensuring regular contact, OH advice and interventions where appropriate will need to be consistently applied.

If you need further support on individual cases please do not hesitate to contact your HR team who can contact the WME advice line on [info@wmemployers.org.uk](mailto:info@wmemployers.org.uk).



# Seeing Green

## How being outdoors improves your physical and mental health



**Author: Lorna Young, Principal Consultant  
- HR, WME**

**With thanks to Tony Lund, Senior Environmental Project Officer, Lancashire County Council**

For most people the lockdown has brought with it changes to our lives that were unimaginable prior to March 2020. The freedom to go where we want, when we want snatched away overnight. Being confined to our homes for long periods and not being able to access our usual methods of escapism has impacted greatly on the mental health of a nation. With us entering a 3rd lockdown period many people find the ability to exercise outdoors once a day crucial to maintaining some balance.

Walking (with or without a canine companion) is one of the easiest ways to access this key mental and physical health boost. There are countless studies highlighting the benefits of walking in our green spaces. The colour green, particularly in the natural world, has long been proven to reduce stress and anxiety and walking is ideal for all ages and fitness levels. Of course these spaces can also

be used for running and cycling and during the pandemic it has become even more apparent just what a key role Local Authorities play in providing access for these activities.

A Senior Environmental Project Officer at Lancashire County Council told me



“Working for a County Council and having responsibility for Public Rights of Way and Countryside Services I have seen a great increase in the numbers of people using our sites and the rights of way network generally over the past year. For many people access to the countryside and parks is a great boost for both their physical and mental health. There have been some studies such as [this one](#) from City Monitor which have some interesting conclusions and statistics, for example that 1 in 8 households in the UK does not have access to a garden so with travel restrictions local green spaces and footpaths have become even more important. With gyms closed and amateur sports suspended opportunities for Exercise Are limited largely to public open space.”



In July 2020 the Government published a policy paper on a cycling and walking plan for England which sets out a vision for a travel revolution in England's streets, towns and communities which you can read [here](#) It contains some fascinating and useful data on the health benefits of cycling and walking in the first chapter.

Feedback on the use of LA sites is powerful evidence which highlights the value of open and green spaces, particularly at this time. I was provided with one such example from a Countryside Service that I'd like to share:



"I wish to thank you for what has been a lifeline for me and many others in this area.

I have been isolating since the beginning of March this year (2020) as I am a carer for my disabled husband and need to stay safe so that I can continue to take care of him. The highlight of my day is when I get him to bed for his afternoon nap and I get out for a walk, which I do on most days.

The new cycle path has opened up a beautiful, safe walk which is appreciated by many walkers, with or without dogs and often results in meeting familiar faces for chatting along the way.

I want to congratulate the planners for their innovative thinking and the designers for giving the local housing estates such ease of access to this lovely new pathway leading right up to the town centre. The construction standard is also first class with wide pathways (brilliant for social distancing), cat's eyes and gold speckled tarmac."

From all angles continuing to promote walking in our open spaces as a regular activity will be a key factor in supporting everyone during what continues to be an unprecedented time in our lives, for our workforce and our communities as a whole. It is worth pointing out that we must however continue to adhere to current restrictions and guidelines in relation to travelling to open spaces. I hope that long after the pandemic is over we continue to harness the physical and mental health benefits of this simple pleasure.



# Add a Hobby To Your Wellbeing Toolkit

The WME team share some of the things they have been doing to keep well for the last 12 months

**Name:** Manny Sandhu



**New Activity:**

## Biking

**What impact has this new activity had:**

With the sunshine out and nurseries closed, it seemed like no better time than to teach my then 3 year old how to ride a bike. The challenge wasn't teaching my fearless 3 year old, but to manage my own fears after having a bike accident in my teens which resulted in surgery. I decided it was only a matter of time that I wouldn't be able to keep up with his cycling by jogging along, so it was time to "feel the fear and do it anyway". So I plucked up the courage to buy a bike and within the a week, my 3 year old and I mastered the skill of biking.

### Impact

Initially my inspiration to cycle was to spend quality time outdoors with the family and the physical exercise was a bonus. But the psychological benefits have been far wider than I'd anticipated. Cycling is reported to have a relaxing effect on the brain, promoting new thought patterns, including feelings of calm and wellbeing. For me it's been a good way to "zone out" especially if I go out by myself, and for a not such keen runner it's been a welcomed aerobic exercise one that's said to also help reduce anxiety and stress, but most of all, it's a new family activity which I am sure will lead to many adventures in years to come.



**Name:** Sharon Phillips



**Activity:**

## Gardening and Crafting

Everyone has their own way of managing positive mental health, for me my hobbies have always been a great way to switch off a busy mind through focussing on simple tasks. My go to hobby is gardening - I love being outdoors, so as well as the pleasure of birdsong, getting your hands dirty and the physical benefits of working on your outside space, you also create a beautiful environment to relax in and drink a cuppa or read a book. When the hard work is done, it really is important to just sit and simply enjoy the space, experiencing the sights, sounds and smells of nature. This year, with lockdown, I've grown more vegetables and flowers than usual, so the space we have had to spend most time in this summer gave us maximum pleasure. Even the smallest outside space can offer great health benefits and whilst I can't do much gardening this lockdown I do potter, feed the birds and have signed up for the RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch this month!

My second passion is crafting - of any kind - and the need to concentrate on a task where you are using your hands is another great way to distract the mind from more stressful thoughts. I have a group of friends who also love to craft and around Easter, Halloween and Christmas we generally meet up for a crafting get together, and as we are prone to the odd craft disaster it usually means we laugh a lot together. Whilst 2020 was different for us all, we still held our crafting sessions but via Zoom this time. There is no doubt Zoom has been vital to keeping us connected, but by doing something together online other than just chatting, it helps life feel a little more normal. In September we got together online for a pumpkin carving session - we chatted, laughed and each turned out a



pumpkin for the doorstep! We are just planning our Easter crafting day as a mini online conference where we will each lead a 'craft session' posting each other the materials needed to do the workshop. At the moment it's something I'm really looking forward to whilst activities are limited!

There are so many free online crafting projects and workshops and some need nothing more than paper and glue, plus it's a great way to spend fun time with the children. So this weekend, why not switch off the tv and have a crafter noon - for ideas try <https://onelittleproject.com/>



**Name:** Lorna Young

**New Activity:**

## Keeping Tropical Fish



As a teenager I had a tropical fish aquarium and loved it. Last year I decided it would be a good time to rediscover this hobby so purchased and set up an aquarium in the space I use to work.

**What impact has this new activity had:**

“It has been proven, that **keeping fish** improves **mental health** and also helps to reduce anxiety. Research carried out by Plymouth University discovered that just watching fish in an **aquarium** led to noticeable reductions in participant’s blood pressure and heart rate.”

I do find it very relaxing to look at the fish during the day. It gives me another focus away from the COVID-19 crisis. I’ve had to remind myself of the science of looking after the delicate ecosystem, maintaining the water quality for example. It actually takes some effort to establish a new aquarium and there is an ongoing routine which doesn’t take up much time. Not as interactive as the dog but still definitely a mental health boost!

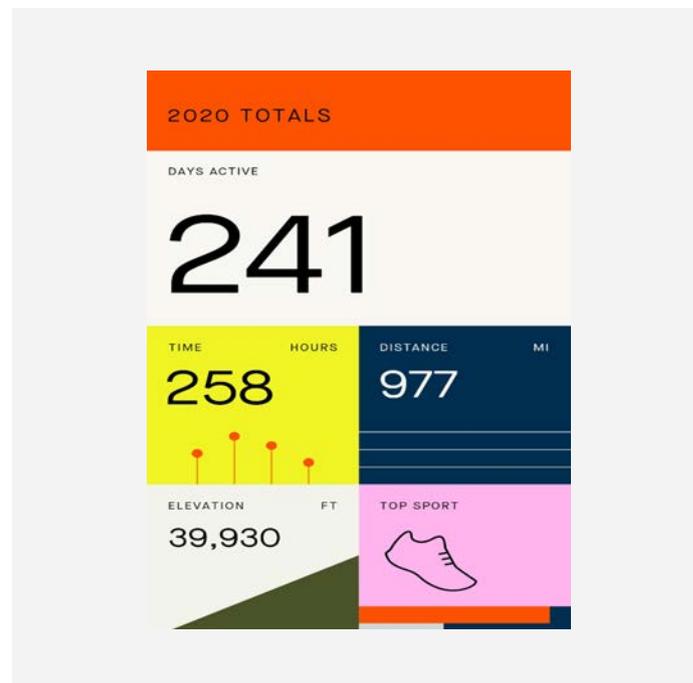
**Name:** Rebecca Davis

**Activity:**

## Running



I had always been a ‘runner’ but during lockdown my running went up a whole new level. It became less of a ‘fitness hobby’ and more of an ‘essential’ part of my daily routine. During the first Lockdown I would be up and out the house by 6am every morning for a run and at the weekends I started running my first solo half-marathons (something I never thought I would do). The sense of achievement was important to me and the quiet peace of the world at that time in the morning really helped me to face the day. Before COVID-19, I had never run in the winter, always favoured the gym as it was too cold. Now my mantra is ‘I defy winter’ and drag myself out in all weather and the dark mornings. I’ve been forced to stop running a few times due to ‘self-isolation’ so have converted the garage into a gym and have hired a gym quality treadmill.... nothing will stop me running.



