



2020

# Lockdown Urban Survive kit

## A mental health guide

CARL WILLIAMS



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## About this guide

First things first, this is not the sort of survival kit where you will have to drink your own urine and live off twigs, leaves and stray animals. I am not an Ex-special forces SAS, SEAL or anything else that is highly trained to poke things with sharp objects either.

I am just a simple therapist or to put me on par with the ex-forces people, I'm a therapeutic ninja. I just have some useful hints and tips, to help people cope with stressful and sometime overwhelming situations.

We are all in this lockdown together, although we are all in the same cooking pot, it does not mean we experience the situation the same. We all have different perspectives, situations and needs. Hopefully, some of the things which you read in this survival guide can help you; or help you think of something else which could help you: either way, your mission (should you choose to accept it) is read, absorb and apply (if you are able to) to help yourself and others.

So this is a practical guide to help reduce stressors and anxieties while we are in this lockdown.

### **IMPORTANT**

This is something which will be over in time, the trick is how we manage ourselves and navigate our way through this.

## Where do we start?

Well at the beginning I suppose. So we are in a situation we don't normally find ourselves in (accept for those doomsday shelter owners), so what do we do?

There are a few options (just a few):-

1. PANIC and run around screaming the end is nigh, running around like a headless chicken.
2. Start thinking more rationally, and start thinking about what you need.
3. Exploring the support you have, and the support you give others within your social structure
4. Do nothing and just carry on.
5. Taking care of self and what does that look like.

There are many more options, but for the purpose of this guide we will stick to these.

So we will start from our self, then work outwards.

## Taking care of self

So what do we mean when we say things like taking care of self? I know that this may seem very new age or even hippy like,; but it is important to take care of yourself, because if you don't how can you take care of anyone else?

So the first thing I think we need to look at is our own first aid kit.

As we have a first aid kit for our physical problems, e.g. bandages, plasters, cleaning equipment etc. But we never really have a psychological first aid kit. Right, here is how to make one:-

Things we need:-

- A piece of paper
- A pen
- An envelope or a small box
- A Scissor (or the ability to tare paper)



### Directions

Cut or tare the paper into smaller pieces, just big enough that you can write on. Once of you have about 20 pieces of paper, you can start writing on the paper, things that you enjoy doing.

This can be anything, from eating chocolate to watching a film; anything you want. And if you want to put something like sex down on a piece of paper, that's fine too.

Once you have written on the paper, you can put it all into the envelope or small box. So far so good.

### Why do this?

When we are anxious, or stressed our brain can't make rational decisions, and accessing our memory is difficult. So if we have a plan of action or a psychological first aid kit to use, we don't need to think,

we just need to pick one thing out of the envelope or box and do it. As we have already pre-decided these things we enjoy, we know we are going to feel better after doing these things.

As you go through this guide, you can add things you learn to this psychological first aid kit, equally you may want to throw things out, it is completely up to you.

**Helping others:**

You could help others develop their own first aid kits, helping them to take care of themselves, and a helpful resources for children and young people to also use.

## Good and bad stress

I think it is important to realise that not all stress is bad for us, as good stress helps motivate us to do things in life e.g. achieve qualifications; work harder in the gym or at work; gives us a sense of achievement; keeps us safe (looking out for threats). There are a whole list of things that stress is good for, it's not always bad.

When stress gets too much, it starts impacting on our wellbeing, we can't think properly; our memory goes out the window; making decisions can be difficult; generally our brain goes to jelly when thinking. As our brain can over produce chemicals like cortisol, which makes our body and brain go on high alert.

Some of us have natural ways to cope with stress, which we have built in to our day to day lives e.g. exercise; talking to people; playing with an pet and other distraction techniques which we do on a daily basis. What these things do, are to naturally increase our happy chemicals in our brain e.g. serotonin, oxytocin, endorphins and dopamine.

When we go through a period where these natural things we do are restricted, or stopped; this will start to affect our mood and mental health, because we are not getting our natural fix of these happy chemicals.

So for some of us who don't realise how stress affects us, using something as practical as a Psychological First Aid kit can help.

So when you are starting to have a feeling of stress or anxiety, or even panic what can you do?

First we need to know what it is like to experience stress. Seems simple, but recognising the signs, we can use as an early warning system to put something into action.

So what are some of the signs of stress?

- Heart racing
- Sweating
- Dry mouth
- Unable to think clearly
- Panic
- Stomach turning over
- Wanting to go to the toilet more or less (depends what's normal for you).

These are just a few of the signs, but noticing these can help you put into action something from your first aid kit.

Also I think it must be noted that all the above signs are exactly the same as excitement, so meeting a celebrity; as a child the Christmas Eve; going on a rollercoaster or meeting Piers Morgan.

