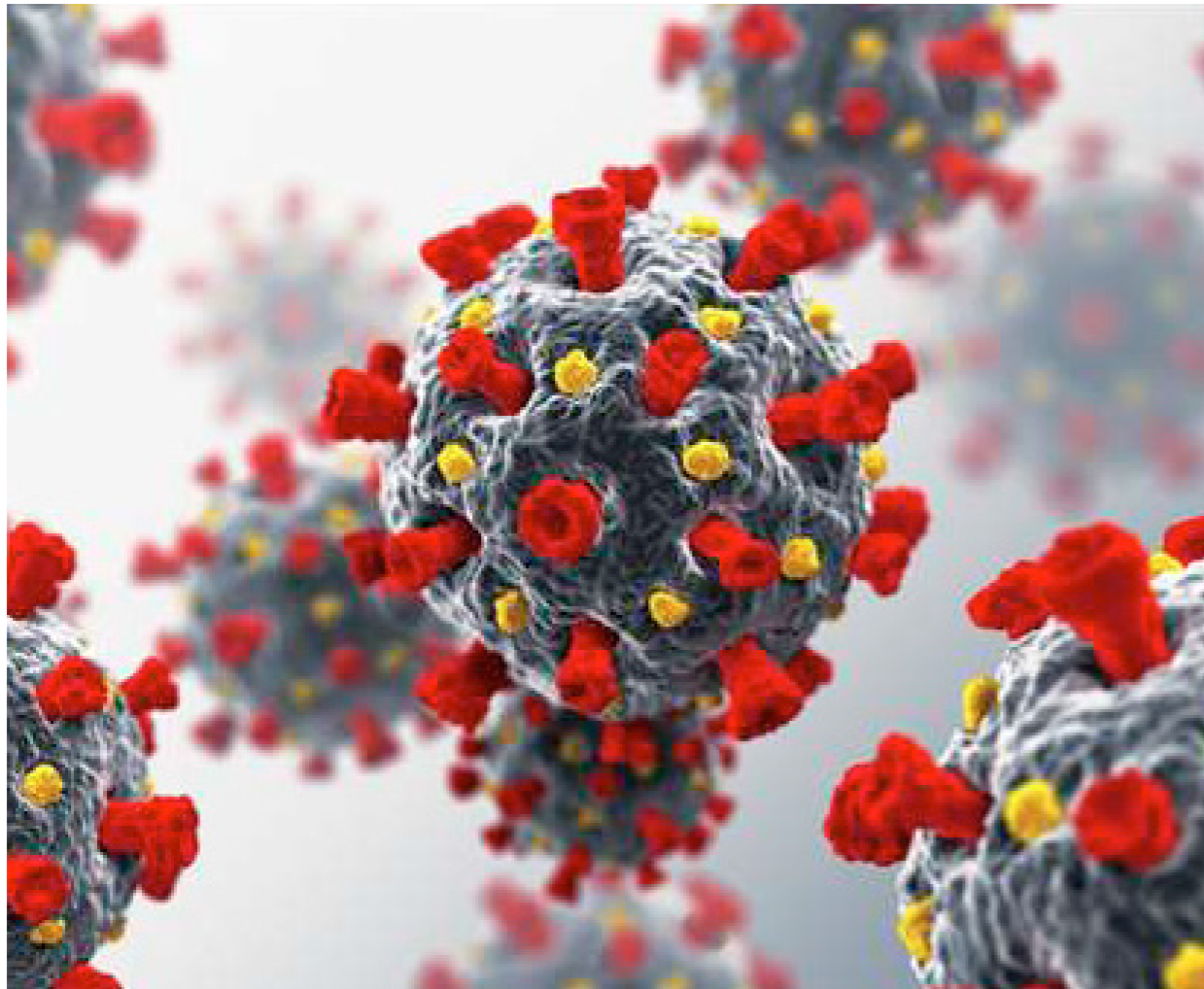


# Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) Strategies to Improve Mental Health during the COVID-19 Pandemic



## What is cognitive behaviour therapy? (CBT)

Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) includes a wide range of evidence-based strategies to improve anxiety and depression. Thousands of scientific trials have supported CBT as an effective treatment for a range of psychological problems.

