

Bromley,
Lewisham &
Greenwich



Coping with Caring during COVID-19



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Coronavirus (COVID-19) is part of a family of viruses that affect the respiratory system, spread through small droplets from the nose or mouth, expelled when a person with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes or speaks.

To reduce the risk of infection spreading to vulnerable adults and those at highest risk of contracting the virus in 2020, the Government introduced shielding, self-isolation and social distancing measures to keep people safe. These changes have led to an increased need for more family members and friends to enter into unplanned caring roles to support loved ones (around 20% in the UK), who without their assistance may have been unable to cope throughout the pandemic period.

The purpose of this booklet

This booklet has been designed with the support of feedback from clients who perform caring roles, staff and volunteers who work with carers and people with experiencing of caring during COVID-19. The aim of this booklet is to provide you with key support and information that may be helpful in your caring role during this pandemic period. For more information and support, please contact Bromley, Lewisham and Greenwich Mind on 01689 811 222 or email reception@blgmind.org.uk.



Please note, this booklet relates to support available during the Coronavirus outbreak. Contents were accurate at the time of printing. Printed: Sept 2020.

A carer is someone who provides or arranges regular support for another person who may be in poor health or unable to cope without their assistance.

Around one in every ten people in the UK perform daily caring responsibilities that assist a partner, a loved one, or a friend.

Providing care can take many different forms, and may include tasks such as:

- ✦ Support with personal care e.g. help with washing, dressing or toileting
- ✦ Providing help at home e.g. cleaning, cooking, doing laundry, arranging shopping
- ✦ Assistance with administrative tasks e.g. scheduling appointments, collecting prescriptions, managing finances
- ✦ Providing regular emotional support
- ✦ Helping the person they care for to stay safe

The presence of a carer can enable another person to live their lives fully and safely.

Carers usually provide support to others around their own commitments and the care they give is unpaid.



When caring for another person, it may be difficult to know if you or the person you care for are entitled to more support. Use the following checklist to consider additional support you may both be entitled to access.

Support for you

- Register yourself as a carer with your GP
- Get a carers assessment from your local council
- Apply for Carers Allowance, or use a benefits calculator to check entitlements
- Take a break from caring, apply for respite through your local council, or reach out to friends and family for support

Support for the person you care for

- Help them get a care needs assessment from their local council
- Help them complete a benefits check
- Agree an emergency plan with them
- Consider the future, is their will up to date and will they need powers of attorney



For more support on how to work through items on the checklist, visit the Carers Trust www.carers.org.

If the person you care for is 50+, try contacting Age UK (0800 055 6112) for age-friendly advice.

Caring for someone during the pandemic is a responsibility, and it means that you need to be sensitive to your health and the person you support when you are face-to-face with them, or in their home.

Living with the person you care for

- ✦ You are part of a support bubble, this means all of the people in your household do not need to socially distance, you can sit next to each other, sleep in the same house and travel in the same car together too.
- ✦ Maintain COVID-19 hygiene rules where possible e.g. wash hands when entering the house or when new objects arrive, preparing or eating food, cough into a tissue, bin it and wash your hands afterwards.
- ✦ If a member of your household develops Coronavirus symptoms - a loss of taste or smell, high temperature or has a persistent cough or fever - they must self-isolate for 10 days and be tested within 5 days of showing symptoms, visit www.gov.uk or call 119 to book a test.



Cut out and pop up on the fridge as a reminder



Cut out and pop up on the fridge as a reminder



- ✦ Only if the person you care for lives alone can they form part of your support bubble. If the person you care for lives with others, you must maintain social distance, and if possible, wear a face mask when providing care and wash hands regularly.
- ✦ If the person you care for experiences symptoms of Coronavirus, they must self-isolate for 10 days and be tested. You must self-isolate for 14 days, and so do members of your household. Only if the test comes back as negative, can you stop self-isolating and return to providing normal care.

Caring for someone who is clinically vulnerable, or at high risk of contracting Coronavirus

- ✦ Notify the GP if the person you care for is part of a clinically vulnerable group, and that you are providing them with care support at this time.
- ✦ If the person you care for develops symptoms follow the above guidance and notify the GP. If you need care assistance, contact NHS Volunteer Responders **0800 196 3545**, and ask visitors to wear a mask.

