

*A message from our Director People Assist...*

# A HELPFUL WAY OF THINKING ABOUT CORONAVIRUS



## CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

It has been impossible to ignore and has featured at the top of our news feeds for weeks. We've watched the spread of it move across the globe and reach our shores. We've started to notice people coughing and sneezing near us, and if we board planes we are scrutinizing the passengers in adjacent rows – doing our own risk assessment (probably wildly erroneously, but we'll come back to that in a minute).

It's quite amazing that coronavirus has shot to the top of the catalogue of worries that this exhausting summer has already dished up – drought, bushfires and floods and, unsurprisingly, we are feeling more tired and edgy as a result. This 'what on earth now...' reaction is a common collective experience as we gear up to face this global threat.

At Converge, we are in the business of both acknowledging life's big worries but importantly, also assisting you and your fellow work colleagues to deal with them (or at least recalibrate them so they are more manageable).

## SO, WHAT CAN I DO?

There are two key things that immediately help and this guide will take you through them, both to increase your understanding of the strategies and improve your ability to enact them.

**1** Firstly if you suffer from anxiety about the anticipation of a future event, you will more than likely be most impacted. A large proportion of our community suffers from what we call 'anticipatory anxiety'. What is most interesting, is that the majority of people who experience anticipatory anxiety about an event, cope beautifully when the event occurs - often much better than those that don't! A helpful definition of anticipatory anxiety is overestimating the likelihood of something occurring, and most importantly, underestimating your ability to cope when it does. Recognising your strength in coping with an event, can diminish your worry about the event occurring. In other words, when stressful events occur, you cope. It is in the anticipation of the event that you fall apart. Recognising this irrational pattern is the first step to improving your coping ability. Catch yourself when you are worrying about something that has not occurred, and bring your focus back to your proven history of ability to cope when it does.

Secondly, human beings are notoriously bad at risk assessment – remember the withering assessment of those sitting around you on the plane? Let's be honest now, we are irrational in much of what we think and do. We will apply copious amounts of sunscreen to our bodies, and then drive at 20 kms above the speed limit on windy ocean roads to get to the beach. We will eat salads and vegetables, and sneak out the back door for another cigarette. We will do anything to avoid medication but drink a bottle of wine every night to reduce our anxiety. We will scrutinise our children's every move but fail to teach them basic resilience. Each of these behaviours and counter behaviours is not fully rational and therefore represents very common and irrational thinking traps, hindering our capacity for clear-headed, rational risk assessment.

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<sup>1</sup>[www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert](http://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert)

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## LET'S LOOK AT THE FACTS ASSOCIATED WITH COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS) RIGHT NOW:

At the time of writing this article, Across the world, there have been about 89,907 confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) and 3,084 reported deaths. Of confirmed cases reported globally, the case fatality rate is approximately 3.4%. The case fatality rate in countries and regions outside mainland China is 1.8%.<sup>1</sup> However, the mortality rate of COVID-19 is higher than strains of the flu and COVID-19 is a new disease which causes understandable uncertainty regarding how far it will spread and how many deaths it will cause. These statistics are cause for concern and caution, not panic and paranoia. Based on current mortality and morbidity data for common mental health illnesses and suicide, the risk of death or disability from these causes is far greater than the data is indicating will arise from COVID-19. But as we have seen, anxiety and certainly media coverage is often far from proportionate or rational. So, perspective and clear thinking are what is really important right now.

It is on this basis we suggest you tread carefully, remain alert and follow all health guidelines. Be more vigilant if you or older family members have a compromised immune system. But please don't compromise your psychological and emotional coping ability by remaining calm, clear-headed and rationally considering risk. Arguably, not doing so could have a far greater impact on your health than exposure to COVID-19 virus. The application of grounded common sense is the strongest protection factor we have in times of crisis. It improves our immune response and keeps us present to those we love and care about and able to deal with the big and important issues in life.

### WHEN TO REACH OUT FOR HELP

If you find your anxiety or fear about the coronavirus is building to the point that intruding on your thoughts or preventing you from getting on with your daily life, seek assistance. That is where we can potentially help. **Converge offers 24-hour, 7 day a week counselling support. The great thing is, because we offer phone and video-conferencing facilities, we can provide that support for you, even if you're at home. To access the EAP services, simply call 1300 OUR EAP (1300 687 327) to make a time to speak with one of our team.**

### ESSENTIAL LINKS

#### International

##### *World Health Organisation*

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

Up to date advice as well as posters you can download for your workplace or school.

#### National

##### *Federal Government Department of Health*

<https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov>

#### State

##### *Victorian Department of Health*

<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/>

##### *NSW Department of Health*

[www.health.nsw.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx)

##### *South Australian Department of Health*

<https://bit.ly/2x8SQ6W>

##### *Tasmanian Department of Health*

<https://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/>

##### *Queensland Department of Health*

<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/>

##### *Western Australian Department of Health*

<https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/>

#### *Travelling Overseas?*

International travellers should check the latest Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) travel advice on the Smartraveller website.

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