**Name:** Chantelle Wooldridge



**Activity:**

## Crafting

I don't think I'm alone, when I say, "I find it difficult to switch off". That's probably always been the case though and not just because of the pandemic. I can be a worrier and an over thinker. So navigating my way through this past year with sustained periods of working at home and away from the people I love has been challenging. I'm sure we can all relate to that.

So this year, I revisited a hobby I used to love as a child - Crafting. I can remember creating paper chains, to post offices made out of cardboard boxes, as well as an entire activity book full of games and educational tasks as part of my Child Development GCSE. I really enjoy getting lost in my own world of design and then seeing that come to life with whatever it is I decide to make. Research suggests that taking the time to activate your creativity and do something that you enjoy allows you time to de-stress and relax while feeling great because you are doing something you love and enjoy. Research shows that creative practices improve depression, anxiety and coping



skills while enhancing the quality of life and significantly reducing stress - all vital for maintaining healthy wellbeing.

During the summer months last year, since I couldn't do the usual things I would normally do during my weekends, like going shopping, going away, or seeing friends and family I started making flower crowns. My design mind was activated once again and I felt such a sense of pride and happiness when what I had pictured in my head came to fruition. Flower crowns then turned into Halloween and Christmas wreaths for the winter months, which I enjoyed the most. The best thing of all...my little creations became gifts for the people I couldn't see to provide them with some comfort too.

**Name:** Monica Puri



**Activity:**

## Blogging

Impact: I have always had a passion for resilience and self-improvement. I want to be my best self but I also want to help other around me. It was this passion that led me to creating a website so that I could reach out to anyone suffering from the impact of the pandemic by publishing articles on resilience techniques and how to create inner strength. I continue to learn and practice these resilience teachings to be strong and serve others who are in need. With a 'can do' attitude that I have, I named my website MON I CAN.... [www.monican.org](http://www.monican.org).

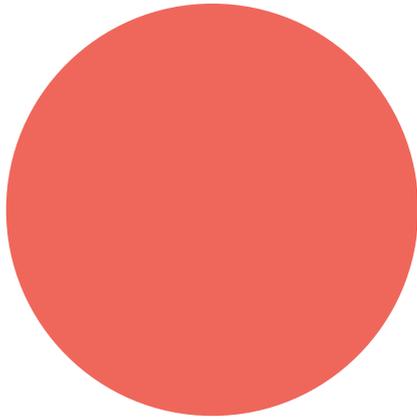
Please feel free to read my articles, I hope they can help you.





# Emotional and Spiritual Wellbeing

This section looks at how an emotional or spiritual approach can help you wellbeing day and when things get tough.



# Why Do Our Minds Wander

## How Meditation Can Help To Create Stillness

**Author: Karen Pearson, WME Associate**

As we continue to live in these unusual times, I wanted to explore how we can feel more comfortable with the challenges or frustrations that life can bring to us in its different forms and look at how we can create a stillness in our lives that brings an inner calmness.



Challenges or frustrations that arise when we have to fundamentally change what we normally do in our lives - such as a 'lockdown scenario' or the typical challenges/frustrations we can experience within our normal daily lives, such as not being happy in the job we do or having worries over a relationship or money.

At times of uncertainty we can often feel overwhelmed as our minds go into overdrive which can leave us feeling stressed, anxious, depressed and exhausted.

Neuroscience studies continue to discover how our brains work which is having such a positive impact on us finding ways to be able to improve our overall mind and body wellbeing.

**According to a study by Killingsworth & Gilbert in 2010, our mind wanders 46.9% of the time. Our minds are not with us for large amounts of our day - wow.**

People are mind wandering in almost all daily activities, and studies are now showing us the negative impact this is having on our happiness levels.

How this impacts our happiness levels depends on what type of mind wandering we are doing. There are different elements of mind wandering which could be unpleasant, neutral, or pleasant. We move between past and future and we tend not to spend much time in the present.

Studies are also showing us that the happier we are the less our mind wanders.

As Dan Gilbert states

“A wandering mind is an unhappy mind”



It's amazing that we have the ability to mind wander. It's apparently a unique quality amongst the species - a cognitive achievement. We might be the only species that can think from different perspectives.

However, this unique ability, although is an achievement, is coming at an emotional and physical cost to us.

In order to understand why we do this we need to go back to the science for a moment as this is pretty fascinating.

Again studies (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010) have found that mind wandering is a feature of our brains and the reason why we do it is to use energy more effectively.

Neuroscience calls this the Default Mode Network (DMN) and when we are not involved in a task then our brains think it is more efficient to click into this part of the brain.



Science has discovered two strange features of DMN:

- The DMN is really fast and can activate within a fraction of a second after a task has been completed.
- It thinks outside the here and now. It focuses on past and future and its purpose is to get us out of our reality experience.

I can see the above being useful at certain times and “thinking outside of the box” has and will bring many benefits, but we need to have a balance. We need to be able to be more aware that our brains are doing this so that we can find a different relationship with it and therefore lessen the negative impact this does have on our physical and medical states.

How do we do this? Numerous studies have been showing us the impact regular meditation has on bringing more control and balance to our brains.

When meditating, studies showed how regular meditators brains were shutting off DMN activity, bringing the brain more into the moment and more regions of the brain were active.

The effects of meditating also went beyond the actual meditation practice and identified how a regular meditation practice can curb mind wandering in daily life.

Sharon Salzberg, a leading meditation teacher talks about “having that anchor” “that resting point” to centre ourselves. When we are centred we have more chance of curbing that wandering of the mind and we have more freedom, more space to just be.

So if you are an over thinker, can feel overwhelmed a lot of the time, or find that you can lose moments of your day lost in thought, these are all as a result of your mind wandering.

Mind wandering can have such a negative impact in many different ways. However, the positive in all of this is we can do something about this. Through meditation we can feel happier by curbing the wandering in our minds and increase our physical and mental health.

This is particularly useful to know at times of dramatic change such as the lockdown we are in currently. If you are finding you are not feeling in control and feeling overwhelmed, then why not try some meditation and create an anchor that will help you feel more grounded and in control.

You can start with as little as 5 minutes a day - and it's good to build a routine, so you meditate at the same time every day.



**Try this guided meditation for creating calm and space within chaos [here](#)**

**If you want to find out more about meditation or would like to learn more and develop your own practice then get in touch by contacting us at [info@wmemployers.org.uk](mailto:info@wmemployers.org.uk)**





## Helping Others

### The impact of volunteering on your wellbeing

**Author: Chantelle Wooldridge, Principal Consultant - Resourcing, WME**

During the pandemic last year, I struggled with feelings of incredible gratitude versus feelings of helplessness and frustration, which slowly began to affect my mood. As I sat and listened to the news or scrolled endlessly through my phone for the latest updates, I was continuously inspired by the amazing work and generosity of people, whether that be teaching remotely or delivering food parcels to those who were shielding and most vulnerable. Supporting the region from a professional perspective was extremely gratifying, but I knew I could do more from a personal point of view.



It was widely reported how vulnerable adults were instructed to limit face-to-face interactions with individuals outside their immediate household, to protect themselves from contracting the virus. The consequence of this resulted in some of the most vulnerable people living through long and sustained periods of social isolation and loneliness.

From speaking with colleagues in Councils, I was aware of the variety and high volume of volunteering opportunities available, one of which was supporting individuals who were feeling socially disconnected and lonely and would involve calling them once a week for a catch up. I had a 'light bulb' moment... I knew that was where I could help and make a difference. Anyone who knows me, would say, "Chantelle loves talking and interacting with people". But I also enjoy listening. I knew this was the right volunteering opportunity for me, so I got in touch with a voluntary organisation to find out more and get the ball rolling. They clearly explained what I was required to do as well as the level of commitment required each week, whilst also being incredibly flexible with my own personal circumstances. I immediately agreed, because let's face it, I wasn't doing much else in the evening.

I will not go into the detail of the people I spoke to, but what I can say is that it was a pleasure and a joy to do, and as much as I hope I helped the people I spoke to each week; I know for a fact it certainly helped me and my mental wellbeing.

It is well known there are mental health benefits of volunteering. Studies have shown that volunteering helps people who donate their time feel more socially connected, thus warding off loneliness and depression. According to very recent research, people also report becoming happier over time after they start volunteering.

**You can find out about the volunteering opportunities available [here](#).**

# The Sikh ethos of Langar

## And communities who work in this way

**Author: Manny Sandhu, Director of Leadership, OD & Resourcing**



If you have been watching BBC Midlands News throughout COVID-19, you will be familiar with the work of many charities and organisations who have been supporting communities primarily through supporting them with the necessities. We all need “food” and the Sikh community through their concept of providing Langar - a free meal to all without prejudice - have come to the forefront, from food parcels to those shielding, to feeding the homeless on Christmas Eve at Birmingham New Street, to feeding truck drivers stranded at our borders.

With many of us having additional disposable incomes due to the restrictions, and for some of us a desire to continue providing ‘Seva’ outside of our religious places of worship, we provide here details of two organisations based on the foundations of Sikhism which you can be part of.

## Midland Langar Seva Society - Who We Are & What We Do

MLSS is an organisation to help the those in need around the UK. The charity was established October 2013 in Walsall providing hot food and drink to those living on the street, schools, safe houses and those on the poverty line. MLSS operates on Sikh based ethos, where we help and support all people

regardless of social status. Langar is the term used in the Sikh religion or in Punjab for general or common kitchen / canteen where food is served for free, without prejudice regardless of race, religion, and background.

