

MAINTAINING EMOTIONAL FITNESS



'How do you feel?' It's a question that's asked frequently, part of saying hello. Social protocol tends to dictate that we respond in a positive manner, no matter what is going on. However, when life throws up things we're not used to, it also floods our heads with new emotions we might find hard to identify, let alone express.

EMOTIONS AND THOUGHTS ARE NOT FACTS

They are signals and responses based on multiple factors including our personality, past experience and the current situation. It's fair to say the current situation is a bit messy right now with Covid-19 (coronavirus) creating global havoc and disrupting life as we know it. As well as staying physically healthy (and washing our hands) we need emotional fitness to understand and cope with an invasion of emotions that may be very new.

WHY AVOIDANCE WON'T WORK

In a world where avoiding painful feelings is the preferred social strategy, blocking out your feelings is understandable. Talking about how we really feel is not something we're encouraged to do but avoidance is. It's not a bad short-term strategy but over time, keeping things bottled up can affect your health. Your muscles become tense, you're irritable and lose your temper quickly, you start getting sweaty or you grind your teeth. All of these are early signals that your emotional cholesterol is shooting up and your brain and body are breaking down.

MAKE FRIENDS WITH YOUR EMOTIONS

Sorry if that's a bit hippie for some of you but we're talking science here. When you acknowledge our emotions and express them, the limbic system of your brain calms down and your neo-cortex (the boss of your brain) responds to help regulate your nervous system. Obviously, there's much more to it but the point is that you're going to be emotionally fitter and stronger if you feel the feeling and put how you feel into words.

How to do it:

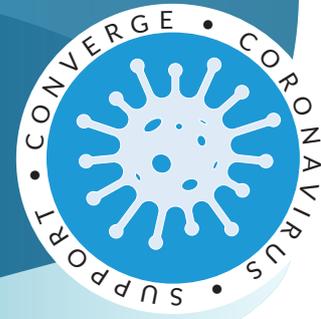
- At least once a day, stop and ask yourself what emotion you're actually feeling.
- Practice using words that describe your feelings in your sentences. You don't have to say them out loud: you can keep a journal and write it down. **We know words aren't everyone's thing so on the next page there are some starters to help you identify your feelings.**



MORE INFORMATION

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MAINTAINING EMOTIONAL FITNESS

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|-----------|-----------|--------------|-------------|
| Tense | Calm | Frustrated | Energised |
| Scared | Happy | Panicky | Tired |
| Hopeless | Irritated | Exhausted | Positive |
| Unhappy | Hopeful | Nervous | Discouraged |
| Anxious | Flat | Disappointed | Lonely |
| Depressed | Bored | Pessimistic | Overwhelmed |

- Monitor levels of distress in your body and brain. Are your thoughts overly negative? Have your muscles become tense? Is your digestive system troubling you? All of these indicate your nervous system is under stress and you need to take positive action
- Mindfulness and meditation are worth exploring and can help build your emotional fitness. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy can help train your mind to handle difficult thoughts in a rational way.

WHEN TO REACH OUT FOR HELP

Converge offers 24-hour, 7 day a week counselling support. The great thing is, because we offer phone and videoconferencing facilities, we can provide that support for you, even if you're at home.

To access the EAP services, simply call **1300 OUR EAP (1300 687 327)** to make a time to speak with one of our team.

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