

Staying safe online during covid-19

May 2020

Bored? Anxious or worried? Pornography? Risk?

During this period of lockdown, you may find you are using the internet to fill the gaps where you would have been out and about. You may find it is becoming a larger and more important part of your life or that you are using the internet and/or pornography as a way of coping with negative feelings, isolation and stress.

This guide offers some tips that can help you in finding positive ways of coping and in managing your behaviour online. It invites you to draw up a personal internet safety plan or review an existing plan considering your situation in COVID-19 lockdown. An internet safety plan is a contract with **yourself** to make your use of the internet as safe as possible. This means taking steps to avoid situations where there is an increased likelihood of making risky or inappropriate decisions.



Motivation

Some people find it helpful to have visual cues to remind them how essential it is to keep safe on the internet. This could be through photographs or pictures either close to your device or on the screen itself as the background or screen saver.

Remember the positive things that are important to you – this can help you to feel better and remind you of what you may lose if you committed another crime.

Keep in mind that the police and online safety groups are ever watchful.

It can also be helpful to remind yourself that we'll get through – this time will pass.



Staying well

It is natural to be experiencing difficult thoughts and feelings during this time. There is likely to be a sense of uncertainty, threat, unfairness and loss. Normal emotional responses may include distress, anxiety, euphoria; anger, dark humour; sadness, guilt, shame and shock. It is also normal for these feelings to affect our thinking in different ways, including distraction, loss of focus, irritability, feeling slow, confused or shut down.

Men often link their online offending to the experience of such emotions and states of mind; pornography and masturbation being a means of escape and stress-relief. Therefore, finding positive ways to attend to your physical and mental well-being may be important for staying safe online during this period.

Talking to someone can help

Talking things through with someone or even just venting to a friend has been shown to help ease the physical tension that we get from worrying and having problems. Talking can also improve physical health

and overall well-being. You never know, talking it through with someone might also help you think of positive changes you can make. There are a range of people available to talk to:

- your social worker
- a social support
- a confidential helpline like Stop it now! - call 0808 100 900
- the Samaritans - call 116 123

TALK TO US
If things are getting to you
116 123 FREE
This number is FREE to use round the clock
SAMARITANS

stop it now! 0808 1000 900
A Stop It Now! helpline operator
"We're here to support anyone worried about their own sexual thoughts or behaviour, or that of a loved one."
Together we can prevent

Other ways to de-stress and relax

There are a range of advice and support agencies to help with mental health, as well an ever-expanding range of self-help resources to assist with relaxation and positive thinking.

If you are concerned about your mental health, you can speak to your social worker for advice on how to get help and support and you can browse a list of [mental health advice lines](#).

If you find yourself struggling to sleep these online information sheets can be helpful

- [facts about sleep](#)
- [information on worry and difficulties sleeping](#)
- [tips for sleep hygiene](#)

The NHS 'One You' website also lists a [range of free to download apps](#), including ones designed to help with relaxation, mindfulness and positive-thinking. Highly recommended.

You will also find some [information sheets](#) on ways of calming the mind and body at the end of this pack.



Need for activity and stimulation

This is likely to be a challenge right now. You may be feeling bored and lacking stimulation. Here are some ideas for staying physically active and/or mentally stimulated with some tips drawn from an article around coping during extreme isolation – try to:

- establish a routine to your day
- balance your use of internet-enabled entertainment (streaming-media; podcasts; gaming platforms, etc) with creative hobbies and pursuits that can be done on your own away from the screen.
- ration your news consumption.

If you find yourself lacking inspiration, there is an [online worksheet](#) that can help you to think about how to set goals that align with your values:

Exercise – the benefits of exercise to physical and mental well-being are well established. Fitness tracker

Need to connect with other people?

Many people are finding that their normal social support network of family and friends has been significantly disrupted during lockdown, or maybe you were already feeling socially isolated.

Your social worker can help you to think about your social supports and ways in which you may reconnect or discover new opportunities.

During lockdown smart phones and other devices are a great relief and enable us to stay socially connected. Consider how you can do this safely.

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apps can be downloaded to your phone and can really help to stay motivated. NHS has helpful [videos of indoor workouts](#).

Cooking – find your inner chef. A great way to be creative and healthy. Simple recipe ideas are available via the downloadable Easy Meals app.

Volunteering - can be a great way to find a sense of purpose and give something back to the community. Discuss with your social worker if this is an option for you. For information and ideas see [Volunteer Scotland's website](#).

Expand the mind – there are lots of opportunities and ways to expand the mind online, from virtual tours of museums to education and skills courses. Chatter Pack offers a really [good directory](#).

Use of social media

Your social worker can help you with any questions you might have as to any conditions restricting your use. Staying safe might also require you to consider your own privacy and account-settings, as well as being aware of the risks of contacting individuals with little knowledge of their true-identity.



Sexual needs – achieving healthy sexual functioning

Masturbation has been shown to be a normal part of sexual development and can have positive benefits, including:

- improved mood
- better sleep
- stress and tension relief.