The charity itself was founded in October 2013 by the CEO **Randhir Singh** and best friend **Parmjit Singh** in Walsall, West Midlands, UK. Today the society is working successfully across all major cities throughout the UK. We’ve also managed to form valuable links with fantastic charities, businesses and government / religious organisations, who are now working alongside us to combat homelessness and make a better Britain.

There are lots of opportunities to get involved, from Volunteering, to individual donations and fundraising events. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, support has included providing families with food parcels (links in Twitter, LinkedIn, Youtube and facebook to share the work they do).

## Get involved

**Midland Langar Seva Society (MLSS)**  
**Recent BBC Coverage**





## Khalsa Aid - Who We Are & What We Do

Khalsa Aid is an international NGO with the aim to provide humanitarian aid in disaster areas and civil conflict zones around the world. The organisation is based upon the Sikh principle of “Recognise the whole human race as one”.

Khalsa Aid International is a UK-based humanitarian relief charity providing support around the world to victims of natural and man-made disasters such as floods, earthquakes, famine and war.

Their team is often one of the first on the scene to help distribute food, water, clothing, medical and sanitation supplies. They fund and build semi-permanent shelters, if needed - anything that’s required in those early days to save lives, reduce people’s immediate suffering and help maintain their dignity.

The charity was founded by Ravinder (Ravi) Singh, who was struck by the plight of the refugees in Kosovo in 1999. That year also marked the 300th birth anniversary of the Khalsa - an opportunity for the community to reflect on the core teachings of their faith.

Ravi saw the footage of the Kosovan refugees on the news and was inspired by one Sikh ideology in particular - “Sarbat da Bhalla” meaning “well-being for all” - recognising the humanity in us all and reaching out to those in need, regardless of race, religion, borders.

Whilst the inspiration for the charity stems from a strong belief in the Sikh principles, their work is by no means restricted to the Sikh community. Khalsa Aid became the first ever cross-border international humanitarian aid organisation based on the Sikh principles.

Since 1999, they have been able to provide crucial aid to millions of people around the world: from victims of the Yemen Civil War to refugees landing on the shores of Greece from the Middle East and, more recently, the Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar seeking refuge in Bangladesh; to earthquake, flood and hurricane-stricken areas in Nepal, Australia, and the Caribbean.

Closer to home, their teams have helped residents in the UK cope with the devastating floods that swept through Cumbria and the south-west of England; and we were there to support the families who escaped the horrific fire at Grenfell Tower in London.

## Get involved

To find out more about our previous and current projects and how you can donate please click here including a Coventry based food bank.

[Khalsa Aid](#)  
[Recent BBC Coverage](#)

# Tackling the delusions of the Mind

## How mindfulness and meditation can help your mood

**Author: Monica Puri, Principal Consultant - HR, WME**



The current lockdown has created a mood amongst people of exasperation and sadness due to the various ways the restriction impact us all. This article has been written to support anyone who is experiencing an emotional response to the lockdown and to try and take control of those responses through mindful meditation practices.

For the last 7 years I have explored and tried to practice mindful living and meditation. Mindfulness has become accepted globally and has been embraced by a big part of the Western World as a practice that offers great benefits to mental health.

Having read books that provided a basic understanding of this practice, I then explored this further by attending advanced classes to learn more about how meditation can help with life's challenges. You may know that Mindful Meditation is a Buddhist practice, and it is Buddha's teachings and my interpretation of his teachings that I will be referring to in this article.

Buddha said:  
"Life is about suffering. Sounds quite ominous doesn't it?"

Buddha having meditated for years was able to identify that human suffering was inevitable but was able to craft a practice that would reduce this suffering which I am all for knowing more about!

## Delusions of the Mind

There are many lessons that Buddha put forward but, in this article, I will focus on how to manage the delusions of the mind. You may think exactly what do I mean by delusion? In simple terms delusion is a mindset that we adopt in response to a situation or person.

A situation, a problem or another person can trigger you. The reaction to this can create a delusion/mindset that you will experience. This is an automatic response to the situation that firstly needs to be acknowledged and questioned.

### Example:

**You have a negative interaction with someone where you disagree or are offended by the other persons input.**

### Response:

**You feel angry (the delusion).**

### What caused this anger?

**Most people would say that the person you had the negative interaction with caused the anger.**





Therefore, it is not the other person, situation, or lockdown that has caused the delusion; your mind has chosen this delusion and just as it has the ability to choose this mindset of anger for example, it also has the ability to choose another mindset which is likely to benefit you and serve you better.

“Nothing  
in the world can  
bother you as much  
as your own mind. You  
may think it is others that  
are bothering you but it is  
not others, it is your own  
mind”

**Sri Ravi Shankar**

## That is in fact incorrect

**You** caused the anger as a response to the situation. Your brain decided that anger was the best mindset to adopt and respond to the situation with. You are therefore responsible for your angry state of mind.

Your brain reacted by presenting you with the delusion namely anger as a reaction without fully understanding the situation or knowing all of the facts to a given incident. It's like an automatic primitive response and it is quite natural. The key is to be able to observe your mind and notice the delusion at play, the feelings and reactions that the mind is having during that experience.

Other strong delusions are Pride, jealousy, hate etc etc. Can you think of some?

The way to manage delusion is to see it for what it is..., it is a delusion, it is a mindset, and it is the reaction to a situation in which you have full control. Anger or one of the other delusions are not likely to serve you and a mindset that is calm, positive, patient or tolerant is likely to offer you more benefit in dealing with a situation or challenge.

The way in which I have incorporated this practice into my life is by watching the responses in my mind and body to situations which helps to recognise that I am experiencing a delusion. I then take time to reflect on what is triggering me and take ownership of the reaction I am having and chose a better mindset and better response. I want to be at peace and be calm all of the time so I know that a mindset of anger will not help me achieve this peacefulness ever.

Usually, we get angry when we think people are treating us in an unfavourable manner or in a way that we feel is undeserving; it is so easy to blame others. However, if we step back from this way of thinking/reacting and accept that what is making us unhappy or angry is our response then we can actually defuse that delusion and look at the problem or situation we are encountering with a clearer and more focused mind. We can then think; what mindset should I adopt instead of an angry response? Maybe a patient mindset, tolerant, cooperative, positive mindset? This is looking beyond the problem and creating an inner strength that puts you back in control of any given situation.

## Mindful Meditation

Having adopted this approach into my life, it has had a big positive impact on me, and it is part of my everyday living. But as my mindfulness teacher once said this is the advice which we can accept in a logical way and think 'yes, that makes sense!' But what actually makes this all come together is to allow your mind to process this approach through mindful meditation.

By practicing meditation is to take in the advice about delusions and to use affirmations that will allow these messages to be part of you and your body. It is like you are taking in the medicine for the mind through meditation and using different affirmations to build your inner strength and ways of thinking.

<b>Step 1</b>	Start your deep breathing and come into the present moment.
<b>Step 2</b>	Notice the situations, people or events that trigger you or that come to mind.
<b>Step 3</b>	Non-judgementally watch and notice the feelings that surface.
<b>Step 4</b>	Recognise the delusion that has/was presented.
<b>Step 5</b>	Take ownership of the reaction and the delusion.
<b>Step 6</b>	Decide a more appropriate and positive response/mindset that would serve you better.
<b>Step 7</b>	Meditate on this positive mindset and repeat an affirmation that will deepen this response within your mind and body.

Affirmations during meditation can strengthen our mind to move away from delusions and build inner strength and resilience. Through meditation you can create the intention to train your mind and strengthen it. I try to do this every day to try and build my inner strength over time. I encourage myself every day to be strong and resilient - even if I encounter challenges I try and move forward.

### Affirmations to practice:



By practicing meditation and recognising delusions we are less likely to be triggered by our external environment and we will be able to maintain inner peace and happiness.

If you are interested in advancing your knowledge on mindfulness practice, I would recommend the following books:

**Guide to the Mindful Way of Life - Adam Dacey**  
**Buddhism - Buddhism for Beginners - A guide to Buddhist Teachings, Meditation, Mindfulness and Inner Peace**  
**Mindfulness by Professor Mark Williams**  
**The little book of Buddhism - Dalai Lama**



# Our Walk to Bethlehem

## How waking with a purpose can give you purpose

**Author: Margot Worton, WME Associate**

2020 brought forth many challenges and new opportunities - one such opportunity presented itself when a friend suggested a "Walk to Bethlehem" at the start of the Advent. At a time when we could not share our faith in traditional Christmas time fashion, this was our way to bring the message of Jesus's birth back home, with muddy walking boots we would perhaps be more like the shepherds than the kings but the chance to share something special with a group of friends was too good to miss.

Further discussions took place, and an idea became a plan resulting in over 3,173 miles travelled - all within a short radius of our own village.

We became physically fitter (allowing us to keep eating our far from healthy diet) and we also gained so much more.



Beautiful sunrises, bird song, berries ripening in the late Winter sun, mist hovering over the canal, frost sparkling on the grass verges all helping to raise the spirit, which would have been missed without the motivation of our four-legged friend and the need to get as many steps in as possible every day.

Every step walked side by side (socially distanced of course) with friends or virtually on WhatsApp gave new opportunities for sharing everything from recipes to technical inadequacies, memories, and anxieties. Smiles and nods with strangers have grown into full blown chats to new friends, each walk taking longer.