Please note this information is accurate at the time of printing and is subject to change. For up to date Government guidance on COVID-19 visit www.gov.uk.

When incorporated into your life, the following five ways to wellbeing can support an improvement in mood, resilience and health and support you with your caring during COVID-19.

1

Connect - to yourself and others

Find ways to connect differently with the person you care for to keep your relationship healthy, enjoy quality time with loved ones and reconnect with yourself through hobbies you enjoy.

2

Be Active - in mind, body and spirit

Make time for activities that bring you satisfaction, that keep your body moving and your heart and mind active. If you can, use the time with the person you care for by doing an activity together, so that they can feel the benefits of being active too.

3

Take Notice - of the world around you and yourself within it

Keep checking in with yourself. When emotions run high, if you start to feel overwhelmed, or tired, take a moment to stop, pause and re-group. Use the outdoors, or practice mindfulness to stay calm and keep on top of stress.

4

Keep Learning - about yourself and the person you care for

Use this time as an opportunity to find out more about the person you care for, and ways you can approach caring with them differently. If you feel you want to develop more skills to help your caring role, visit www.carersuk.org for more information and support.

5

Give - yourself a break, and make space for others to give too

There will be days when caring feels too much. Plan ahead for days like these to prevent yourself feeling stuck, and factor in more 'you' time. A little self-care time each week and distance from the caring environment, even if only 30-60 minutes can greatly improve your mood, self-esteem and the relationship you have with the person you care for. Consider options of support from friends, family, professionals, befrienders or local respite services.

“ Someone once said to me, ‘you cannot pour from an empty jug’. You do need rest and downtime in order to care well for someone else. I took up walking to clear my head, and carved out time to write down things I was worried about. I found both helped me let go of things I could not control or change about caring for my mum or how unwell she was. ”

Adult Carer, supporting her mum (89)
who has Alzheimer's and Parkinson's Disease

You may have had to make considerable changes to your lifestyle in order to support someone throughout the pandemic period. You may have encountered new challenges, and this may have put new pressures on the relationship you share with the person you care for as well.

Some things that may help you adjust safely:

- Keep a routine
- Focus on the day ahead of you
- Let go of things you cannot control
- Talk about what is happening. Find a peer support group, or download the app [Jointly](#), to meet other carers who can understand your situation and offer support
- Spread the load and let others help you
- Make space for rest days
- Contact your GP if you experience any problems in managing your own mental health as a result of your caring role

The next few pages offer guidance on different caring situations most commonly experienced by carers in the pandemic and some tips on ways to manage them effectively.



Working and caring for someone simultaneously, is likely to put your time and energy under strain. Consider taking the following steps that could help:

- ✦ **Talk to your employer about your situation.** You may be eligible to remain on the furlough scheme until 31st Oct 2020. You also have a statutory right to request flexible working from your employer to help balance your caring hours. For more tips on working, caring and your rights, visit: www.carersuk.org or call **0808 808 7777** for advice. Alternatively, ACAS, is an independent charity able to advocate your rights to your employer, contact them on **0300 123 1150** or visit www.acas.org.uk.
- ✦ **Reflect on your finances.** If you need to work for financial reasons but also need to balance care responsibilities, you may be eligible to become a paid carer, or you could apply for Universal Credit, a monthly benefit payment to help towards your living costs. You can also see if you are eligible for discounts on household bills, prescriptions, and grants from local charities to help you manage care costs. Call Citizens Advice on **03444 111 444** for more information.
- ✦ **Consider care assistance options.** Contact your local council for a Care Needs Assessment, and for information on local Homecare services in your area. Visit: www.gov.uk/find-local-council to find your local council.

Managing your mental health at work whilst balancing caring responsibilities may be difficult at times. The Mental Health at Work website is an online toolkit to keep you mentally well at work, during the pandemic and beyond. Visit: www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/ for more information.

Caring for someone with a mental health problem during COVID-19

Supporting an adult with a mental illness can prove challenging under normal circumstances, but during a pandemic, this can add other pressures and strains that may be at times difficult to manage.

