

Managers have feelings too managing mental health during the coronavirus pandemic

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We are all feeling some very strong emotions at the moment, notably:

- fear, loneliness and anxiety
- positive feelings of pride, especially for the NHS and our key workers
- compassion for the most vulnerable at home and at work

But how do you manage these emotions, within yourself and your team?

Out of sight but not out of mind

Although many of us are keeping in touch via video links, getting a sense of how our people are coping is much harder without observing someone's body language and behaviour during a typical working day.

Brendan Barber, Chair of Acas, memorably described mental health as the 'new landscape we all live in'. Imagine a manager looking out of their window at the current landscape for their own teams. What would they see? Our own managers at Acas are telling us that they see colleagues in all sorts of difficult situations:

- "my elderly mum has moved in with me"
- "my daughter has OCD and can't stop washing her hands"
- "my knee surgery has been cancelled and I'm struggling to exercise at all"
- "my wife has cancer and I am terrified for her safety"
- "I'm sharing the kitchen table with my kids as they do their schoolwork"

Managers need to keep a watchful eye on all their staff and offer more in-depth support for the most vulnerable, particularly those with pre-existing mental health conditions. Acas advisers recommend keeping 'Wellness Action Plans' to help create and maintain positive coping mechanisms.

[Find out more about Wellness Action Plans on the Mind website.](#)

Right now, this is a tough world to live in for many people. And it's ok to acknowledge that. As a manager, you have the added responsibility of looking after your own health and wellbeing, which brings us to the age-old conundrum of 'who cares for the carers?'

Being realistic about what you can do

Looking after yourself means being realistic about what you can do for others. Try thinking about:

1. What you can directly control: this might include the example you set for others, the workload you allocate to staff and the working conditions. The [IES Working at Home Wellbeing Survey on the Institute for Employment Studies website](#) shows that musculoskeletal problems are on the rise for new homeworkers. So I'd suggest improving their ergonomics or encouraging more frequent breaks.
2. What you can try and influence: you can certainly influence the strategies people use to cope. There are a whole host of resources available as well, from Mental Health First Aiders to 'corona kindness' tips and advice for staying healthy and motivated. For example, if someone was a regular gym user, ask them what are they replacing it with now? [The NHS website has some helpful corona kindness tips and advice.](#)
3. What you can only hope to understand: accept that some things are beyond your control. The relationships people have at home are personal to them. Offer an empathetic ear but recognise you are not expected to be a relationship counsellor (although it's worth checking in with your staff more regularly than usual about their physical and mental wellbeing and safety).

One top tip

Have meaningful conversations – whether these are about pay and conditions, the unknown future, or about the daily reality of how people are living their lives now and getting by.