There are various internet-based CBT programs, websites, and self-help books available as e-books. The resources provided are not complete and do not imply an endorsement, but are examples of resources available.

## Normalise worry and engage in helpful behaviours

It is a normal response to feel concern, anxiety, and worry about the pandemic. Anxiety and worry are natural and adaptive reactions when we face danger. Take action to protect yourself and engage in helpful behaviours to help ease distress.

For more information about the guide,  
please visit our website:

[www.covidcbt.org](http://www.covidcbt.org)



- **Take action to protect yourself:** Take steps to protect yourself from the virus through physical distancing and regular handwashing.
- **Excessive handwashing and concern over germs:** If you notice handwashing has become excessive (for example frequent handwashing numerous times a day while at home over and above what is required), gradually reduce handwashing which is more than required. Adults who have developed excessive handwashing or concerns with germs/contamination see: Challacombe, F., Oldfield, V.B., & Salkovskis, P. (2011). *Break free from OCD: Overcoming obsessive compulsive disorder with CBT*. London, UK: Vermilion, for children and teenagers see: [www.ocdnotme.com.au](http://www.ocdnotme.com.au).
- **Engage in general self-care:** Set regular times to go to bed and wake up, exercise (at home if required), and eat a balanced diet with regular mealtimes. Avoid excessive alcohol and caffeine.
- **Engage in pleasant events:** Pleasant events every day improve mood. Brainstorm activities you enjoy and do them every day. For example, listen to music, watch favourite movies, exercise, cook a nice meal and savour the food, read a book, play board games, keep in contact

with friends and family (via telephone/internet if required). Savour enjoyable experiences by anticipating, enjoying in the moment, and reflecting on afterwards, see ideas for pleasant events: [cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Depression](http://cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Depression)

- **Worry and rumination:** While it is normal to worry and be focusing more on health, take steps to try to manage your worry. Limit the amount of time you worry by setting set aside a limited “worry time” each day. Set a limit on reading about the pandemic on the internet, for example, 30 minutes per day. It is not recommended to read worrying news before bedtime, as it may interfere with sleep.

Accurate information on COVID-19 can be found at: [who.int](http://who.int). For resources to manage worry see: [cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/For-Clinicians/Generalised-Anxiety-and-Worry](http://cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/For-Clinicians/Generalised-Anxiety-and-Worry) and: [psychologytools.com/articles/free-guide-to-living-with-worry-and-anxiety-amidst-global-uncertainty/](http://psychologytools.com/articles/free-guide-to-living-with-worry-and-anxiety-amidst-global-uncertainty/)

- **Health anxiety:** It is normal during the pandemic to have concern over health. If you find this worry is interfering with your life see: [cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Health-Anxiety](http://cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Health-Anxiety). Try to reduce searching about symptoms and health excessively on the internet, or seeking reassurance from your family regarding health.

• **Anxiety over finances:**

Robert Leahy in his article for the WCCBT on [Coping with Covid 19: The Challenges Ahead](#) has suggested the following:

- **Normalise anxiety.** Given high unemployment rates and the economic downturn it is normal to feel worried about finances.
- **Keep a budget.** Review your savings and sources of financial support. For free financial counselling services in WA see: [dlgc.comunities.wa.gov.au/AdviceSupport/Pages/Funded-Services-Directory.aspx](http://dlgc.comunities.wa.gov.au/AdviceSupport/Pages/Funded-Services-Directory.aspx)
- **Challenge your worries.** Focus on what you can still do with less money, and imagine possible ways of coping. For example, the employment market is fluid and ever-changing.
- **Focus on other areas of your life.** Think about what you value, imagining your life as a large pie with pieces of different sizes representing meaningful activities, e.g., a partner, parent, friend, community member, someone who learns, exercise/relaxation, and kindness.
- **What can you do for free?** Think of free activities, e.g., exercise, learn, connect with friends and family, show kindness, and meditate.

• **Engage in problem solving:** Steps to solve problems are:

- (1) identify the problem; name it, and be as precise as you can about the nature and extent of the problem
- (2) Generate potential solutions,
- (3) Decide on a potential solution,
- (4) Plan the chosen solution,
- (5) Carry out the solution,
- (6) Evaluate the result. This may be a useful strategy if you are having difficulty organising yourself while you are working at home.