- ✦ Encourage the person you care for to talk to you about what they are going through. Discuss together what might help, and support them to make a plan you can work through together. Consider support options such as connecting with friends and family, talking to a professional, or engaging in a new hobby. For more support, and information on services in your area, contact Bromley, Lewisham and Greenwich Mind on **01589 811 222** or visit www.blgmind.org.uk.
- ✦ If the person you care for is currently not receiving support from services, and you are concerned that their mental health has worsened recently, you may both need more support. Encourage your loved one to contact their GP as an initial step if you are concerned. If they need your support to do so, offer to be with them when they make the call to provide encouragement. If this step feels too difficult, consider seeking independent advice yourself first through your GP, although you may need to register as a carer to be able to do so.
- ✦ If the person you care for receives support from the Adult Mental Health Team, they may have a care coordinator in place to support them in the community. Discuss with your loved one how they are finding this support, and if they have any questions or concerns. If they do, or if together you feel things have become more difficult to manage, together write a list of any concerns and encourage them to make contact with their assigned worker to discuss them. If they feel unable to, offer to support them to set up the call, or to be present when the call takes place. Ensure they are present when these concerns are discussed with services, so they can voice their own needs independently and access the help they may require.

If you cannot visit the person you care for face-to-face, make a plan so you both know how to manage difficult situations or a crisis. Visit www.rethink.org, or call **0300 5000 27** for support on future planning, and coping with distanced caring situations.

Caring for someone with a physical disability or long-term health condition during COVID-19

A loved one with physical health issues, may have become more dependent upon you during the pandemic period. Here's some things to remember:

- ✦ Providing opportunities for regular movement is essential to ensure the person you care for stays physically and mentally well, and this may be challenging without care support. Visit www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/get-active-with-a-disability for safe activity ideas at home you can both do without assistance.
- ✦ Adaptations at home, or new equipment could mean providing care more comfortably. Your local council can complete a Care Needs Assessment to help you determine what may be useful at home. Equipment aids are available for hire through the British Red Cross (**0800 196 3651**) or visit www.disabilityequipmentservice.co.uk/ for more support.
- ✦ If you cannot continue to provide care, you may be eligible for homecare support, or a personal assistant. Contact your local council, or call disability charity Scope on **0800 800 3333** for more support.
- ✦ Loved one feeling anxious, stressed or low? Encourage them to talk to their GP about a referral for free talking therapy. Visit www.nhs.uk and search 'IAPT' for more information.



Living with dementia can at times be confusing, and at this time it may be difficult to talk about COVID-19 with the person you care for or how it is affecting their care or the world around them. Remember:

- ✦ If you need to talk about Coronavirus, keep messages simple: state facts, acknowledge changes (e.g. people are wearing face masks), and use signs around the home to communicate hand washing rules.
- ✦ Try not to show your own worry or frustrations about the virus when providing care, as this can elevate anxiety and cause confusion if your loved one does not understand the emotions you are showing, or if they do not remember there is a pandemic. If things get difficult, pause, or take a short break, when you return talk about something different. Contact Dementia Carers on **0203 096 7894** or visit www.dementiacarers.org.uk for more advice.
- ✦ If your loved one is in a care home, or usually accesses a day centre and you are worried about their health, being able to visit or any part of their care, Dementia UK (**0800 888 5678**) are there to give you advice and support to cope with this situation effectively.
- ✦ If you are concerned that your loved ones health has declined recently, and together you recognise they may find communication, decision-making or recalling things from memory more difficult, it may be worth discussing together about appointing a Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA). An LPA is a legal document that appoints one or more trusted persons to manage decisions around the care and finances of a loved one who no longer has the capacity to manage those situations. For support and advice on LPAs and capacity, contact the Alzheimer's Society National Dementia Helpline on **0300 222 1122**.

In some cases, it may be possible that loved ones have experienced a decline in their wellbeing, or a worsening in their symptoms, since living at home more permanently following lockdown. If you are in this situation, the following steps may be useful to you:

1. Identify: small changes in mood and behaviour can be an indication that the person you care for needs more support. Encourage them to share with you any concerns they have about their wellbeing. Try to approach this conversation calmly, with patience and understanding. Remember, the person you care for may not see the concerns you have, or feel there is a problem. Support them to write down, or talk through their experiences. Reassure them, and reinforce if you need to, that support for a professional may help them to feel better.

2. Notify: the GP is responsible for supporting the person you care for to manage their care needs so they can remain as independent and as well as possible. Encourage the person you care for to share their concerns with the GP, who can assist them to talk through options safely. If they refuse, reassure them you can support them to make contact, or attend an appointment. Consider contacting the GP yourself for extra support if you feel uncertain or contact Bromley, Lewisham and Greenwich Mind for advice on **01689 811 222**.

