



Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Social and Emotional Wellbeing, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

Staying healthy and strong during the coronavirus outbreak

Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia acknowledges and pays respect to Elders, both past and present and all generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples now and into the future as the Traditional Owners of this land.

We are all feeling worried and stressed about the coronavirus. Our lives are changing in many ways, and we have to prepare ourselves. Life won't be the same until the virus is under control, but with the right information and a sensible approach, the road ahead can be easier and less stressful. To stay mentally strong, here are some tips:

1. Staying healthy - Be informed the right way

We need to know what the health experts are saying and follow their advice. Knowing what to do is important - not just to stay physically healthy, but to help bring peace of mind and stop unnecessary worry. However, do limit how much time you spend on news and social media for your own wellbeing.

We need to protect ourselves and our families as well as stopping the virus from spreading in the community. The virus spreads mostly by the sneezing and coughing into the air and onto surfaces that other people touch. But you can also feel OK and still be infected and spread it to others. Every person has a part to play so learn what is right for you.

What we know is that the following are important things we can do to control the spread of the virus:

- Staying indoors and only going out if it's unavoidable – to get food if you can't order it in, or go to school or work if you can't do these things remotely. In particular, any Indigenous person over 50 years of age or with a chronic condition has been advised by the Australian Government to remain indoors and practice social isolation.

Coronavirus Emergency Contact Numbers

If you feel unwell, have a fever or sore throat, PLEASE do not go to the medical centre/family clinic or the hospital. Instead, contact the following for instructions:

- **ACT Health:** 02 6205 2155
- **NSW Health:** 1300 066 055
- **SA Health:** 1300 232 272
- **TAS Health:** 1800 671 738
- **QLD Health:** 13 432 584
- **VIC Health:** 1300 651 160
- **WA Health:** 08 922 8588
- **Northern Territory helpline:** 1800 008 002
- **National helpline:** 1800 020 080

- If you have to go out, the Australian Government requires you not mix in groups larger than two people - if the people are not part of your household - and the advice is to keep two big steps away from the other person.
- Calling your doctor or health service to find out how to access telehealth or other remote health services for any non-virus-related health issues you have rather than visiting. If you think you or a household member might have the coronavirus, follow the instructions in the text box.
- Avoiding visiting Elders, any Indigenous person over 50 years of age, or Indigenous person with a chronic condition, pregnant women and anyone else who may be at risk. There are ways to connect or help without having contact.

Further:

- Avoiding touching anything the virus might be on. Clean and disinfect surfaces or objects that might have come into contact with the virus
- Trying not to touch your face. This will stop the virus spreading from your hands to your mouth, nose or eyes, where it can enter your body
- Washing your hands often with soap and warm water if possible.
- Coughing into your elbow or into a clean tissue, then throwing the tissue in the bin, and washing your hands
- Not sharing drinks or smokes, and washing cups after use.

The following are useful, reliable sources of information about the coronavirus:

- The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation’s coronavirus updates: <https://www.naccho.org.au/home/aboriginal-health-alets-coronavirus-covid-19/>
- The National Coronavirus Helpline - The line is free and operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week - [1800 020 080](tel:1800020080)
- The Australian Government [COVID-19 news and media](#) website. See also a range of government of [COVID-19 resources](#) including the Coronavirus Australia app – downloadable from the [Apple App Store](#). You can also join its [WhatsApp channel](#) on [iOS](#) or [Android](#).
- Different governments are also doing different things, and some have made laws to control the spread of the virus that you should know about. You can find up to date information at: <https://www.australia.gov.au/#state-government>

Staying strong....

2. Be practical and prepared as things change

It's good to think ahead more than usual at this time. There's no need to hoard things, but have some back-up food and supplies in storage, And, if you rely on a medication, have an extra script filled for peace of mind. Make sure the car is registered and so on. Make a list or keep a calendar of all the things you need to know about for the next 1-3 months like medical appointments or bills to pay. Keep a list of important phone numbers or contacts and help others to do the same, especially older people who may become more isolated or stressed during this time.

3. It's OK to be stressed and worried

It's OK to be stressed and worried about the virus. It's normal to want to protect our families, communities and cultures. What's not so good is to bottle it up. It's better to recognise how we are feeling, talk about our fears and worries and get it off our chest. That way we can build up our strengths. Remember, we are all in this together. And if you get really down or feel upset all the time, seek support from a friend, family, health worker or doctor, including talking to a doctor or counsellor on by phone, Skype or by video-link (see a list of free services at the end of this tip sheet). The Australian Government has also established a website to connect people to mental health support:

<https://headtohealth.gov.au/>.