## Some of the basics

So what things can we do to start controlling how we feel, or think in situations where it may be overwhelming or stressful?

### **Focusing on the fundamentals**

A quick and helpful technique is just to focus on your breathing. Why do we always go back to the basics of breathing? Well, firstly you take your lungs everywhere you go, so you don't need to pack anything: secondly, focusing on our breathing can help affect our thinking.

### **Breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth, does this really make a difference?**

Yes is the answer. If you think about it, the only times we every really breathe in through the nose is when we are relaxed or sleeping; so the body informs the brain that you are relaxed or relaxing when you start breathing in through the nose, so effectively you are tricking the brain by doing this action.

### **How do we breathe to relax us?**

A simple technique which takes less than 10 seconds to learn can help you anywhere. So the first step is the following:-

- Breathe in through the nose for the count of 3 seconds.
- Hold your breath for the count of 2 seconds
- Breathe out through your nose for the count of 3 seconds

### **Straight forward and simple so far?**

The next step is creating a link between your body and tension, then releasing that tension.

- When you breathe in for the count of 3, you tense your body as you do so. So tense your muscles, clench your fists, scrunch your

face up, tense your neck and shoulders and even tense your belly. All the things you can tense up, do so as you breathe in.

- Hold this tension and breathe for the count of 2.
- Then as you control your breathe out for the count of 3 you un-tense your body.

By doing this exercise you can release the tension in your body, and help your brain notice when your body is tense and stressed. If you do this a few times it helps physically relax you; also you may experience breaking wind when doing this; so as a part of a health warning it would be advisable to open some windows and allow some fresh air to circulate the room.

### **Longer relaxation technique**

If you wanted to make this relaxation technique last a bit longer, you could use the same method, but you could go through each of the muscle groups in your body in turn. This is at your leisure.

### **When do to this, and how can I fit it in to my day?**

I always get asked this question, I'm too busy, I haven't got anywhere I can relax or do this exercise. My answer to this, is if you have time to go to the toilet, you have time to do a relaxation technique that takes less than the time it takes you to pee. In fact, you could do this while you go to the toilet.

## Modern day mindfulness

If you have the time to sit on a mountain top, listening to Tibetan Singing Bowls in search of enlightenment, then that is the golden standard of mindfulness: however, I don't think you can purchase these from a local supermarket, and run up the local hill with a bedsheet rapped around you as part of your daily exercise routine (but you are welcome to try).

I think for me, mindfulness can be incorporated into your everyday life, from putting your makeup on to making a cup of tea. It is about being in the moment, and I think a lot of marketing has been put into this mystical practice; when it is about being in the here and now.

### Simple mindfulness technique:-



Waking up in the morning.

- Noticing how you are feeling.
- Noticing if you need to stretch
- Noticing the warmth of the bed you are in.
- Do you notice the weight of the covers on your body
- Being aware of your breathing as you wake up, is it changing.
- Drawing your attention to any morning fragrances.
- What sounds do you hear as you awake?
- Not identifying or scrutinising these things, but simple just noticing them.
- Noticing any tastes in your mouth.
- As you may move in your bed, what muscles are you using to move?
- Are there any aches or pains you are aware of.
- Nothing when you breathe in, the difference in temperature of the air that fills your lungs to the air you exhale.

This is just a simple exercise you could do, as you awake in the morning, but it also highlights how you can use mindfulness in your day.

## Another mindfulness technique

Drinking a cup of tea or coffee.

- As you make the cup notice the mug or cup you use.
- What do you notice about the cup, the colours and pattern
- Notice how you make your drink.
- What muscles do you use?
- Which hand do you use most to put the ingredients into the cup?
- Notice the smells of the drink
- Notice the sounds as you put them together
- Notice the heat or warmth from the cup
- As you slowly bring the drink to your lips, notice the transfer of heat
- Notice the sounds as you sip
- The flavours as you drink
- Notice how this makes you feel.

You can continue to notice through your sense, not judging the thoughts but simple noticing them.

Again, this exercise shows you how you can adapt and integrate mindfulness into your everyday life, in a number of ways. You don't need to go to a retreat, spend lots of money, or use any special bowl. You just simply use you and your environment.

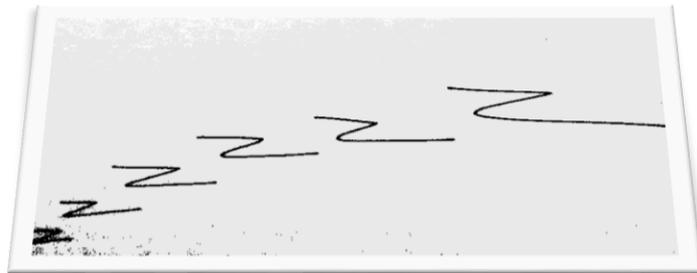
## Getting some sleep

Getting a good night's sleep can help you in a variety of ways. It helps you recharge, it makes you feel good and it also helps with your brain functioning. So how do we have a good night's sleep, or at least learn to get a better night's sleep.