3. Support: you can continue to support the person you care for, even if it feels like a difficult period. Share with them information on services they can reach out to e.g. the Samaritans (**116 123**) and encourage them to stay independent, participate in normal routines and engage in daily activities with you and others as much as possible. If the person you care for starts to engage in unusual, risky or difficult behaviours, or if you feel they are unsafe, you may both need more help at home. Consider talking to your local Mind, Council or visit page 17 for more advice.

If your loved one refuses support, remember that they do not have to engage in services unless they are detained under the Mental Health Act 1983.

An increasing number of families have been bereaved during the Coronavirus outbreak, and significant changes have impacted the provision of end of life and funeral care. Experiencing loss during a pandemic period, is likely to have led to issues such as:

- ✦ Being unable to support palliative or end of life care arrangements
- ✦ Having limited or no access to the hospital to visit a loved one in their final days
- ✦ Difficulties in registering a death
- ✦ Restrictions around funeral arrangements, including numbers and costs
- ✦ Challenges in handling your loved ones estate and finances

If you have experienced loss:

- ✦ The www.gov.uk website has a step-by-step guide on what to do following a bereavement, including details on funeral costs, and bereavement benefits you may be entitled to.
- ✦ The NHS have introduced a new National Bereavement Helpline to support anyone affected by loss during the pandemic period, call **0800 2600 400** (8am-8pm, 7 days a week) for free advice and support.



Grief can be overwhelming. For free, emotional support contact Cruse Bereavement Care on **0808 808 1677** or visit www.cruse.org.uk.

Coping when a loved one falls into crisis can be difficult. Knowing the best way to provide support can be hard to think through calmly when you are concerned about someone's safety. Here are some ideas you could use to help you manage ahead of and during a crisis situation:

- 1. Make a crisis plan** - planning ahead for a moment of crisis, will allow you and your loved one to feel more in control when things get difficult. Involve the person you care for, friends and family who can support in a crisis and make a note of services that can provide support quickly too.
- 2. Prepare a self-care box** - some days may prove difficult but they may not escalate to crisis level. Put together a box with: items that bring joy, positive memories, and ideas for things to do that could increase wellbeing and telephone numbers of friends and services the person you care for can call on for more support.
- 3. Get help from services in a crisis** - if you are in a situation that you feel unable to manage safely, or you are worried the person you care for is vulnerable to harm:
 - ✦ Visit www.nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-an-urgent-mental-health-helpline and contact your local Urgent Mental Health Team
 - ✦ Contact 999 for an emergency response from Police or Ambulance; or
 - ✦ Attend A&E with the person you care for, as soon you both safely can.



Use this plan to help you continue to cope with the various challenges you may be experiencing in your caring role.

Part 1: Continuing with caring

Write down three actions that will be most helpful for you to continue to provide care for your loved one:

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-
-

Write down two actions that you would like to do with the person you care for, to continue the caring relationship and support you both through the pandemic period:

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-

Part 2 – Making time for personal wellbeing

Visit pages 8-10 and select one or two items that you could do each week to support your wellbeing, and write them down to get you started:

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-

Part 3 – Accessing a wider network of support

Caring for another person does not have to be something that you journey through alone. There are many support services available that as a carer you are entitled to access. Here is a simple checklist to help you get started:

- Download the free, dedicated carers app, [Jointly](#), to access a community of support, information and help from carers and professionals.
- Contact your local Mind, or visit www.carersuk.org to find your local carers peer support groups and other events in your area that specifically support carers.
- Consider some individual support for yourself. If you are experiencing anxiety, stress or low mood, speak to your GP about a referral to IAPT for talking therapies.

Part 4 – Planning for the future

Plan ahead for possible scenarios, or caring goals for the next 6-12 months. Being prepared for what could happen, could help reduce anxiety and increase confidence in your caring role.

- ✎ Identify areas where you need more support
- ✎ Consider steps you might take you manage those
- ✎ Share your ideas and plans with family
- ✎ Include the person you care for if it helps you feel more able to follow through your plans.
- ✎ Stick the plan somewhere you can refer back to it and change it when you need to as things change and your plan progresses.

At home

Q: I feel trapped at home with the person I care for. What can I do?

