

Self-care tips for media reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic

Mindframe and the Dart Centre Asia Pacific have developed this resource to support media professionals who have been covering COVID-19 and its impacts on mental health for almost 18 months.

As we enter the second half of 2021, we are all experiencing some form of “pandemic fatigue,” with feelings of stress, anxiety, low energy, irritability and hopelessness. This includes media professionals.

It is important that journalists and others working in the media focus on their mental health and wellbeing, especially as they continue to report daily on COVID-19 and its impacts for our communities.

Finding a way to replenish that works for you

It's important to take proactive opportunities to maintain your wellbeing. Identify and practice the self-care strategies that work for you:

- Take a break – make time to do things that you enjoy but may have been putting off
- Get sweaty – regular exercise is great for mental health
- Reach out to people who may be isolated or on their own, let them know you care
- Seek professional support when you need it, and encourage others to do the same

Source: National Mental Health Commission

Wellbeing while working through COVID-19

Pandemic fatigue can contribute to prolonged stress from lack of sleep, or from producing multiple stories about people who are impacted or traumatised. Ensure you make time to switch off from work, your device, and from consuming COVID-related stories after work.

Set schedules for yourself that delineate your work time and social time. If you are working from home in lock-down, set some boundaries between work and home. This might include getting out of your pyjamas and ‘going to work’ in a different room to the one you sleep in.

Part of staying healthy and remaining focused on the job is remembering to take good care of yourself by eating well, drinking water, sleeping regularly, taking breaks and exercising.

Know your limits and stress triggers. Have a plan as to how you will manage them when they arise.

Your efforts to prioritise your mental health can make it easier for others to do the same. Others might see you taking breaks, and do the same. If you reach out to a colleague, they might be encouraged to do the same for someone they know.

Social support promotes resilience. Look out for your colleagues who may be fatigued or struggling. Tell them that you have noticed a change, ask them how they are and encourage them to take action.

Covering a story on the mental health impacts of COVID-19

Looking after yourself

It is useful to evaluate psychological as well as physical risks before starting an emotionally demanding assignment. If covering a story on COVID-19 and mental ill-health or suicide, it would assist to discuss the possible emotional, physical and logistical risks you may encounter with your editor, manager or trusted peer.

Plan your reporting schedule and decide when you will do your toughest work or in-depth interviews. If possible, do as much of this emotionally intense work as early in the story as you can, when you are less tired.

If you are feeling distressed at any time, talk to someone you trust. This might be a peer or colleague who understands you. The Dart Centre also has a network of experienced journalists available to chat with as a peer support person if needed.

Accurate and helpful reporting

Refer to the *Mindframe* guidelines, or make contact with the *Mindframe* team, if you need guidance on reporting mental illness, alcohol and other drugs or suicide. Your stories can make a big difference to the community.

Be on the lookout for opportunities to promote information on ways that people can manage the mental health and wellbeing impacts of COVID-19. Use information and tips from trusted sources, such as the National Mental Health Commission or other recognised national and local organisations.

Stories about recovery or things that have worked for people experiencing mental ill-health during the COVID-19 pandemic can be particularly helpful.

Recognising trauma

A trauma reaction is a common response to an event that includes 'any threat, actual or perceived, to the life or physical safety of a person, their loved ones or those around them.' Indirect trauma or vicarious trauma may result from working with survivors of trauma such as death or illness from COVID-19.

Emotional and physical responses to witnessing a traumatic event can include:

- Upsetting dreams or sleeplessness
- Recurring reminders of the event
- Being easily startled
- Sweating, rapid heartbeat, dizziness or nausea.

When to seek professional support

These reactions are normal and usually pass after some days or weeks. If they continue for longer than three to four weeks, or at any stage feel overwhelming, journalists should seek professional help. Warning signs may include:

- Being unable to handle the intense feelings or physical sensations
- Feeling numb and empty
- Continuing to experience strong distressing emotions
- Continuing to have physical symptoms of being tense, agitated and on edge
- Continuing to have disturbed sleep and/or nightmares
- Having no one to support you and with whom you can share your feelings and emotions
- Having relationship problems with friends, family and colleagues
- Increasing your use of alcohol or drugs.

Support services

Adult

Lifeline: 13 11 14

lifeline.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467

suicidecallbackservice.org.au

Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636

beyondblue.org.au/forums

MensLine Australia: 1300 789 978

mensline.org.au

Youth

Kids Helpline: 1800 551 800

kidshelpline.com.au

headspace: 1800 650 890

headspace.org.au

ReachOut: ReachOut.com

Other resources

Head to Health: mental health portal

headtohealth.gov.au

Life in Mind: suicide prevention portal

lifeinmind.org.au

SANE: online forums saneforums.org

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander: healthinonet.ecu.edu.au

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and/or intersex: 1800 184 527 qlife.org.au

Culturally and linguistically diverse: embracementalhealth.org.au

Read more

[Dart Centre – Covering Coronavirus: Resources for Journalists](#)

[Dart Centre - Tips for News Managers: Covering Pandemics](#)

[Mindframe – Providing help-seeking information](#)

[Mindframe – Resources and information for media](#)

Contact us

For media comment or expert advice on media reporting on COVID-19 and mental illness, contact:

Mindframe: mindframe@health.nsw.gov.au or (02) 4924 6900

Dart Centre: kimina.lyall@dartaspac.org