We discovered areas of interest so close to our doorstep yet not previously explored in over 20 years living here, the gift of time - to reflect, to give thanks and to think of others with so much less and doing so much more - the everyday heroes.

Over 70 miles away my sister walked with me - bringing her closer than physically possible, by our partnership in something special. Each telephone call challenging and supporting each other onwards.

A few miles down the road my brother and sister-in-law heard the news and joined our walk bringing a competitive edge and an extra spark when the mind was willing but the legs not so much. It is a long way to Bethlehem and sometimes you wonder if it is all worth it. The next day a Zoom Advent Service, an extra bud on the holly bushes, a sly fox sneaking past or a Facebook posting reminding of the pressure on our food banks put a spring back in the step.

We walked alone, in pairs, with dogs, with children or not, but always together, sharing fears and spreading hope in a common aim until we reached our destination.

The sense of achievement and pride in those who are less able and had walked and stumbled with us is immense; together we are stronger.

The final part of the jigsaw - the gift of giving, as in that act we receive so much ourselves. We raised over £2000 which has been shared between our church and the local food bank.

Poverty is often hidden in rural areas and the number of families using food banks has risen further this year because of losses of household income due to the impacts of the corona-virus. COVID-19 has also had a very significant impact on the income of our church, without services, weddings and regular fund-raising events income is considerably down meaning an unavoidable and unsustainable deficit. The church has served the village for hundreds of years, it has historical importance as a building, memories shared by the community of all life events as well as a focus for faith and we want to ensure it continues to serve future generations.

The ongoing legacy of our simple walk is that of friendship, fitness, awareness of the beauty in every day if you look and a commitment to remember and support those that need us.

If this isn't wellbeing, I don't know what is - and the great news is we can all do it for whatever cause, charity, or religious pilgrimage - just one step at a time to Bethlehem, to Mecca to the moon - even to your doorstep of your family or friends bringing us closer and raising our spirits.

I share this story with you as suggestion for how you too could look to find a destination of faith, or other, as a goal to help you achieve a healthier mind and body, and share the journey amongst friends, colleagues, or family.



## A final thought

In what is recognised as being one of the most challenging times in history, this is a great example of how we can find different ways to nourish, look after ourselves and build our personal resilience. We recognise that not everyone can easily reach out to others and the sense of being isolated from those we care about including our colleagues at work can feel like a lonely experience. Asking for help individually or requesting additional support is a positive step and it is not unlike giving yourself or your team a virtual arm around the shoulder.

One of the ways WME is supporting organisations but also individuals is through resilience coaching either as a team or on a 1:1 basis and the delivery of resilience workshops which we can deliver to teams who have previously worked closely together but now, for obvious reasons now working remotely. If you feel that this is something that you would find helpful, please visit our website or give our colleagues in the Leadership and OD Team (which includes Coaching) a call.

**For more information [click here](#)**

# A Mindful Meditation for your Mental Health

## Approaches to improve inner strength

Author: Create Mindspace

We must take care of our mental health during these times. Mindful Meditation is one method increase our resilience and inner strength. Ten of the main benefits I have experienced from practising Mindful Meditation and that I have also heard from fellow meditators and students who attend my classes and retreats over the past twenty-five years are:



**1** Our stress is pacified



**2** We feel more confident



**3** Our mind becomes more focused



**4** Our memory improves



**5** Our physical and mental health strengthens



**6** We are naturally more patient



**7** Our emotional intelligence increases



**8** We fall asleep smoother and go deeper



**9** Our relationship with ourself and others improve and grows in a positive direction



**10** We become increasingly peacefully until we attain the permanent inner peace of nirvana



The recipe to experience these first hand and not just have an intellectual knowledge is to sit and practise quietly and regularly. The consistency is the challenge for many, like with anything we can start enthusiastically - but later when we encounter a slight obstacle our energy wains, we become distracted or bored we look to begin another pursuit.

One way we can maintain our practice over a prolonged period is to keep it light and enjoy - to love Meditation! Start with short practices; you do them because you enjoy the process, not because you feel you should do. Enjoy even for a few moments - let's try.

Place both feet on the ground. Rest your hands in your lap. Gently straighten your back and relax your shoulders. Bring your attention to your body. Inhale deeply and whisper the words 'calm'. Hold for a few moments. Exhale fully and whisper the words 'release'. Now enjoy the rest of your day!

Try doing this every day for one week, each time increase the inhalations and exhalations by one, after one-week you will reach one-minute in length. If you have found the process helpful, keep going to increase the time that you practice.



Share with your co-workers, make a time to practice together, creating a peaceful community in your workplace. Whether publicly in the office, or virtually on a Zoom call. Once you taste the benefits, just like with good food, you will naturally want to share your experience. Show your dear family and friends how they too, can reduce stress and find focus during these challenging times. Training like this, the practice of Meditation is something we look forward to during the day. Meditation is not a chore or hard work but an activity that is light and enjoyable. This article is an adaptation of an extract from Adam's new book entitled 'Love Meditation' written for Pulse magazine.

**Love Meditation will be published in September 2021.**  
**Take a course or class with Adam at**  
[www.createmindspace.org](http://www.createmindspace.org)

# The Unspoken Subject

## Dealing With The Death Of A Colleague

**Author: Lesley Shore, Director Of Corporate, HR and Membership Services, WME**



Most of us work for most of our lives, and would very rarely have to consider the death of a colleague in the way we might have to through the course of the current Pandemic.

The relationships we develop through our work take up a lot of our time and emotional resources. Any time a person dies, other people's lives are impacted. Most of the time, there is a direct impact on the people they worked with. Whether the deceased person worked within your own team or as part of your wider work circle, someone they knew will struggle with the news.

These are things to think about for coping with grief and loss in the workplace:

## Be conscious and clear

When a colleague dies, it can rock the very foundation upon which the daily tasks of the workplace are built. Showing up to the (virtual or physical) workplace and having the person there one day and gone the next can be devastating.

As a society, we are taught to rationalise, avoid, or push pain away. We are taught that death is something we shouldn't talk about. These learned behaviours, while temporarily "useful" in avoiding pain, actually create shame, fear and isolation around the loss.

Being conscious and clear about the death of your colleague includes acknowledging the truth to yourself and others. It includes being a safe person with whom others can open up about their feelings and fears related to the loss. It involves consciously allowing yourself to personally grieve.

If you are a supervisor or manager, being conscious and clear means having an open-door policy in the days and weeks after the loss. It means being candid about the circumstances, as long as the desires of the person's family are respected. But it goes beyond that.

While the work must go on, honouring the emptiness is important. Pushing people right back into productivity mode without properly processing the loss as a team may not only be detrimental to workplace culture, it may ultimately decrease productivity. Taking the time to work through it together is likely to build more trust and community.



## Encourage focused feelings

If you're a manager in an environment where someone has passed away, it is your responsibility to facilitate support for employees. If the death was sudden and tragic (such as a sudden COVID-19 death, an accident or suicide), it is crucial that you hire a mental health professional to come in and be available as part of a debrief. If the loss wasn't unexpected (such as a long-term battle with cancer), your approach might be different. It might include an opportunity for your team to meet (either in or out of the office) to share stories about the colleague, or even a personalized office memorial.

Additionally in the current pandemic you will need to think about additional fears and anxiety around situations where the death was COVID-19 related, and what this means for team members who are exposed to the same working environment and might now be extremely anxious about their own situation and risk exposure. You will need to acknowledge this as a legitimate concern, and work with your team to address any specific issues they raise.

**While the work must go on, honouring the emptiness is important. Pushing people right back into productivity mode without properly processing the loss as a unit may not only be detrimental to workplace culture, it may ultimately decrease productivity.**

Even though, for some of us, our colleagues can be our best friends, that doesn't mean there is crossover between office friendships and family connections. For this reason, sometimes an office-focused memorial is helpful to make sure all team members are included and feel able to share the experience. While attending a family-led memorial service might be healing, it may not include everyone who has been affected by the death.

If an office-focused memorial isn't an option, other ideas for group processing include getting together (when you can) and sharing favourite memories; convening at a colleague's house and sharing a meal in the deceased person's honour; finding a way to raise funds for a charity in their name for a favourite cause: having a day where you all wear the person's favourite colour; or purchasing new office plants as a symbolic reminder that growth, despite the current pain, will eventually come.

These are just a few ideas to start with. Those who worked closely with the person may be the best source of ideas to recognise the spirit of the departed colleague.



# You Can't Teach An Old Dog New Tricks

## Or how to adapt to change in changing times

**Author: Sue Groves, SuGr Training, WME Associate**



Here we are at the start of 2021 and in another lockdown! Reflecting on the remarkable resilience of individuals across the whole country it seems to me that offering kindness and support to friends, colleagues and even strangers is now more important than ever.

The situation we find ourselves in has caused me to reflect on my own journey over the last year and I thought I'd share my thoughts with you.

I'm a people person! I love being with people and supporting people - it's what I do! A few years ago, I took the plunge and set up my own learning and development consultancy and it has been going really well. I have a reputation of being an authentic and empathetic facilitator.

In fact, the last time I was actually in a room with people (March 2020!) one of the delegates said to me, "you were born to do this!" I remember reflecting on that statement on my drive home and it gave me a warm glow! I thought how lucky I was to be able to do a job that I loved and be running my own successful business. I've made it I thought, I've finally mastered my craft!