Consider options for extra support at home, through friends and family, your local council, or a befriending service.

Q: The person I care for is too anxious to go outside because of the virus. What would help?

Write a list of things you can both control e.g. keeping distance from others and washing hands regularly. Together, plan for outdoor time each day. Start small e.g. sit by a window indoors, then in the garden. Build up to talking to a neighbour safely next door, then walking to the end of the road and so on. Try not to talk about the virus, as this can elevate anxiety. Instead talk about what you can see and hear, and build in small reminders to sanitise hands and wear face masks. When you return home, praise and acknowledge your loved one's efforts for going outdoors with you, check in with their anxiety level by asking them to rate on a scale from 1-10 how anxious they feel. If between 1 and 5, continue normal activities, if 5+ take some time to pause together, stay still, breathe normally, reassure them they are safe and the feelings will pass. If anxiety elevates into panic, contact No Panic for support on **0300 772 9844**.

Communication with services

Q: We are struggling to reach our GP for an appointment, and cannot connect with their digital services. What should I do?

Call your GP to notify them of the difficulties you are having, and see an alternative GP if your regular GP is not available to get a face-to-face appointment. There may be a waiting list, so if it is urgent, phone NHS-111 for advice. If your query relates to medication, talk to your local pharmacist, and if necessary request prescriptions for 28 days to be delivered to your home.

Q: The person I care for has been discharged from mental health services and is without any support. What options do I have for them now?

Discharge may have occurred if treatment plans have ended, or further treatment was not required. If the person you care for has been discharged, they should have a care plan. If they do not have this in place, or do not agree with the decision taken by the service to discharge, they can make a complaint via the Patient Advice Liaison Service (PALS) or their local CCG who can review their query further. If you have their consent to make contact on their behalf, you can also help them to complete this complaint. Alternatively, consider support within the community, for example through the local Recovery College. Contact Bromley, Lewisham and Greenwich Mind on **01689 811 222** for more information.

Q: Many of the services we normally access have been closed during the pandemic period. What happens if these do not reopen?

Unfortunately, many services have had to reduce or stop providing support during the Coronavirus outbreak. If you are no longer able to access a vital service, contact your local council for information on alternative support in your area or visit www.carers.org for details of other support options.

If you find that you do have questions, and they have not been answered by this booklet, please visit pages 22 and 23 for other services that may be able to help you at this time.



Age UK

Offers a range of free and low-cost services to support older people, their carers and families, including help at home, transport assistance and much more. Visit: www.ageuk.org.uk or telephone **0800 055 6112**.

Carers Direct

Free, confidential information and advice for carers. Telephone free on **0808 802 0202**. Lines are open 8am to 9pm Monday to Friday, 11am to 4pm at weekends, and you can request a free call back.

Carers Trust

Provides access to support, advice and local support services through its network of carers' centres. They also have options for grants available to pay for respite and care assistance. Visit: www.carers.org/ for more information.

Citizens Advice

Provides free information and advice on matters relating to legal issues, social care, housing, finances, debt and relationships. Call the national helpline for support on: **03444 111 444**, or visit www.citizensadvice.org.uk.

Gov.uk

Government website. Use for the latest information relating to Coronavirus, and to follow regular changes to the law and benefits related to caring for adults in the UK. Visit: www.gov.uk for more information.

Mind

Provides supports to adults living with mental health issues, their carers and families. They can provide you with information, advice and guidance, and help connect you to your local Mind for further support in your community. Visit www.mind.org.uk or contact their infoline on: **0300 123 3393**.

Mencap

Supports adults and young people living with disabilities, as well as their carers and families. Visit: www.mencap.org.uk or telephone **0808 808 1111**.

Support Line

A confidential telephone helpline offering emotional support to any individual facing any issue. If you are seeking support for a specific problem, they can support you to find the right service. Visit: www.supportline.org.uk or call **01708 765 200**.

Turn2Us

A national charity able to provide information and support on sourcing care equipment, managing finances, seeking benefits and applying for grants. Visit: www.turn2us.org.uk or call **0808 802 2000** (open 9am-5:30pm, Monday-Friday).

For more information about services in your area, please visit www.blgmind.org.uk.

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Contact us

Bromley, Lewisham and Greenwich Mind supports local people with mental health problems and dementia, their carers and families.



www.blgmind.org.uk



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