



Tips for mental health during the corona crisis

Take care of your mental health during the corona crisis

The corona crisis has resulted in a partial lockdown of Denmark, which now seems to last longer than first anticipated. The crisis greatly impacts everyone in Denmark - also when it comes to our mental health. It makes a lot of us feel unsafe as we are not in control when it comes to work, private life, health and illness.

Here, you can get PFA's tips for staying focused on mental well-being despite the many changes that are happening around you at the moment.

Mental balance

We are bombarded on a daily basis with narratives and worries about what catastrophic consequences the corona crisis has had or might have for our physical health, the healthcare system, the economy, our jobs, etc. A lot of people in Denmark are now feeling those consequences directly, and yes, it is a very serious situation.

It goes without saying that finding ourselves in such circumstances affects our mental health. When you look at triggers of stress, depression or other significant mental challenges, it is often serious illness, divorce or relationship problems, uncertainty about one's job and financial worries that top the list. And in times like these, most of us are very likely facing at least one of the above-mentioned challenges.

Be careful not to let your worries take control

When we worry, it has a major impact on our emotional state and our way of doing things. Thoughts and feelings are closely interlinked, and our sensory perception is also influenced by our emotional impulses and processes. In other words, our feelings affect how we experience things. If, for example, you are feeling down (which would be perfectly natural during times such as these), you may begin to see everything through a negative filter, which will make you even more sad and make it even more difficult to get through these times. Therefore, it is important that we do our best to maintain or restore a good mental balance where we do not let our worries and emotional reactions take complete control of our lives, and it is important to give our brains 'a break' from corona worries.

A healthy 'state of alert'

During periods where we are impacted by various stressors, it is inevitable that our 'state of alert' is heightened. We might also feel that the load of worries and negative thoughts about our health and the health of others has significantly increased. We may also experience intensified physical symptoms such as increased anxiety, our hearts racing, head aches or feeling drained of energy. If you can recognise any of these symptoms, you ought to be extra attentive towards working on your mental well-being.

When we are under pressure and stressed, and perhaps even afraid, we tend to generalise too much. For example, we may think: "Why do good things never happen to me?" or "It is always my fault when something goes wrong". We may also jump to conclusions based on incomplete information, for example: "My payslip didn't arrive in the mail this morning - it must be because I'm fired."

We may also be prone to assume more blame for this virus than we realistically should. For example, thinking: "When I carried my child out of the pram, I forgot to use hand sanitiser first. If she gets sick, it will be my fault now." This phenomenon is called 'personalisation'. An increased state of alert can also mean that we start developing 'catastrophic thinking'. For example: "If I infect someone without knowing I did it, I am responsible for killing other people - the worst possible will happen!"

Train your mental health

The different scenarios describe the kinds of natural reactions that a lot of people are experiencing these days. However, the good news is that there are well-documented ways of working on overcoming such reactions. Whether your worries are about your family, your job, infection or health, here are some good tips for dealing with them:

The six focus areas in this guide are:

1. Accepting the unknown
2. Play to your strengths and opportunities and focus on what energises you
3. Open and honest communication both at work and at home
4. Make sure to develop new routines
5. Prioritise taking breaks
6. Prioritise getting enough sleep.



Accepting the unknown

Accept that the times we are going through now with corona are uncontrollable and uncertain for all of us. This also means accepting that it will be difficult having to live your life differently for a period of time and not knowing how long this will go on for. If you follow the recommendations of the health authorities, you must have faith that you are doing what you can and that you can find a way to thrive.

Avoid spending too much time speculating about the future. Try to limit how much time you spend consuming news about the virus. The corona virus is getting a lot of media coverage, and we do need to stay informed, of course, but try to limit your news intake if you feel that it is getting out of hand. The same goes for your worries about your job, finances or other things. You may have legitimate reasons to worry, but try your best to accept the uncertainty that you are currently faced with. It is not about trying to live your life as if nothing has happened, but you do need to live your life 'despite' the new circumstances you are in. Let worries be worries and try to direct your attention towards the activities that make you happy and focus on what energises you.