4. Have hope – this won't last forever

At some time, the virus will come under control and life will return to something like normal. It's important to remember this and have hope, even as we prepare to cope with what is ahead. Staying at home, not seeing our Elders, behaving differently - it may last a month, it may last many months, but it will end. Keep a focus on all the good things you can do to stay healthy in mind, body and spirit.

5. Our culture keeps us strong

As peoples, we have faced many, many battles before and survived. Think about our ancestors' strengths and where we have come from. Think about your strengths too, and those of the people around you. Focus on what makes you, your family and community strong for the journey ahead. Culture is stronger than the virus - even though our roles and responsibilities might be challenged by the need to stay indoors and physically apart from each other. We can still be culturally, spiritually and socially connected. Do what you can to keep culture strong, and let culture keep you strong. There might be opportunities too – the time to learn language, stories or dances or to learn from Elders in ways that don't involve visiting them and putting their health at risk. Remember, our ancestors are always with us.

6. Take time away from the news and social media

It's important to stay informed, but if the news or TV is stressing you out turn it off for a while. And make sure what you're reading and watching is reliable, so you don't waste time worrying about things that aren't true. You may need to help your kids with this too. Redirect their time and attention to things that help.

7. Keep in touch with friends and family

When you are outside, you need to keep two big steps away from other people to stop the virus spreading, and you shouldn't visit other people. But you can still yarn on the phone, on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Messenger and so on. Keep in touch that way. And if you need to talk to an Elder or older person, call them – don't visit! Share things with friends and family or connect as a group together online. Be creative, share recipes, try a cooking or exercise challenge with friends, share stories, have a laugh and keep connecting.

8. Get some fresh air and exercise

Try to get some fresh air. Go for a walk if permitted but remember to keep at least two big steps from anyone outside. If you've got a garden or balcony - use it. If you can't go out, find new ways to exercise at home – it will help with the stress. There are plenty of work out, yoga and exercise videos on-line – search video sites like YouTube until you find one you like.

9. Eat well

Think about what you're eating and try and eat well - plenty of fruit and vegetables, can make a big difference to how you feel. Some foods also help to boost your immune system so try some new foods or recipes. Websites with plenty of healthy recipe ideas can be found at the end of this tip sheet.

10. Be creative or learn something new

Get into playing music, singing, storytelling, dancing and creativity to reduce your stress and keep your spirit strong. Make a deadly playlist. Draw, paint, write, create something new like a garden. Talk to your Elders over the phone and learn about the music and stories of Country. Take up a hobby. Use the time to grow and learn. When we are creative, it takes our mind away from our worries and helps us to be innovative and to heal. It can give us joy in difficult times. This is especially important for children.

11. Chill out

You might find yoga, meditation and mindfulness helpful, and there's also dadirri – the deep, spiritual reflection that our mob have been doing for thousands of years. They bring the body and mind together through breathing, physical relaxation or silent listening. To find out more see: <https://www.miriamrosefoundation.org.au/about-dadirri>.

Sometimes it is hard to switch off and relax when you feel really stressed. Some people find it easier to do something active first and then chill.

12. Keep the kids happy

Check in with your kids regularly but especially if they're behaving differently. Kids get stressed too. Talk to them about what they're hearing and how they are feeling about the virus. Let them ask questions, be honest with them but explain things in a child friendly way. Take a bit of extra time to let them know you're there to keep them safe. If they're worried about grandparents or family, putting them on the phone for a yarn can make everyone feel better. And of course, be clear about what kids should do, like washing their hands, to stay healthy. Kids will feel better if they also know what they can do to help, like cleaning up or

helping with the younger kids. Don't fill up too much of their time with activities, give them some space to explore and be creative as well. But do spend good time together, playing, singing, reading and give reassurance when necessary. Try and keep routines as much as possible and especially for mealtimes and sleep. Sometimes kids need time away from all the tensions in the house so use distraction, stories or games to keep them happy.

13. Keep Elders happy

It is our way to make sure Elders are doing okay. So, it's important we protect them and make sure they don't get the virus. It's tough, but for most of us that means staying away, and keeping the kids away, until the virus is under control. It's better to speak on the phone, by Facetime or Skype. And you can leave groceries or medicine for them at the front door too if they need it. They need to know they're safe, you're safe and that you're there for them.