For example:

- 1 The problem: Procrastination.
- 2 Designate a certain amount of time to work before rewarding self by taking a break.
- 3 Set a timer for 30 minutes of work, then take a short break.
- 4 Get a timer and set it. Sit down to work.
- 5 After 30 minutes, stop and take a break. Get up and move around for a few minutes.
- 6 Did you manage to get some work accomplished during the 30 minutes? How do you feel? Do you need to modify your plan? If so, start again and try it!





## Ease stress and tension, mindfulness and exercise

- **Relaxation Exercises:** Slow, abdominal breathing and progressive muscle relaxation exercises practiced daily can reduce physical tension. There are relaxation apps and self-help books online e.g., [blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://blackdoginstitute.org.au)
- **Meditation and Mindfulness:** Regularly taking time to develop present-focused, non-judgmental awareness (mindfulness) can reduce anxiety and depression. Mindfulness involves a mix of structured meditation exercises (e.g. sitting still and following the flow of your breathing for 10 minutes) and 'informal' exercises where you apply this mindset to everyday activities (e.g. mindful cooking).

Mindfulness reduces anxiety and depression as it helps you accept and let go of upsetting thoughts. Doing a structured program such as the 8-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) or Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) program is a good way to start, see:

- **Oxford Mindfulness Centre's MBCT courses:** <https://www.oxfordmindfulness.org/learn-mindfulness/find-a-course/>

- **UMass Centre for Mindfulness:** <https://www.umassmemorialhealthcare.org/umass-memorial-medical-center/services-treatments/center-for-mindfulness/mindfulness-programs/mbct-8-week-online-live>

- **Palouse Mindfulness free online MBSR program:** <https://palousemindfulness.com/>

You could also use a book with accompanying CDs to practice, see:

- **Williams, M., & Penman, D. (2011).** *Mindfulness: a practical guide to finding peace in a frantic world*, [penguinrandomhouse.com/mindfulness-meditation-downloads/](http://penguinrandomhouse.com/mindfulness-meditation-downloads/)
- **Williams, M., Teasdale, J., Segal, Z., & Kabat-Zinn, J (2007).** *The Mindful Way through Depression: Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness.*

There are also many mindfulness apps e.g.,

- **Insight Timer:** <https://insighttimer.com>
- **Headspace:** <https://www.headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app>
- **Smiling Mind:** <https://www.smilingmind.com.au/mindfulness>
- **Calm:** <https://www.calm.com>

The pandemic has prompted free resources and online forums see:

- **Jon Kabat-Zinn daily livestream of practices and inquiry:** <http://www.wisdom2conference.com/live>
- **Oxford Mindfulness Centre Free Online Mindfulness Sessions & Introductory Course:** <https://www.oxfordmindfulness.org/free-online-mindfulness-course-sessions/>

- **Exercise:** There is evidence that regular exercise can reduce anxiety and depression. Incorporate exercise in your routine, e.g., walking, using apps or online exercise programs, keep a daily diary of exercise to help motivate you, find exercise you enjoy.

## Challenge unhelpful thoughts and take a balanced perspective:

Stressful times often lead to unhelpful thinking, including negative predictions about the current or future situation, focusing on the negative, predicting the worst-case scenario, or pessimistic thinking.

Taking a flexible, balanced and optimistic view of the situation can help ease stress. It is natural to have fears and at the same time, taking a balanced perspective, not assuming the worst, and a long term, optimistic view can help reduce your anxiety. We have survived world crises before and this too shall eventually pass.

There are various thinking styles which can be unhelpful and contribute to feeling anxious and depressed. Some examples include:

**Catastrophising** – Worst case scenario thinking, e.g. *“I will never find a job”*.

**All or nothing thinking** – When you think in an all or nothing way, e.g. *“If I cannot finish the entire task, I may as well not even start it”*.

**Noticing the negative and discounting the positive** - When you focus on negatives and discount positives, e.g., how you feel lonely and disconnected from friends rather than how you might reconnect with them.

**Shoulds** - When we pressure ourselves e.g., *“I should never waste time”*.

**Overgeneralising** – Where you take one behaviour to make negative overall conclusions e.g., *“I didn’t get the job I applied for, I am a failure”*.