Play to your strengths

Focus on opportunities instead of limitations. The current situation has resulted in many of us having limited physical social interactions. Many of us are spending a lot of time at home, and many of our regular social activities have been cancelled. This means that the feedback and reflections that we usually get in our daily lives from, for example, managers, colleagues and friends are limited, and many may begin to question their own abilities, performance and adequacy in a number of areas.

If interacting with people is one of the things you are best at and what energises you, then try the following:

1. Create a good daily routine where you can be social in other ways than usual, for example, using Skype, FaceTime or your phone.
2. Invite your manager to a meeting if you feel like the distance has become too great and you need closer contact or more involvement.

Open and honest communication both at work and at home

It is important that you are open and honest about it if you feel that your mental well-being is challenged. This applies to both at home and at work. Talking about your worries and sharing them with others is important, because that can also help you to change your focus if the worries become overwhelming. Try to work with the following advice:

1. Talk about the uncertainties you are experiencing.
2. Ask those closest to you or ask your manager for perspectives on your thoughts and maybe ask others to help you assess whether you are having realistic expectations of yourself.
3. Express what you need to improve your well-being. For example: "I need for us to stop talking about corona for the rest of the day" or "I need your help to structure my working day."
4. You could, for example, tell your manager: "I worry a lot about my job situation, and I need you to know that I struggle with those thoughts at the moment."
5. Remember that everyone, including your manager and family, are also in a situation where a lot of things are new and different. Therefore, mutual respect and dialogue are key words during these times - they allow us to create new everyday routines together.



Develop new routines

It is important to have a daily routine. A daily routine creates comfort and new habits, and therefore, a daily routine is a fundamental aspect of feeling more in control in an everyday context that is very different from what we are used to.

Habits and routines are developed over the course of many years, and often without us being aware of it. Therefore, they also take a long time to change. New 'pathways' need to be created in the brain, and you have to accept that it can be difficult to find good routines both for working from home and in your private life. But it is possible, so remember that 'practice makes perfect'.

Try to work with the following advice:

1. Establish some fixed routines such as: Organise your work tasks, get a workout routine, do laundry on fixed days, shop at fixed times, make meal plans, do activities with the kids/the family or something else entirely.
2. Use a calendar to create an overview of individual days and weeks. The calendar can help you decide whether you are focused enough on your work, but it can also show you if you are prioritising doing enough good things for yourself and your family in these difficult times.
3. Make a list of things that usually energise you. For example, this could be taking time to read a book, bake a cake or play games with your family. It is also helpful to do this exercise in relation to activities at work and at home.
4. Make it a goal of yours to find out how you can implement at least two activities per day that are only about improving your well-being.
5. You can also read PFA's guide with tips and tricks for 'When you have to work from home.'

Remember to take breaks

When you find that your brain is working overtime, it is important that you prioritise taking breaks during the day. Often, breaks are not a natural occurrence in the home office, particularly if you live alone. It is also difficult to take enough breaks when you have a family and children. Therefore, try to schedule breaks so that your brain can get a much-needed rest during the day and, for example, schedule time for a good lunch or a quiet walk without noise, interruptions or corona updates. Remember - breaks are what your brain needs to recharge. If it is difficult to get your mind to rest, then try some mindfulness exercises or relaxation music and find a way where it actually feels like you are on a real break.

Remember to get enough sleep - it is important!

Sleep is the most important part of maintaining mental well-being, and, these days, you may find it particularly difficult to fall asleep or maybe you wake up several times during the night. Here are some tips that can help improve your sleep.

1. The bedroom should be quiet, dark and not too warm
2. Make sure to air out the room
3. Do not look at TV screens or other digital platforms for a few hours before you go to sleep
4. Avoid drinking tea, coffee, chocolate or coke the last four hours before you go to sleep
5. Create a calm and fixed routine so that your body gets used to winding down.



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