14. Keep Yourself happy

Our people are good at looking after everyone else but not so good at looking after ourselves. Take some time out to make sure you are ok. Do things that make you feel good and build your strength. If you are strong and happy, this will help others to do the same, especially kids.

15. Be kind to others

Everyone will be stressed at a time like this. We're all sharing the worry and dealing with the virus in our own way. And most of us are stuck indoors and seeing the same people day in and day out. People may react in unexpected ways when stressed. Try and understand how they are feeling and see if you can help. It's important to put yourself in the place of others at this time, to keep as calm as we can, and be as kind as we can. But it's also important to recognise and tell your family when you need time out and accept that others do also. If problems are serious, extra help may be required. Don't let things get out of hand.

16. Find and give space and respect

Wherever you can, make some part of where you live your own space –a small corner, a chair, or a room. Add a plant, a cushion, whatever makes you calm and happier. Create your own space and respect other people's need for space as well. If you like listening to music or watching TV, try using headphones to keep the noise down for others. If you're working from home, try to set up a separate space so you can feel the difference between work and home.

17. Create a Stay Strong Plan

Think about all the things that keep you and your family strong and what you might need to help. Learn some new ways to talk about what is going on with the family. Make sure you check in with everyone and see how they are going. Do a check on yourself, how are you going? What do you need so you can stay strong to help others? Plan with family or friends what you will do once the virus is under control – go on a holiday, go to the beach, have a party or catch up with your grannies....

And finally...

18. Don't let money worries get on top of you

You may have new or additional money worries until the virus is under control. It's ok to get some support, many people will be in the same boat. If you feel like you need help paying the rent or bills, or affording food and essentials, talk to someone for free advice at <https://ndh.org.au/> and find out more about Australian Government financial supports at: <https://www.servicessaustralia.gov.au/individuals/subjects/payments-and-support-for-indigenous-australians>

19. Cut back on smoking

It's important to keep your lungs strong and healthy because the lungs are particularly vulnerable to virus infection. Despite the added stress, aim to cut back or quit if you can. Now might be a great time to chat with Quitline or download the MyQuitBuddy app (links are at the end of this tipsheet). But if you have to smoke, wash your hands with soap as much as possible because otherwise you could be transferring the virus from your hands to your mouth with the cigarettes. It is also important to not smoke inside or around kids and family to keep them and their lungs healthy.

20. Think before you drink

In times of stress, it might feel normal to reach for a drink. But think first – How might my drinking affect others in the house? Is drinking becoming the main way I am coping with the coronavirus? Talk to your doctor or health service if this is the case. It might be the time to start thinking about how to cope better and get your wellbeing back on track

FURTHER RESOURCES

Please note that Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia is not a provider of mental health services or counselling. If you need help or would like to talk to someone please phone or talk online to the following:

National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation	Online list of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and links to websites and contact details	https://www.naccho.org.au/member-services/naccho-member-services/
Beyond Blue	Talk for free to a trained mental health professional. Calls are confidential.	1300 22 46 36
Lifeline	24-hour free crisis support telephone service. Lifeline provides 24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention services.	131 114

Kids Helpline

Free telephone counselling support line for children and young people ages 5 to 25

1800 551 800

e-headspace

Free Online mental health support for young people - available 9am – 1am (Melbourne time) 7 days a week.

<https://headspace.org.au/eheadspace/>

1800 – RESPECT

Free and open 24 hours to support people impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse

1800 737 732

Finally, remember to dial **000** in an emergency where you or someone you know is in immediate danger, or go to your nearest hospital emergency department.

Other useful links:

- Emerging minds - resources to support children and reduce worry and distress: <https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/supporting-children-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/>
- Headspace has a webpage aimed at younger people: 'How to cope with stress related to Coronavirus': <https://headspace.org.au/young-people/how-to-cope-with-stress-related-to-covid-19/>
- For healthy recipes:
 - https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/images/uploads/publications/4423_HF__Koori_Cookbook_FA_WEB.pdf
 - <https://www.makehealthynormal.nsw.gov.au/food/healthy-recipes>
- For the National Debt Helpline's coronavirus financial survival guide: <https://ndh.org.au/debt-problems/covid19/>
- Australian Indigenous Doctors Association: <https://www.aida.org.au/covid-19/>
- Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association: <http://www.indigenoupsychology.com.au/>
- The My QuitBuddy app: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/my-quitbuddy-app>
- Call Quitline on **13 78 48** and ask to speak to an Indigenous counsellor.
- Australian Government's Australian health sector response to the coronavirus as it relates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020/03/management-plan-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-populations.pdf>

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