Don't worry I'm not going to show you how to sleep, as I'm sure you have done it a few times before in your life. I'm going to show you how you can get a better night's sleep if you are having problems.

So if you want to tidy up your sleeping habits, it is called "Sleep Hygiene" (not very imaginative, but it does work).

So over the next few pages I have put a sleep plan together. This will walk you through a step by step guide to help you develop your own plan; by looking at physical things, thoughts and behaviours around sleeping.



<b>Target time to sleep (time you want to go to bed)</b>	
<b>Food</b>	Try not to eat anything heavy before bed. Allow the minimum about of 2 hours between consume food and bed time.
<b>Drink</b>	Try not to drink any stimulating drinks e.g. tea/coffee or fizzy drinks. Allow the minimum about of 2 hours between consume caffeine/fuzzy drinks and bed time.
<b>Exercise</b>	Try not to exercise before bed, Allow the minimum about of 2 hours between exercise and bed time. As not to increase heart rate.
<b>Routines</b>	Any routines you have, you can incorporate them into your sleeping ritual e.g. brushing teeth, showering etc. You can start to become more mindful and focus on sleeping more.
<b>Lighting</b>	Reduce unnecessary lighting before bedtime. If there is no light, it tells the brain it is time for bed.
<b>TV, PC or mobile phones</b>	Try not to use any of these while you are in bed, as you are increasing your serotonin levels which will keep you awake. Allow the minimum about of 20 minutes between using a PC, TV or mobile phone and bed time.
<b>Environment</b>	Bedroom, show now be dark, little to no lighting while going to sleep. If there are some smells that relax you, you could use them to help you go to sleep e.g. lavender spray on the pillow
	Sound, some people like sounds others do not, which every works for you, you can incorporate into your sleeping regime.
<b>Relaxation</b>	Quick relaxation technique could be used.

	<p>Breathe in for the count of 3, hold for the count of 2 then breathe out for the count of 3.</p> <p>When you breathe in you tense your muscles in your body, then hold, and as you breathe out you relax. You can repeat this a few times until you feel your body is relaxed.</p>
	<p>A longer relaxation techniques can be using the same process, but focusing on different muscles and work your way through the body.</p>
<p><b>Sleeping technique</b></p>	<p>This is the 4, 7, 8 technique.</p> <p>You breathe in for the count of 4.</p> <p>You hold for the count of 7.</p> <p>Then breathe out for the count of 8.</p> <p>This irregular breathing pattern helps focus your mind on developing great control over your breathing. Repeat this until you feel comfortable. This technique can take a while to get used to.</p>
<p><b>If you wake up.</b></p>	<p>Rule of thumb, if you are awake longer than 15 minutes, get out of bed and do something mundane which doesn't require you to think deeply.</p>
<p>By going through this process you will be tidying up your sleeping habits and helping to regulate your sleep patterns.</p> <p>Once you have managed to get into a regular sleeping pattern, it would be advisable just to do the 4,7,8 technique, even if you are tired, as this will condition your brain to go to sleep anytime you start using the 4,7,8 approach.</p>	

## Physical distancing isn't social distancing

It is important for us to use the correct terms when we are in lockdown, and to realise that social distancing is different to physical distancing. So when we see things that say we need to social distance, what is meant but this is that we should be physically distancing from others.

So while we are in this lockdown, we can still remain socially close and connected to people within our life.

In today's world we can remain connected through a variety of different ways. Here are just a few:-

- Talking to people of the phone (sounds a bit old fashioned).
- Talking to people via Zoom, Microsoft teams, Skype, facetime etc...
- Video calling someone
- Facebook, twitter, Line, whatapp etc.

In this day and age, we can be more connected than we have ever been. Think about it, before the internet there were only a few ways we could keep in touch.

- Phone (that were attached by a wire to a brick)
- Letter (what envelopes where originally used for)
- Telegram (how POSH people communicated)
- Carrier pigeon (for animal lovers)
- Walkie Talkies (for anyone over 30)
- Smoke signals (for the survival experts)

So although we have to physically distance from people, we can still remain very much connected.

## Taking care of others

So now you have learnt a few ways to take care of yourself:-

- Making a psychological first aid kit.
- Learning a breathing technique
- Learning how to use mindfulness
- Learning how to get better sleeping
- How to remain connected to others

So now you have a few tools you can share with other people, teaching others how to take care of themselves; which helps you also take care of them.