However, as with many pleasurable things in life moderation is key. There are a significant number of men whose use of pornography or online sexual chat and masturbation becomes problematic. In this case, it may be that abstaining from pornography and masturbation, at least for a while, might also lead to the benefits mentioned above. Or, how about rationing yourself to a couple of days per week.

As they say, “don’t add fuel to the fire”

Although mainstream pornography sites may not contain illegal material, this doesn’t mean it is all healthy eg simulated violence, teen, etc. There is good reason to believe that limiting the amount of time you spend viewing pornography may reduce the risk of becoming desensitised and/or habituated and of finding yourself wanting to look for more extreme forms. Being mindful of your mood state can also help. Try avoiding using pornography / online sexual chat as a way of

alleviating negative feelings, such as frustration, anxiety, loneliness, stress or anger.

Remember when you’re online you may be ‘only one-click away’ from doing something illegal.

How can you make sure that your masturbation and pornography use is as healthy as possible?



Other sexual health tips

It is estimated that 1 in 10 men has a problem related to sex, such as premature ejaculation or erectile dysfunction. If you are experiencing sexual health problems, it can help to get further information and / or advice.

NHS UK has a [good resource](#) for finding out more on this topic.

You may be concerned about the nature of your sexual thoughts and interests. If so, you may benefit from speaking with someone who specialises in working with men around managing problematic sexual thoughts. Your social worker can help you to access such a service.

Be safe - give yourself limits and monitor this

There are lots of ways to lessen the temptation or opportunity to use the internet illegally:

- keep the computer in a shared space so you know other people can see what you’re doing.
- limit the time you spend on the internet. Set yourself a time limit or just use it for some specific task.
- restrict your access to risky sites using internet filters such as [Netnanny](#) or install internet monitoring software such as [Covenant Eyes](#) so that your internet use is monitored to help you manage any temptation.

How can you monitor your use of the internet during this time?

Use our ‘My Plan’ worksheet to develop your personal approach to monitor your use

Read our help sheets on

- [Calming your body](#)
- [Calming your mind](#)
- [Physical grounding](#)
- [Mindfulness](#)

Help sheet #1: calming your body

When you are feeling overwhelmed, empty, or distressed try these strategies that activate your senses and help calm your body.

Vision

- Colouring in / drawing
- Look at pictures of beautiful scenery
- Watch clouds pass by
- Visualising techniques

Hearing

- Listen to music that helps your mood
- Listen to rain or wind
- Positive self-talk
- Listen to guided meditation / relaxation CD

Smell

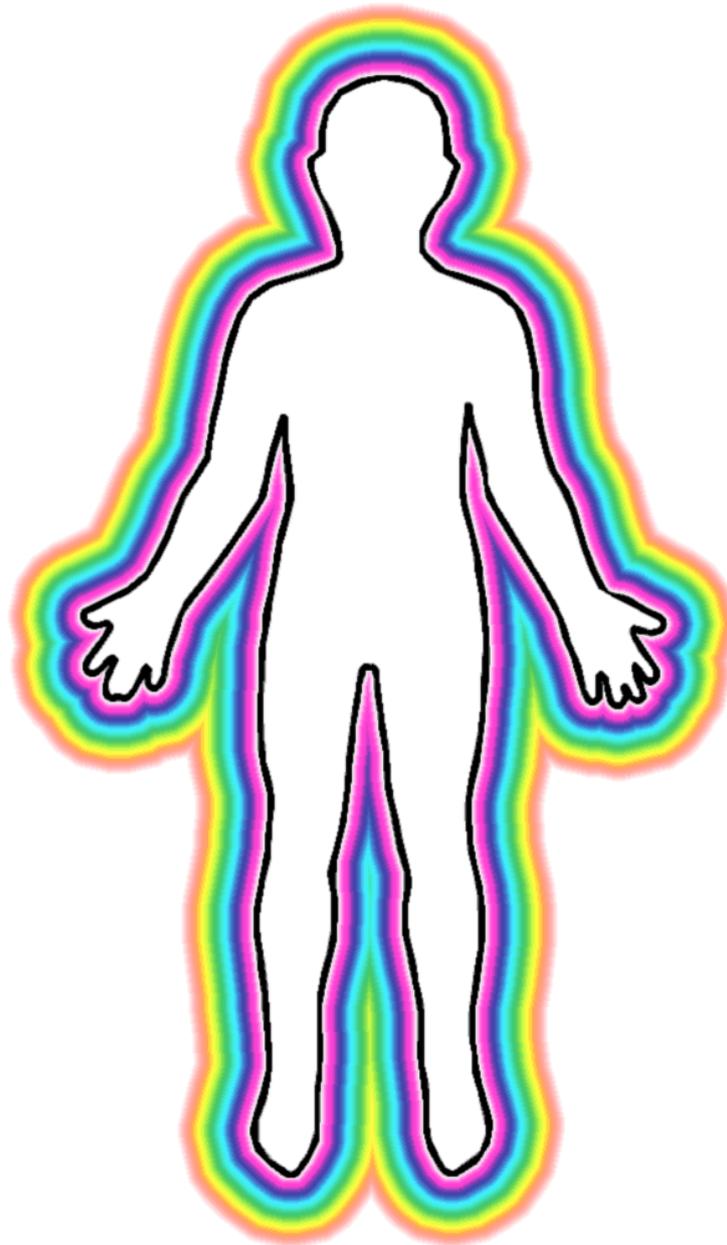
- Breathe in fresh air
- Peel an orange
- Put on scented deodorant or aftershave
- Use aromatherapy oils