And then Covid 19 happened! I woke up in a different world! A world where the virus taken hold and the lockdown was a reality. Overnight, the world had changed for everyone. The emails came in quick succession, all with the same message - the scheduled events are now postponed for the foreseeable future. My full diary became empty within a matter of hours. It was scary! What was I going to do? I didn't want to do anything else! I love being in a room, engaging with others and sharing learning and laughter and now I can't do it - the unthinkable had happened and I knew I was going to have to adapt - and fast.

The virtual world had become a reality. What a paradox! How will my skills translate in the virtual environment - would it work? Over the next few days, I found myself moving between frustration and acceptance on the Change curve (Kubler Ross) I had explained so many times during my career.

I knew I couldn't change the situation we were in and getting frustrated wasn't going to help anyone - least of all me. The words of Viktor Frankl (a survivor of Auschwitz) came to mind "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves".

So, then - what should I do? I had time on my hands unexpectedly - how can I use it effectively? I decided to enroll on an open university programme and started developing my skills. I also started networking, offering help to others where-ever I could, and also reaching out for support in areas that were new to me. Through these discussions it became clear that there appeared to be more of an acceptance to be "human" in the workplace and to support each other - the mantra "it's Ok not to be OK" became well used.



I have always considered demonstrating kindness and compassion are strengths of mine, even within the most challenging situations. I reflected that over the years, even though I had been given feedback telling me that this would be seen as a weakness, I always believed that it was a strength and that kindness belonged in the workplace (not to be confused with being nice!) Kind can also mean challenge.

I thought about the changing attitudes and the fact that it now appeared that kindness was in fashion! Great news! Perhaps that was going to be a positive legacy of this awful pandemic we were living with.

I became busy with my new routine of learning new skills, together with supporting colleagues, friends and family.

Then came an offer of work! Virtual delivery in practice and guess what - it worked! Great feedback and a wonderful feeling of achievement for me.

And now - delivering virtual workshops has become the new normal, I can engage again, interacting with others in a way which doesn't feel that different!

Don't get me wrong - I still look forward to the time when I can be in the same room as others. However, for the moment I am grateful for the opportunity of working in a different way and exploring the prospect of what this may mean for me in the future. Perhaps in an ideal world I can have a mix of both.

I remain hopeful that in our rush to return to the "old normal" we can keep the positives of our "new normal" taking responsibility for each other and keeping kindness at the forefront of our minds.

So, the moral of this story, or indeed my journey, is believe in yourself, stick to your values and yes, you can teach an old dog new tricks!

I'll leave you with a few of my favourite quotes which seem more relevant now than ever:



"The illiterate of the future will not be those that cannot read, but will be those that cannot learn and re-learn!"

**Alan Toffler**



"If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change."

**Wayne Dyer**



"Be kind whenever possible.  
It is always possible!"

**Dalai Lama**





# Financial Wellbeing

This section has tips and advice to help you manage your personal finances



## Looking after your financial wellbeing

### with MoneySavingExpert

The key to financial wellbeing is not burying your head in the sand. Dedicating even just one day to sort through your finances will leave you feeling more empowered and in control. Our top money-saving tips will get you started, whether everything's rosy financially, or you're finding things a bit tougher. And lots of little changes can have a big impact on your wallet - you could save £1000s!

### Do a money makeover

Honestly and accurately assess your income and outgoings... don't forget things like travel costs and haircuts, as well as bills. [MSE's budget planner](#) can help reveal any hidden spending.

Now it's time to overhaul your finances. First, cut costs without cutting back. You can save £100s by switching and saving money on regular, essential bills. When it comes to things like mortgages, insurance and utilities, more often than not, loyalty doesn't pay.

Switching energy is easy - your supply won't be cut off and no one visits your property. For help, join [MSE's Cheap Energy Club](#) and try out our new Autoswitch service.

Check out [MSE's Broadband Unbundled](#) to see the latest internet deals. Consider if you really have a need for speed - faster is generally pricier.

If you're one of the 9m out of contract and often overpaying, MSE's [Cheap Mobile Finder](#) could help find a great deal, whether you need a new phone or are happy with the one you've got and just need a cheaper Sim.

Then it's time to tackle the painful savings - cutting back on non-essentials. But it's easier than you think...

Try MSE's [Demotivator tool](#) - it will show you how much ditching regular habits like coffee can save you in the long run.

A quick [direct debit audit](#) will help to see if you're paying monthly for things you don't use or need.

'Downshift' your shopping: drop a brand level on everything and if you don't notice the difference, keep it.

Always do your own price comparisons, and look around for vouchers, sales or cashback.

Go through [MSE's full money makeover](#) for even more big savings.

## If Coronavirus has impacted your finances

Of course, for some, this year has been tougher than most, leaving many worried about paying the bills.

- Firstly, talk to the firm, or firms, you may want help from - be it your mortgage lender, landlord or insurance provider - and ask if you can take a payment holiday (remember though that interest doesn't pause, so only take it if you really need it). If you've already had one lasting six months, you'll be offered 'tailored support measures' and options will depend on your financial circumstances. See [MSE's Coronavirus Finance and Bills Help guide](#) for more details, including the current deadlines to apply.
- If your plans have been scuppered, it's worth tooling up on your refund rights for the likes of cancelled events and postponed weddings - see [MSE's Life in Lockdown guide](#).
- If the pandemic's meant you've worked from home, even for just one day, since 6 April 2020, you can claim tax relief for the whole year. [Full details are in Martin Lewis' blog](#).

## No debt problems are unsolvable

It might not be easy or quick, but there's always a route out. Try to pay down any expensive debts (except student loans, as they are repaid differently to commercial debt), and see if you can [move credit cards and overdrafts to 0% interest](#), cut the cost of [personal loans](#), or slash mortgage costs. If you're consistently struggling with debts and meeting repayments, seek free help from charities. Visit [MSE's Debt Help guide](#) for more details.

Right now, credit cards and overdrafts will cost you more than you would earn in even the top savings accounts, so it's best to pay down debt before saving. If you're feeling unexpectedly flush however, check out [MSE's Top Savings guide](#) to see where the best place to put your cash is right now.

## Anything else?

For non-essential spends, ask yourself the Money Mantras:

**Do I need it?**

**Can I afford it?**

**If so, is it cheaper elsewhere?**

Can you downgrade your Netflix subscription to just two screens? Have you read that magazine subscription recently that keeps landing in the post? The list goes on.

And if you've done all of that and still want to educate yourself further, enrol on [MSE's free Academy of Money course](#) - a joint initiative with the Open University, on its free learning platform Open Learn.



# New Year Resolutions

## Top tips to help you have a better financial 2021

**Author: Sharon Phillips, Assistant Director, Finance & Governance, WME**



Losing weight, joining a gym and giving up smoking may be high on your list of New Year resolutions, but now's a good time to make financial resolutions too. Here we round up 10 top tips to start you off from [www.which.com](http://www.which.com)



### 1. Switch bank account

If you're not getting the best deal or great service from your current account provider, vote with your feet and switch. Check out comparison websites for bank account benefits to find the best for you.

### 2. Get the best savings rate

Compare your current savings account with the best currently available and switch to maximise your savings.

### 3. Protect your income

If you fall ill or can't work due to an accident, having insurance in place to maintain an income is vital. Think about taking out an income protection policy to see you through.

### 4. Shop around for insurance

If you've been with your car or home insurer for almost a year, don't just automatically renew your policy as you could pay a far lower premium by shopping around. Choose a recommended Provider for home insurance and car insurance to get the best cover and service.

### 5. Sort out your debts

List everything you owe and prioritise payment on high-interest debt. Consider transferring credit card debt to a Best Rate 0% balance transfer card or a low-rate personal loan. If you're struggling with unmanageable debt, contact a free debt advice organisation.

### 6. Use your tax allowances

Avoid paying tax on your savings by placing your money into a Best Rate cash Isa. From April 2012 you can place £5,640 into a cash Isa, an increase of £300 from April 2011.

### 7. Know your credit card rights

Section 75 and chargeback let you make a claim to your credit card provider if you buy faulty products or items you've ordered don't arrive.

### 8. Cancel pointless insurance cover

It's a good idea to cancel any insurance policies you don't need. Your mobile phone can be covered as part of your home contents insurance.

### 9. Keep a spending diary

Keeping track of your expenditure each month can help you to make the most of your income. There are plenty of free personal finance software packages that can assist too.

### 10. Save energy

With rising energy costs, making your home more energy efficient can save you money, while switching energy provider can cut down your bills.



# Case Studies

We wanted to showcase some of the great work going on around the region to provide you with inspiration and ideas to take into your own workplaces



## Sandwell Metropolitan Council

### Putting Wellbeing At The Heart Of The Organisation

**Author: Mark Stanley, Senior HR Business Partner - Resourcing & Wellbeing, Sandwell Council**



It's great being shortlisted for an award! Professional recognition aside, it's also an opportunity to get dressed up, have a night out and celebrate! So, one of the early disappointments of last year was when the PPMA Excellence in People Management Awards were cancelled.

Sandwell had been shortlisted for the Best Health and Wellbeing Initiative, an award that I'm proud to say we eventually went on to win. I'm still hopeful of a night out at some point, but what I didn't realise at the time, was that the work that got us the award would really come into its own as we found ourselves responding to a growing global pandemic. It's fair to say that wellbeing has never been more important...or challenging.