### Steps to complete a behavioural experiment:

- 1 Identify an unhelpful thought to test.
- 2 Set up an experiment to test the thought.
- 3 Specify what you think will happen in the experiment (your prediction) and rate how strongly you believe it.
- 4 Describe your feelings and rate how strong they are (0-100).
- 5 Record the results of the experiment.
- 6 Develop a revised belief based on the evidence you have found.

## Challenging unhelpful thinking with thought records

Try challenging negative thinking using these steps with the example worksheet

### A: Activating event

Record what was happening at the time you felt bad.

### B: Beliefs

Ask yourself, *“What was going through my mind?”*

Rate the belief (0 = not at all, 100 = completely believe it). Identify unhelpful thinking styles.

### C: Consequences

Ask yourself, *“What was I feeling?”* e.g., angry, sad, anxious and rate the belief (0 = not at all, 100 = strongest feeling possible).

### D: Disputation

Ask yourself questions to view it in a more helpful way e.g. *“What would a friend say about this thought?”*, *“How else could I view this?”*.

A Activating Event	B Beliefs	C Consequences	D Disputation	E Evaluate outcome
What was going on at the time? (situation thought, image, memory)	What went through my mind? Rate 0-100% Which unhelpful thinking styles am I using	What was I feeling? Rate 0-100%	Is there another way of viewing it? What advice would I give to a friend?	How do I feel now? Rate 0-100%
(eg thinking about feeling isolated and lonely)	(eg I feel lonely, I will never have a good group of friends - overgeneralising)	(eg Sad - 90%)	(eg I do have a few friends but lost contact during lockdown)	(eg Sad-30%- I can reconnect with friends)

## Challenging unhelpful thoughts with behavioural experiments

Behavioural experiments are very good for challenging negative thoughts. Test your negative predictions to find out what happens when you behave in a different way.

# Behavioural Experiment Worksheet

**Prediction:**

(eg because I did not get the last job from the interview, I will not get this one)

**Unhelpful thought:**

(eg I will never find a job)

**Results:**

(eg Applied for jobs, have been short listed for interview from one application)

**Experiment:**

(eg apply for five jobs)

**Revised belief:**

(eg It is not true that I will never find a job, times are tough but I will find a job)

## Resources for pregnancy and the perinatal period:

COVID-19 Perinatal Mental Health Resources  
<https://marcesociety.com/covid-19-perinatal-mental-health-resources/>

## Resources for children and teenagers:

Children are anxious about COVID-19. We encourage you not to let them watch media about the pandemic, especially without some discussion about what they understand.

The following website provides strategies for children: [mq.edu.au/COVID-19-weve-got-this-covered](http://mq.edu.au/COVID-19-weve-got-this-covered)! Tips include listening to your anxious child while avoiding giving excessive reassurance, focus on ways your child has been courageous before with anxiety, and be a calm role model for your child in coping. If your child is feeling depressed check regularly how they are feeling, spend one-on-one time with them, focus on pleasant events, balance screen use with daily physical activity away from screens and encourage social connections.

The following websites also provide advice:

- [emergingminds.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID19\\_advice-for-parents-and-carers\\_20.3\\_.pdf](http://emergingminds.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID19_advice-for-parents-and-carers_20.3_.pdf)
- [bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/talking-children-about-coronavirus](http://bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/talking-children-about-coronavirus)
- Information booklet explaining coronavirus for children: [mindheart.co/descargables](http://mindheart.co/descargables)



## The following websites provide information on CBT for anxiety and depression in youth:

- A list of CBT e-books for children: [reading-well.org.uk/children](http://reading-well.org.uk/children)
- A list of CBT e-books for teenagers: [reading-well.org.uk/books/books-on-prescription/young-people-mental-health](http://reading-well.org.uk/books/books-on-prescription/young-people-mental-health)
- Cool kids online therapy for anxiety in youth: [mq.edu.au/about/campus-services-and-facilities/hospital-and-clinics/centre-for-emotional-health-clinic/programs-for-children-and-teenagers/online-treatment-accordions/cool-kids-online](http://mq.edu.au/about/campus-services-and-facilities/hospital-and-clinics/centre-for-emotional-health-clinic/programs-for-children-and-teenagers/online-treatment-accordions/cool-kids-online)
- Youth Beyond Blue: [youthbeyondblue.com/](http://youthbeyondblue.com/)