It is important to remember we will get through this together.

Just in case you may not know what else you can put in your psychological first aid box, here are a few other thing you can put in it.

## 101 Top tips to reduce stress in Lockdown

Thank you so much to those who came back with some brilliant tips on how you manage stress. Everybody is different and what works for one person might not work for another. Here are 101 tips provided by you. Why not give it a try?

1. Meeting a friend (via skype, zoom, Microsoft teams etc.)
2. Setting aside 10 minutes a day to relax and collect my thoughts
3. Watching late night TV debates that deal with the realities of the world
4. Listening to relaxing music
5. Watching funny movies
6. Taking a walk in the countryside (as one of your exercises in the day)
7. Do a home gym workout
8. Soaking in the bath with lavender oil
9. Meditating
10. Talking to someone just to vent a little
11. Walking the dog
12. Getting more sleep
13. Praying
14. Reading a book to distract yourself from stressful thoughts
15. Do something good for someone else
16. Writing a letter to someone to get your feelings across and vent, but not actually sending it
17. Painting or drawing
18. Do some relaxation techniques with a friend over skype or zoom
19. Write a list of things to do and cross them off as you do them
20. Try putting things into perspective
21. Unplug the phone and get some time to yourself
22. Do something you like with a member of your household.
23. Dancing around in your room to your favourite music
24. Putting the world to right with a conference call with friends.
25. Have a change of scenery

26. Contact via social media and make new connections with people
27. Watch and take part in an online yoga class
28. Express your feelings and emotions
29. Spend time with positive things around you
30. Have hot cup of tea or coffee, and enjoy the flavour
31. Eat a healthy meal
32. getting closer with nature e.g. have a walk on the beach, observing the sunset
33. Watch your favourite programme on TV
34. Give yourself 'me time' just a few minutes to think about pleasant things
35. Ask yourself what other people would do
36. thinking of the work you HAVE achieved in a day, rather than what you haven't done
37. Relaxing with a foot rub
38. Watch uplifting plays
39. Go to bed with a great book
40. Host an online dinner party
41. Cheer up someone who is feeling down
42. Spend some time doing something you enjoy, like gardening
43. Writing down my thoughts
44. Play games on the computer
45. Avoid putting things off
46. Find a quiet place and try to visualise a happy memory
47. Do something creative like knitting
48. Play a musical instrument (even if its badly)
49. Play with your pet
50. Get some fresh air
51. Be gentle to yourself
52. Laugh!
53. Go window shopping online
54. Write short stories
55. Call a loved one
56. Talk to a stranger
57. Practice CBT

58. Chat to your friends on Skype or Facebook
59. Take a nap
60. Take a break, even a short one can make a difference
61. Going for a walk at lunchtime
62. Write poetry
63. Eat or drink something you enjoy
64. Give air hugs to people
65. Spend time acting like a child - they really put things in perspective, like 'Wow there's a cool cloud', and remind you of simple things that used to amaze you
66. Go out to an online Karaoke night
67. Imagine living in a different era, maybe wartime or before cars and trains were invented and how much harder life would be
68. Bake a cake
69. Host an online coffee morning/afternoon
70. Go for a relaxing swim/paddle
71. Sit on a park bench and watch the world go by
72. Tidy a room or cupboard (other people might find this stressful, but I find it relaxing!)
73. Challenge a friend to a game of online Scrabble
74. Breathe deeply for two minutes, and focus on your breaths
75. Make something - knit a scarf, build a model
76. Write a list of the reasons you have to be happy with life
77. Take a minute to stretch your body
78. Use a relaxing room fragrance or scented candle to create a sense of sanctuary
79. Practicing Tai Chi (youtube it)
80. Looking at photos of happy memories.
81. Do some mindfulness
82. Thinking of something you're looking forward to or something that was fun
83. Get the paddling pool out
84. Do an online class at lunchtime
85. Go for a bike ride
86. Listen to the birds singing

87. Reminding yourself it could be worse and count your blessings
88. Playing board games with your family
89. Playing my favourite song and singing it out loud
90. Cleaning!
91. Practising calligraphy
92. I find moving furniture around the house very soothing
93. Write a letter to yourself, saying what fun things you are going to do in the future.
94. Play with lego
95. Watch a TED talk
96. Go out for a run in the park
97. Volunteer in some way, it helps put my worries into perspective
98. Play Sudoku or crosswords
99. Read some gossip magazines
100. Go to a salsa class online
101. Get a cuddle for someone in your household.

***Feel free to add to this list.  
Most of all take time to enjoy things.***