Taste

- Eat something you haven't tried before
- Allow chocolate to melt in your mouth
- Have your favourite meal
- Enjoy a mint, popping candy or sherbet

Touch

- Massage your face and neck
- Clasp your hands together
- Handle a smooth stone
- Have a bath or shower



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Help sheet #2: calming your mind

When you are feeling angry/frustrated/sad try:

Express yourself physically

- Go for a walk
- Exercise, Run, go to the gym
- Do some household tasks or DIY
- Cry
- Do some work in the garden
- Go for a bike ride

When you feel you need to calm down:

Do mindfulness exercises

- Write a list of things you have achieved great and small
- Make a list of things that you can be thankful for
- Meditate, relax, yoga
- Write a letter to yourself
- Get in contact with nature, go for a walk somewhere calming
- Listen to a relaxation CD or app or some relaxing music.
- Do mindful colouring
- Focus on your breathing

When you feel overwhelmed try:

Distraction

- Describe your environment in detail using all your senses. For example, “The walls are white; there are five pink chairs, there is a wooden bookshelf against the wall...”
- Play a “categories” game with yourself. Try to think of
 - types of dogs
 - TV shows
 - sports
 - songs
 - European cities
- Play a game on phone or other device

To find more mind space try:

Being creative

- Start a diary or journal
- Write a short story or poem
- Decorate a room or a piece of furniture
- Paint, draw, sculpt
- Sew or knit
- Bake

When you need to feel better about yourself try:

Self-compassion

- Say kind statements, as if you were talking to a close friend who is upset
 - You are a good person going through a hard time.
 - You'll get through this.
- Say a coping statement:
 - I can handle this, this feeling will pass

To cheer up try:

Positive things

- Think of favourites eg your favourite colour, animal, season, food
- Picture people you care about (eg your children) and/or look at photographs of them. If this is something that will cheer you up.
- Remember the words to an inspiring song or poem that makes you feel better
- Remember a safe place. Describe a place that you find very soothing (perhaps the beach or mountains, or a favourite room); focus on everything about that place—the sounds, colours, shapes, objects, textures.
- Plan out a safe treat for yourself, such as a piece of food, a nice dinner, or a bath

To get support try:

Making contact with others

- Talk to a (safe) friend or a family member or call your safe number.
- Crisis line freephone 0808 178 2323
- Breathing Space 0800 83 85 87

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Help sheet #4: physical grounding



- Sit down on a chair, grab tightly onto it as hard as you can.
- Press your heels into the floor— literally “grounding” them! Notice the tension centred in your heels as you do this.
- Remind yourself that you are connected to the ground.
- Carry a ground object in your pocket—a small object (a small rock, clay, ring, piece of cloth) that you can touch whenever you feel triggered.
- Notice your body: The weight of your body in the chair; wiggling your toes in your socks; the feel of your back against the chair. This helps remind you that you are connected to the world.

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Help sheet #5: mindfulness

If you are feeling distressed

The primary goal of mindful breathing is simply a calm, non-judging awareness, allowing thoughts and feelings to come and go without getting caught up in them.



- Sit comfortably, with your eyes closed and your spine reasonably straight.
- Bring your attention to your breathing.
- Imagine that you have a balloon in your stomach. Every time you breathe in, the balloon inflates. Each time you breathe out, the balloon deflates.
- Notice the sensations in your abdomen as the balloon inflates and deflates. Your abdomen rising with the in-breath and falling with the outbreath.

If this exercise worked for you here are some more suggestions:

- As you are breathing thoughts will come into your mind, and that's okay, because that's just what the human mind does. Simply notice those thoughts, then bring your attention back to your breathing.
- Likewise, you can notice sounds, physical feelings, and emotions, and again, just bring your attention back to your breathing.
- You don't have to follow those thoughts or feelings, don't judge yourself for having them, or analyse them in any way. It's okay for the thoughts to be there. Just notice those thoughts, and let them drift on by, bringing your attention back to your breathing.
- Whenever you notice that your attention has drifted off and is becoming caught up in thoughts or feelings, simply note that the attention has drifted, and then gently bring the attention back to your breathing.
- It's okay and natural for thoughts to enter your awareness, and for your attention to follow them. No matter how many times this happens, just keep bringing your attention back to your breathing.

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