- Online therapy for youth with anxiety in Australia: [brave-online.com/](http://brave-online.com/)
- Online therapy for obsessive-compulsive symptoms in youth: [ocdnotme.com.au](http://ocdnotme.com.au).
- ReachOut has online support and resources to help teenagers and their parents: [au.reachout.com/](http://au.reachout.com/)
- Cathy Creswell & Lucy Willetts (2007). *Overcoming Your Child's Fears and Worries*. Constable & Robinson.
- Ron Rapee, Ann Wignall, Sue Spence and Heidi Lyneham (2008). *Helping Your Anxious Child: A Step-by-Step Guide for Parents*, 2nd edition. New Harbinger Publications.



## Resources for parents/carers of children with a disability during COVID-19

Parents and carers of children with a developmental disability, such as autism, intellectual disability, or cerebral palsy, face a number of additional challenges during the pandemic. For instance, these children may find it more difficult to understand changes in routine or social distancing. See:

- [Stepping Stones Triple P Guide: Parenting children with a disability during COVID-19](#)
- [Supporting children with diverse needs. Parenting in a Pandemic Podcast](#)
- [raisingchildren.net.au/guides/coronavirus-covid-19-guide/coronavirus-physical-distancing-disability](#)

## Resources for older adults during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented particular challenges for older adults so it is understandable to feel stressed.

See: <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/advice-for-people-at-risk-of-coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-older-people>, or phone the national COVID-19 support line for older adults on 1800 171 866.

- **Do pleasant events daily:** Reflect on what you like and brainstorm alternatives if required, see: <https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Depression>
- **Maintain social connections:** It is important to maintain social connections to prevent social distancing becoming social isolation. Some older adults may be able to continue social activities outside home while social distancing, others may need to use telephone/internet.
- **Challenging unhelpful thoughts:** While it is true older adults are at higher risk from negative outcomes of COVID-19, most recover, to help balance your worries see: [psychology.org.au/getmedia/97749742-7030-40a0-945e-d91834b418cc/20APS-IS-COVID-19-Public-Older-adults-P3.pdf](https://psychology.org.au/getmedia/97749742-7030-40a0-945e-d91834b418cc/20APS-IS-COVID-19-Public-Older-adults-P3.pdf)







## Self-help books

Many self-help books are available in an online format, some examples include:

- NHS Reading Well (formerly Books on Prescription) [reading-well.org.uk](http://reading-well.org.uk): This website contains a list of evidence-based CBT books for anxiety and depression.
- The Overcoming series: There are numerous self-help books on CBT listed on the website: [overcoming.co.uk](http://overcoming.co.uk)

### General CBT Resources

#### CBT Resources to manage anxiety and worry:

These websites have information about managing worry and anxiety:

[cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/For-Clinicians/Generalised-Anxiety-and-Worry](http://cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/For-Clinicians/Generalised-Anxiety-and-Worry)

[cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Health-Anxiety](http://cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Health-Anxiety)

#### An example of CBT self-help books for adults (search the web for e-books):

- Abramowitz, J.S. (2018). *Getting over OCD: A 10-step workbook for taking back your life*, 2nd ed. New York: Guilford Press.
- Antony, M.M., & Norton, P.J. (2009). *The anti-anxiety workbook: Proven strategies to overcome worry, panic, phobias, and obsessions*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Asmundson, G.J.G., & Taylor, S. (2005). *It's not all in your head: How worrying about your health could be making you sick – and what you can do about it*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Clark, D.A., & Beck, A.T. (2012). *The anxiety and worry workbook: The cognitive-behavioral solution*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Gilbert, P. (2009). *Overcoming depression: A self-help guide using cognitive-behavioural techniques*. London, UK: Little Brown Book Group.
- Greenberger, D., & Padesky, C.A. (2016). *Mind over mood*, 2nd ed. New York: Guilford Press.
- Kennerley, H. (2014). *Overcoming anxiety: A self-help guide using cognitive-behavioural techniques*, 2nd edition. London, UK: Little Brown Book Group.
- Owens, K.M.B., & Antony, M.M. (2011). *Overcoming health anxiety: Letting go of your fear of illness*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- Manicavasagar, V., & Silove, D. (2017). *Overcoming panic: A self-help guide using cognitive-behavioural techniques*, 2nd edition. London, UK: Little Brown Book Group.
- Meares, K., & Freeston, M. (2015). *Overcoming worry and generalised anxiety disorder*, 2nd edition. London, UK: Little Brown Book Group (LBBG).
- Myles, P., & Shafran, R. (2015). *The CBT handbook: A comprehensive guide to using CBT to overcome depression, anxiety, stress, low self-esteem and anger*. London, UK: LBBG.
- Robichaud, M.R., & Buhr, K. (2018). *The Worry Workbook: CBT skills to overcome worry and anxiety by facing the fear of uncertainty*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- Veale, D., & Wilson, R. (2009). *Overcoming health anxiety: A self-help guide using cognitive-behavioural techniques*. London, UK: Little Brown Book Group.