There has always been a strong commitment to workplace wellbeing at Sandwell. We believe people work at their best when they feel their best. We've always held regular wellbeing events and provide a responsive Occupational Health service. However, our commitment to wellbeing never seemed to have quite the organisational reach or impact we were hoping for.

We needed to do something more fundamental, something that would truly embed our commitment to wellbeing within the organisation. We decided to start off by capturing and explaining what this commitment actually was, what it meant and more importantly, what it was we were trying to achieve. This in turn would strengthen and inform our approach, and with greater clarity of purpose, enable us to ensure we were focussing on the right things and putting the right initiatives in place.

And so we created our Health & Wellbeing Approach; a simple statement detailing our commitment, what it sets out to achieve, why we think it's important and how we will deliver on it. It also includes some simple measures, to see how we're doing.

Inclusivity is key to a successful wellbeing approach. Our approach can be used by any employee, supervisor or manager, irrespective of their job role or the service area they work in. It can be accessed and used as an individual employee guide, a self-help tool, a management tool, to facilitate team meetings or as part of regular 1-2-1 catch-ups.

The approach was developed in part by looking at our most common reasons for sickness absence and referrals to our Occupational Health team, including mental health, musculoskeletal and infections. We also considered local and national wellbeing trends, together with current and future priority areas as identified by subject experts.

We wanted to see an improved awareness of our wellbeing commitment, greater uptake of available support, reduced absence levels and improved wellbeing-related staff engagement scores.

We wanted to capture both reactive and proactive initiatives and interventions. Historically, as an organisation, we had tended to focus on reacting to and solving wellbeing issues, rather than proactively looking to prevent issues occurring in the first place.

Sitting behind the approach, and accessible through the council's in-house Occupational Health team, is the 'Supporting Health & Wellbeing' menu of help and support, categorised by the nature of the issue being experienced. This is further complimented by our Wellbeing Hub, prominently featured on the homepage of our intranet. Think of this as a department store of individual services, a one stop-shop for wellbeing, capturing in one place all of the ways in which employee health and wellbeing can be supported, by us as an employer, but also by the individual themselves and through external providers and established organisations.

To fully embed a culture of wellbeing, HR worked closely with Directors and Service Managers to create bespoke actions plans, specifically developed to target key sickness drivers in each directorate. By creating a sense of shared ownership, wellbeing has become habitual, part of the fabric of the organisation and in turn part of the organisation's wider culture.

Promotion of wellbeing is essential, and not just through standard, accepted communication channels. Talking about wellbeing needs to be normalised, allowing it to naturally form part of routine conversations and meetings. This might be through team briefs or individual catch-ups, but also through learning and development delivery and referenced at the highest level of the organisation, demonstrating the importance of wellbeing from the very top.

The wellbeing tools you create or introduce are only ever as good as the managers using them, or the individuals accessing them. To fully embed an organisational approach to wellbeing, actions need to go beyond words, managers must actively role-model what they are endorsing and what they expect from their teams. It's only then that individuals feel empowered and free to invest in their own wellbeing and those around them. Without this endorsement to act, even the best of intentions around wellbeing will only go so far.

The future looks uncertain. Will I ever get to go to my awards dinner? Who knows?! What we do know is that the way in which we all work, how this impacts on our daily lives and on us as individuals, has changed immeasurably. Creating an environment which supports positive wellbeing is as critical to our success now as it ever has been.



# West Midlands Combined Authority

## Creating Good Days at Work

**Tracy Walters, Head of HR & OD, West Midlands Combined Authority**



Tracy Walters, Head of HR/OD, explains how the West Midlands Combined Authority have supported their workforce during the pandemic with a holistic approach to health and wellbeing.

COVID-19 has broken the mould in how we now work - working from home in the midst of a pandemic is very different to working for an organisation which has made a deliberate choice and planned for agile working. The challenge for us here at the WMCA has been to switch from our traditional and largely office based employee engagement solutions to supporting staff and managers in what is completely uncharted territory.

From the start, our priority has been to both inform and support. We knew at the beginning of lockdown that staff needed frequent, consistent and up to date information, so we published regularly updated FAQs and management guidance in line with Government guidance.

We launched a weekly webinar, led by our CEO, Deborah Cadman OBE. It's continued every Wednesday since - a chance for everyone to drop in over lunchtime and hear from their leadership team, outside speakers and experts. Employees can ask questions and comment on what they've heard and we answer - as best we can - everything that's asked. We also use polls and other engagement tools when it's relevant to get a valuable temperature check on how the organisation is feeling. Webinars are recorded and posted on YouTube, so that no one need miss them.

With gyms and parks closed, and conscious that we wanted to encourage staff to take regular exercise, especially during lockdown, we launched a programme of online Exercise Classes ranging from yoga to Zumba with

a daily class for staff to enjoy. And we supplemented this with a series of webinars on topics like diet and nutrition, sleep, mindfulness and resilience. We also published a huge range of online resources aimed at parents and carers to help staff who were home schooling or supporting someone who was shielding.

Our trained Mental Health First Aiders, who were available pre-pandemic have continued to support staff who feel that they need informal but immediate support. We also took the bold step to change our Employee Assistance Provider during lockdown to ensure that staff (and people in their household) can now access a trained counsellor, without going through an intermediary like HR or their manager.

Before lockdown we had run a Menopause Café, which met monthly as a support group, and we moved this online when we started to work from home. And before the pandemic we had done a lot of work to support staff who were living with domestic abuse; conscious that the rates had risen sharply in the West Midlands during lockdown. We reached out to staff to remind them of the support available including a small number of staff who are trained to support survivors.





As the lockdown continued and staff started to feel more disconnected with each other, we launched a Virtual Kitchen in Teams. It operates as a place where staff can drop in and chat to others, or swap stories in the chat function. It has really helped to staff to stay in touch with colleagues who they don't work with directly but would have chatted to whilst making a cup of tea in the kitchen. Simple but very effective.

As the year progressed and we started to think about the support staff would need over the colder winter months, we published advice on tax relief and on how to keep fuel bills down. We reminded staff about the savings to be made through our Reward platform and we invited in a local money advice charity to run some webinars on managing financially through COVID-19.

Over the summer we surveyed staff to ask how they were coping, and we are about to survey them again. We will use that data to review and refine our support offer even further but we know already that our staff have really valued being able to access wellbeing and mental health resources. 85% of staff reported feeling trusted and empowered to work remotely and the same percentage felt they had the right level of support to continue to work from home.

When we had lived 100 days of the pandemic, our CEO wrote to all staff to thank them for their fortitude and service, again a small but very welcome gesture and one which has helped staff feel that they are valued and cared for. Next, we are looking forward to our Extra Staff Awards. They will be held in mid-December and they're a chance for us to thank and reward those staff who have really gone the extra mile. This year has been an extraordinary time and our staff have been extraordinary people.

Published in the Municipal Journal - December 2020

**Principal Consultant, Monica Puri met with Tracy Walters, Head of HR/OD at West Midlands Combined Authority to find out more about the success of their wellbeing initiatives and what they have planned next.**

**It appears that HR/OD has been leading on wellbeing. What advice would you give to organisations on how to achieve the same success?**

I think it's important to show return on investment. These initiatives are a "nice to have" for most people but if you can show it adds real value for your organisation then you will get the buy in and management support. Supporting staff during the pandemic has been vital to enabling people to resume their jobs and feel productive and our staff have told us how much they have valued the support we have provided. So one way to measure the return on your investment is to survey staff, but you can also use metrics such as your sickness data and particularly looking closely at the reasons behind long term sickness; turnover might be another (although we might expect that to be flat at the moment) but by looking at this in combination you can see which interventions are providing the best outcomes and the best value. For example one of the best received webinars we arranged last month in the run up to Christmas was how to make the most of your money, led by the Money Advice charity.

I truly believe that a happy workforce is a more motivated and therefore productive workforce. Ultimately, if we can create the right environment at work then employees will give their best and reach their potential.

## You mentioned that you surveyed the staff, and ‘trust’ was an important aspect of the feedback. What other insights did you obtain from the survey?

We are fortunate to have high levels of staff advocacy at the WMCA and trust and empowering staff is part of our wider attraction strategy. When we surveyed staff over 90% said that they felt empowered and trusted to work from home and over 80% said they were more productive working from home. So we have used this data to start to think about how we want to work in the future and we have coined the term ‘Work Re-imagined’ to start to think about work as “something you do and not somewhere you go”.

We have used the pandemic to run dozens of workshops and we have talked to hundreds of staff about how we want to look, feel and deliver our services in the future. We aren’t saying that remote working works for everyone, and we know some staff crave a return to the office and others miss the informal interaction over a coffee in the kitchen or a chat on the stairs, but we also know from the survey that most staff are comfortable with the concept of working from different locations. And staff are not just coping they have excelled, with most staff working from home we have shown that we can embrace more agile working and that the wheels won’t fall off!

## What are your next steps?

We have just launched a new Wellbeing Strategy. We recognised that like a lot of organisations we responded at the start of the first lockdown simply by putting much of our offer on line, so we moved our daily Exercise Classes online, we produced lots of written guidance to support working parents who were home schooling and carers, now working from home. We ran webinars on helpline staff manage their physical health and mental wellbeing and were even received a Bronze award for the work from Thrive at Work, but as moved through the summer we knew we had to think ahead to the colder and darker months.

