

# In this together

**COVID-19 has brought intense and unimaginable levels of change to our lives and is causing big increases in stress and anxiety.**

"We're missing contact and support, especially the incidental interactions that we take for granted, we're being bombarded with different messages daily and we're facing an uncertain future," says Castlemaine Health Social Worker, Sonya Oper.

"We're all experiencing and coping with it in different ways. Some people, especially those with pre-existing mental health conditions, are finding it particularly challenging."

The impact on our mental health is well recognised. The Federal Government recently announced a package of measures to boost the capacity of mental health services, including a 24x7 phone counselling service led by Beyond Blue.

"This phone service is for anyone experiencing distress or anxiety because of COVID-19, says Sonya.

"Counsellors can talk to you and then connect you with more support including online forums where people are sharing hints and tips about the positive things they're doing to get through."

"Many of us are feeling anxious as we navigate this uncertain time," she says. "One of the big things to remember is that this is a shared experience, we may be isolated but we're not alone."



## Tips for mental health in isolation

- Keep up-to-date so you can stay safe and comply with the laws, but limit your access to news sources and make sure they are legitimate ones. Maybe allow yourself 15 - 30 minutes a day.
- Maintain routines, or find new ones. Exercising, eating regularly, getting to bed at a normal time, it all helps. Rituals like having dinner together as a family and checking in with each other are really important.
- Don't feel pressured to fill isolation with big projects. Set small, achievable goals instead. Having your environment in order can help for some, but if you just feel like having some contemplative time and reading or pottering around gardening, that's okay.
- Focus on what you can control, like your health, connecting with family and friends, maintaining your environment, and take the focus off things you can't, like social distancing rules, your employment or what other people are doing.
- Help someone else. It could be a call to someone who's on their own or supporting a local business. Taking the focus off you is a mood lifter.
- Consciously choose to switch off for a while. Do something that makes you feel good. Watch a mindless comedy, listen to uplifting music, get out in nature.



Castlemaine Health social worker Sonya Oper says maintaining a routine is important.

## Beyond Blue Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service

1800 512 348



[coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au](https://coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au)

# Bereavement during COVID-19



Castlemaine Health pastoral/spiritual care coordinator and bereavement counsellor Danni Moore.

Losing a loved one is difficult at any time.

Danni Moore, pastoral/spiritual care coordinator and bereavement counsellor at Castlemaine Health says that people's grief can be compounded during COVID-19 when a key element of bereavement support, pulling together, is more difficult.

"Because everybody is experiencing such upheaval personal grief can be overshadowed, stifled and possibly intensified," says Danni.

"People might feel like they can't share their feelings, that somehow they should put off their grieving until a more suitable time."

"I would say to reach out for help when you need it. Don't wait for some resumption of normal. I think we just have to do it now in whatever way we can."

Even in the midst of grief Danni suggests initiating contact with someone each day, whether that's by text, phone or email.

"Grief and grieving isn't a form of mental illness," she says. "Grieving is our way of adjusting to loss. It's a normal, natural part of life. But a lot of the self-care we'd suggest for good mental health still applies when you're bereaved."

Getting outside each day, trying to keep to a regular

routine, getting dressed, eating well, exercising, trying to sleep and reaching out to your GP if you need some additional support can all help.

Danni says there are things we can all do to start processing grief and move towards healing.

- Have your own personal time of memorialising. Look at photos, light a candle, reminisce with others. Do something meaningful to you in the context of your relationship with the person who has died.

- Reach out to others. Share personal stories or memories. Send flowers, call, send a message, drop off a delicious meal. Make use of online guest books at funeral homes so you can let people know you're thinking of them.

- Make a donation to something that has meaning to the person who has died or to you.

"I think the most important thing is not to think we're going to fix grief," says Danni. "It's not a problem to be solved, but it is something to be shared and recognised."

If you or someone you know needs support visit the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement [www.grief.org.au](http://www.grief.org.au).

For up-to-date information on COVID-19 visit [www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus](http://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus).