## Websites offering CBT information and treatment

### Australia

- Information on CBT: AACBT - [aacbt.org](http://aacbt.org) and WCCBT - [wccbt.org](http://wccbt.org).
- [Headtohealth.gov.au](http://Headtohealth.gov.au) – information about online mental health resources.
- Anxiety online: [anxietyonline.org.au](http://anxietyonline.org.au) – online information about anxiety.
- Mindspot Clinic: [mindspot.org.au](http://mindspot.org.au) (phone 1800 61 44 34) – online assessment and CBT for anxiety and depression.
- The Centre for Clinical Interventions: [cci.health.wa.gov.au](http://cci.health.wa.gov.au) – online resources for anxiety and depression
- Beyond Blue coronavirus mental wellbeing support service (phone 1800 512 348) - information and support 24/7, coronavirus webchat support service: [coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au](http://coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au)
- Virtual clinic: [virtualclinic.org.au](http://virtualclinic.org.au) - online CBT for anxiety and depression.
- Black Dog Institute: [blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://blackdoginstitute.org.au)
- E-Mental Health in Practice: [emhprac.org.au](http://emhprac.org.au) – information on online mental health services in Australia.

### UK

- Get self help - A UK website offering CBT resources: [getselfhelp.co.uk/](http://getselfhelp.co.uk/)
- British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Therapies: [babcp.com](http://babcp.com) - Information on CBT
- Find a CBT therapist in the UK: [cbtregisteruk.com/Default.aspx](http://cbtregisteruk.com/Default.aspx).
- Anxiety UK: [anxietyuk.org.uk/](http://anxietyuk.org.uk/) and [nopanick.org](http://nopanick.org) - Information on anxiety
- OCD-UK: [ocduk.org](http://ocduk.org) and OCD Action: [ocdaction.org.uk](http://ocdaction.org.uk) - Information on OCD
- Depression alliance: [depressionalliance.org](http://depressionalliance.org)- Information on depression
- MindEd: [minded.org.uk](http://minded.org.uk) - Resources on youth mental health
- National Health Service - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cognitive-behavioural-therapy-cbt/>
- Living life to the full - <https://littf.com>

## Crisis and other Services – Australia

- 000 for emergency services (police, ambulance, firefighters)
- Consult your General practitioner
- **Mental Health Emergency Response Line Western Australia (WA)** (staffed by mental health professionals)
  - Perth Metro residents: 1300 555 788
  - Peel Residents: 1800 676 822
- **Rurallink:** specialist after hours mental health telephone service for the rural communities of Western Australia, phone: 1800 552 002
- **Suicide Call Back Service:** 1300 659 467 (free counselling 24/7)
- **Suicide crisis text line** 0477 13 11 14 (crisis support via text)
- **National sexual assault, domestic family violence counselling service** [1800respect.org.au](http://1800respect.org.au): 1800 737 732
- **COVID-19 advice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples:** [health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/advice-for-people-at-risk-of-coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples-and-remote-communities](http://health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/advice-for-people-at-risk-of-coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples-and-remote-communities)
- **Mental Health advice for people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds** <https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-multi-fact>

Prepared by Dr Sarah Egan, School of Psychology, Curtin University, Perth, Australia

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