So we consulted widely and then published our new offer, which includes help with financial hardship and addresses the importance of being “kind” to each other and reiterates the importance of having the right sorts of behaviours in the Authority, starting with work we have just published around micro-aggressions. We are rolling this new strategy out now and staff have responded in a really positive way, and there is a real buzz around the organisation, with people feeling engaged, excited and enthused about all the work we have done to keep them informed and supported.

I think what we have shown is that trusting staff and not hierarchy is what works, that our focus has to be performance and not on presenteeism, that we can embrace innovation and do away with bureaucracy and that people are more important than property. I think it’s been a great time to work in HR/OD, we have had a chance to re-assert our leadership, influence our organisations, and build on our good people practice. COVID-19 has forever changed our world, and in some ways for the better.

Quote from our CEO, Deborah Cadman;



“COVID-19 has brought unprecedented challenges for everyone - we have all had to adapt to lockdown and the WMCA has needed to find new, creative and innovative ways of supporting our staff and enabling them to continue to make a difference in the region. From the outset, keeping staff informed and supporting them through change was a priority for us. I am proud of how we have managed to adapt, evolve and innovate in this period of crisis and change.”

# Warwick District Council

## Our Health and Wellbeing Covid 19 Journey

**Authors: Nicki Curwood, Marketing & Communications Manager**

**Andrew Day, Leader of Warwick District Council**

**Chris Elliott, Chief Executive Warwick District Council**



The Health and Well-being of our staff has long been a priority for WDC; from promoting the Year of Well-being in 2019 to benchmarking against the Thrive award. We have worked together to develop interesting and inspiring initiatives to support our staff in looking after themselves.

The first lockdown on 23rd March meant a rapid introduction of new ways of working and nearly all of our 500 employees relocating to work from home. If we consider the what, why, where and how of managing health and wellbeing throughout this turbulent time, here are just a few of the actions we delivered:

- We kept staff updated and informed using our 'Big Button' messages on the intranet, to ensure staff knew where to turn for help and information: PHE, NHS, Bupa Health and Wellbeing scheme, Unison, HR team, Employee Support Officers and Line Manager
- The Chief Executive & Leader have personally emailed all staff every week with the latest news, and included a regular check-in on health and well-being, as well as sharing helpful guidance and tips
- Our Managers meet regularly in a forum and we have used this meeting to provide them with more detailed information around health and wellbeing, providing activities and scripts to support their conversations with their team members

- Ongoing monitoring of staff via our Appraisal meetings and 1-1's, with the opportunity to refer onto Occupational Health
- We carried out a Staff survey in June 2020 which focused on the challenges and opportunities of working from home. The results provided a real insight to the wide impact;
- Improved work-life balance, more family time, more time to pursue interests
- Missing colleagues, feeling isolated, missing the chat
- Our Staff Voice Reps reviewed the survey and organised 'coffee and cake' sessions to support staff who wanted an informal chat. We'll be doing more of this!
- We shared ideas on how to keep warm in the winter, which supported health and wellbeing such as regular breaks, getting fresh air as well as hot drinks and lots of layers!
- Risk assessments have been carried out to ensure staff were safe and had access to the appropriate PPE
- Following the staff survey and ongoing conversations, the main office opened up for staff who could no longer work from home; either for practical reasons or for health and wellbeing concerns. A further survey was carried out to check-up on those staff now working back at Riverside House
- And for those staff working at home, a checklist for equipment was provided to ensure they had the tools to do the job.

But this is an ongoing journey, and there is always more to do! We now have a dedicated team of officers, our "Health Club" who meet regularly to discuss the action plan, review government guidance, as well as referencing the staff survey and feedback from staff. We are using our intranet pages as a resource centre and issue regular reminders of what help is available.

# 10 ways to look after your mental health



**Talk about  
your feelings**



**Drink sensibly**



**Eat Well**



**Ask for help**



**Keep in touch**



**Do something  
your good at**



**Keep active**



**Accept who you are**



**Care for others**



**Take a break**

## Remember WDC offers:

- Support from your manager, HR and ESOs
  - Counselling and Occupational Health
  - 24 Hour Employee Assistance Helpline (Bupa - 0345 607 777)
  - Unison support for members

# Malvern Hills District Council and Wychavon District Council

## Staff Wellbeing And The Importance Of Organisational Belonging During Coronavirus And Beyond

**Author: Victoria Lee, Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, Malvern Hills District Council and Wychavon District Council**



Like employers across the region and nationally, Malvern Hills District Council and Wychavon District Council have placed a heavy emphasis on supporting the mental and physical wellbeing of our staff during the coronavirus pandemic.

Employee health and wellbeing has been central to Our People strategy for some time. We've used the Worcestershire Works Well framework to guide and mark our progress, and were recognised for Health and Wellbeing in the Workplace awards at the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce Business Awards in 2018 and 2019.

In 2018 we launched a Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Central to that was the creation of Health and Wellbeing Champions from amongst the workforce, who are trained as mental health first aiders, and coordinate and lead health campaigns across the councils as well as being available as a first port of call for anyone needing support. Other things we've done include:

- Mental health first aid and mental health awareness training
- Updated Health and Wellbeing Policy
- New Stress and Mental Health guidance
- Promoted our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) service, including access to counselling
- Free health checks offered to all staff
- Signed up to Time to Change
- Created an in-house promotional video about mental health awareness
- Introduced a range of health activities including yoga, Pilates, Couchto5k groups
- Provided a host of guidance, tips and run fun events and challenges for staff, before, during and beyond lockdown.

During lockdown we were determined to ensure that employee wellbeing was at the forefront of our weekly formal communications with staff, placing routine reminders about the availability of support through our EAP, as well as regular items around physical and mental wellbeing such as exercise tips and links to sources of further guidance and support (e.g. MIND). Early on our concern for how staff might be coping led us to design and launch a staff survey, aiming to test a number of aspects of work life, including homeworking; health and wellbeing; workload; communications; management; and leadership from SMT.

We had a 78% response rate to the survey, with hundreds of comments about the positive and negative impacts experienced by staff. Staff were asked to rate how much of an impact Covid-19 and working from home had had on their health and wellbeing and explain more about what these were.



### Most common positive themes:

- More free time due to not having to commute,
- Flexibility around work
- Better work/life balance and more time to spend with the family or to exercise.

### Most common negative themes:

- Missing face to face interaction with colleagues
- Feelings of isolation and loneliness
- Missing friends and family
- Increased levels of stress and anxiety.

## Extract of responses from the survey

How useful have you found the health and wellbeing advice provided by the council - please indicate which of the following you have used (tick all that apply) and whether or not you have found them helpful.

Used	
Employee Assistance Programme	6.7% (16)
Information and links on the staff bulletin	70.6% (175)
Intranet	42.1% (101)
E Learning	15.2% (37)
Health and Wellbeing champions	8.8% (21)
Helpful	
Employee Assistance Programme	57.5% (46)
Information and links on the staff bulletin	93.1% (176)
Intranet	80.9% (110)
E Learning	44.4% (40)
Health and Wellbeing champions	51.3% (41)



What are you doing to manage your health and wellbeing during this time?  
Tick all that apply and add any others

78.85%  
(205)

Frequent communication with colleagues

75.77%  
(197)

Taking regular screen breaks/ moving around/ stretches

52.31%  
(136)

Set personal challenges e.g. workout

41.15%  
(107)

Others (please share)

# West Midlands Police

## How the volunteer chaplaincy service supports all of the workforce, regardless of faith

**Author: Chaplaincy Rev John Butcher, West Midlands Police**



The West Midlands Police has a multifaith chaplaincy available to any individual or group regardless of faith, religious tradition, or no faith at all. It is widely recognised that spiritual wellbeing contributes to the stability and resilience of individuals especially through tough times. Principal Consultant, Monica Puri met with Rev John Butcher who is the Multi Faith Lead Chaplain, to further understand the benefits that this service provides to the workforce and the importance of spiritual wellbeing for society.

### Tell us about the service that the Chaplaincy provides?

I have 30 years of being a Chaplain; for 17 years in a voluntary role in London, then Birmingham, and now in a part time paid role for the West Midlands Police. The service comprises of a team of 65 chaplains and 20 faith advisors which I manage within my part time role. These roles are all voluntary roles.

Initially I focused on recruiting voluntary chaplains from the 6 Major faiths (listed below) and then developed the team further to include many of the other faiths that include Quaker and Pagan:

Buddhism	Judaism	Christianity
Sikhism	Islam	Hinduism

In recent years, the chaplaincy has focused on 3 key themes:

### Supporting:

To provide support to Police Officers and support staff in all issues that they face both in good times and bad times. One of the big challenges is COVID-19 which has been an added strain to all the issues that operational police face on the job, and the challenges that occur at home.

### Training:

The Chaplaincy provides basic training on the 6 major faiths so that the workforce can understand the different faiths and the cultural nuances. 'When people see you understand their culture, they are more open and cooperative. This has benefited the police staff immensely'.

### Networking:

There are 65 chaplains from many backgrounds and networking is invaluable to us to ensure that we can support anyone from any part of the community on any issue through this network.

### How would you describe the spiritual/religious needs of the workforce and how has the chaplaincy supported this?

Every one of us have 3 aspects in our lives: Physical, Mental and Spiritual needs which all link together strongly. If a spiritual need is met it will benefit you mentally and physically. It is recognised that spirituality or spiritual faith has supported individuals through challenging times.

As a Christian, I do not push my religion on to anyone but in a one-to-one discussion I am able to provide a view or give guidance. Even if someone is an atheist, they are likely to have a spiritual experience or connection with someone who is spiritual, so it is something that is widely recognised.

The feedback I get is that our assistance has been a tremendous help to them and that their faith connection assists them in everyday life.

## How has the Chaplaincy responded to COVID-19 to support the workforce and community?

As we cannot meet in the same way due to COVID-19, we have been carrying out our service virtually. A number of Faith groups have been doing their Services through Zoom meetings and other virtual online platforms which has brought new people into the congregation and connected us to people regionally, nationally, and globally. It has been an invaluable experience for all. We have found that people find it easier to ask questions through the chat facility than if they were face to face which has been a promising progression.

## Can you share any cases where someone has accessed your service?

A recent case involved a member of staff injuring her finger in an incident which meant her wedding ring had to be cut off. She shared with me that she was concerned that she wanted spiritual connection with the new rings that her and her husband had to buy so I carried out a service to bless the rings with her husband. It was a small ceremony with some of her colleagues. She was very appreciative.

Another example was when two members of staff in the Police Dog Handling unit got married in the registrar's office. They approached me and asked me to bless their marriage commitment. This ceremony was carried on site with police staff there to join in with the ceremony.

There have been several bereavements through Covid-19 with many family issues that people are dealing with. Police officers are the connectors to the community for enforcing what you should and should not do. This has been very difficult, and I am sure the officers have appreciated all the support that they have received which includes the support from the chaplains. Police must deal with fatalities and quickly move on to another serious situation, so to be able to talk to a chaplain provides them a safe space to release any grief or tension.

The 65 volunteer chaplains and 20 faith advisors provide a confidential service and can link the officers and staff to other threads of welfare that is available if necessary.

The Chaplaincy provides support across all faiths. What is your approach, and can you tell us the benefits this creates?

Many people of faith believe that it is important to live out their faiths beyond the places where they worship. This for many is a way of life and effects their lives 24/7 (24 hours 7 days a week). It is important to practice kindness and sense of community with everyone. We help people in everyday places, at home and the street. Sadly, many Faith leaders can become so engaged in local/administrative matters that they don't get the opportunity to relate to and help people as they should. I have personally found that chaplaincy has put 'legs on my faith' and has helped me to make a positive difference to people's lives. I am out there helping people. I have found the chaplaincy has been one big step to make a difference in the world. I was taking my faith outside and relating to people from all different backgrounds. People have fed back to me and have said 'you have brought an added dimension to my thinking' or 'they say you have made such a difference to my situation.'

## How else can the chaplaincy support spiritual wellbeing?

People may feel down, sick, have financial issues. My advice is to have an attitude of gratitude. There is always someone worse off than you. There are some countries that have COVID-19 and are having to deal with starvation and homelessness. Third world countries suffer with these horrific circumstances. We have a lot to be thankful for. When I share this perspective, it lifts people's spirits. It is important to stop and validate how blessed we are and how well off we are.

This is not belittling the hurt or situations they are going through but I highlight that we are living in circumstances that are so much better than many others.



## Birmingham City Council

### Coaching For Wellbeing

**Author: Susan Lowe, Public Health Senior Officer Test & Trace Health Protection Response at Birmingham City Council.**



The last 12 months have brought different challenges for so many of us, both in our work lives and personal lives. Maintaining motivation and staying on track when difficulties are coming at us from all angles not only enables us to cope but can help us thrive in difficult circumstances. Coaches are well known for their ability to encourage, develop and help people be the best they can be, and this case study brings to life just how coaching did that for Susan Lowe, Public Health Senior Officer Test & Trace Health Protection Response at Birmingham City Council.

I came to coaching following a period of sick leave. I had originally looked for a mentor to support me with developing confidence, networking and influencing but couldn't find anyone suitable, so I saw coaching as a way to continue working towards what I want to achieve, and I am pleased I did.

It has been a safe space to talk over challenges and share things personally. It helped me focus on my wellbeing inside and outside of work, which was invaluable. The coaching guided me through a difficult emotional time and it has made me happier at work. It enabled me to come back to work, with tools to provide resilience to reduce the likelihood of future sick leave.

I used the coaching to help me focus on two main goals: improving relationships and building my confidence.

My confidence has increased greatly. Specifically, feedback from coaching has reassured me on my communication skills. Many of my concerns about relationships were around my perception and that had got skewed. When looking objectively through the coaching it made the issues shrink and feel less daunting. Being challenged to talk and think about interactions made it something to be less frightened off. I was fearful of interaction, but coaching has restored my self-respect. It was useful to have my coach provide feedback about the way I was talking and that I realised I wasn't coming across as badmouthing others but rather speaking my truth. It triggered an understanding that my view is important. It's not me being difficult or unprofessional.

I also worked with my coach to find focus in my work and career, but I was in a difficult place and wasn't hopeful of finding this. However, this has changed radically with improved confidence which enabled a successful application for a new role in the division. I am now ready to apply for permanent move to this type of role. Although moving down a grade, the role is much more satisfying and a much better fit for me with much opportunity to learn and grow.

Coaching helped me reflect on some of the challenges of the old role and made me realise it was not my lack of ability but lack of inspiration in what was required of me. The new role is inspiring and brings more motivation and confidence.

My manager commented on what she saw



“I have seen Susan grow, she is more confident, more articulate and positive. She is glowing in confidence and I am proud she went for the new role and got it.

As a manager I realised I couldn't provide the support Susan needed at the time on these areas she wanted to work on. After Susan suggested coaching, although I had no experience of it myself, I felt it could provide what she needed. Coaching has been really useful here and I'm pleased to see the success it has had.”

I really liked that my coach was open to do more than just ask coaching questions, and incorporated creative ideas into the conversations so we could look at how to do things and see things differently. Using pictures and models and graphs, in addition to the talking gave it an additional aspect to build on the conversation.

There was structure to our sessions, although it doesn't feel that way when speaking. The conversation feels natural but you can tell there was a design and flow to my coach's approach. Her style felt easy to respond to which moved me in right direction without feeling like I was being pushed.

For me, it was useful to talk to someone external to my organisation as they aren't embedded in its culture. I had previously received peer to peer coaching and the culture of organisation can seep in and can be negative, the external perspective brought more neutrality and positivity.

It was a longer process than I had originally planned for, as I never expected the things to happen that did in respect to COVID 19 and in my personal life. It was good to have the coaching there to keep me on track at work and get me through. The coaching was a guiding light in dark time.

My coach also equipped me to think about how I could sustain the changes I made when I was no longer working with them.

These included noticing behaviours that may mean I am falling back into old habits, so I can prevent that happening and sharing this with my new manager so they can support where needed.





I have also found that through reaching out to others more regularly (which I started during the coaching) I can use them as mentors for different aspects of my work to further build on what I have achieved.

Coaching helped find the right job for me, that I am productive and happy in. I am getting on with colleagues and have better working relationships and I feel good in myself and positive about the future in what has been a very challenging year. The impact of the coaching has endured after the sessions, helping me to cope with further personal difficulty through negotiation with work. It has also given me the confidence to work with charities to speak out publicly about my experiences to help others. I was interviewed on national radio, something I would never have dreamt of this time last year.

## Coached through the West Midlands Coaching and Mentoring Pool

Coaching can be used in so many ways to support individuals do their best work, but also to work through whatever they are facing. In the current climate coaching may be valuable:

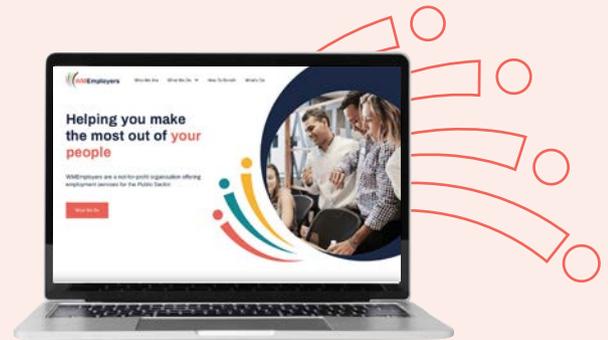
- As a way of providing space to think about how to reform, re-imagine and re-invent.
- As a place to reflect on what is happening through this time both personally and for others to maintain motivation and keep staff and colleagues onboard with the changes (in particular shift to virtual working)
- To work on resilience techniques to help people thrive not just survive the challenges facing them
- To re-build confidence where this may have been knocked due face paced decisions that needed to be taken during the crisis

If your organisation is a member of the West Midlands Coaching and Mentoring Pool you can access coaching and mentoring directly via the fantastic network of coaches and mentors: Find out more here.

WME also have an experienced pool of Executive and wellbeing coaches. Contact us at [info@wmemployers.org.uk](mailto:info@wmemployers.org.uk) for more details.

# Quick Links

We recommend you check out WME website / additional resources and WMJobs:-



**Covid-19  
Support Site**



**WME Schools  
Covid-19 Site**



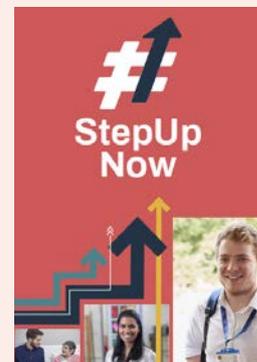
**#WMHeroes**



**ComeCack  
ToCare**



**TimeTo  
Care**



**StepUp  
Now**



# Next issue in March

## Get in touch

We really want you to contribute to future issues of The Pulse so send your views, ideas or content to:



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*Proud to design for WME*

