# How can I help support other people’s mental, emotional and spiritual health in the current crisis?

For several years the NHS has recommended the ‘five simple things’ as a way of maintaining good mental health. They were not derived from the Christian faith but certainly do not contradict it. They are based on research of what is proven to work. Not surprisingly, there are slightly different versions of the list. Some conflate ‘get outdoors’ with ‘be physically active’ and add a variation on ‘pay attention to the present moment’ or ‘be mindful’. For more information see www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/improve-mental-wellbeing/.

Below are the ‘five simple things’ in **bold** and some commentary about how they can be adapted to caring for each other’s mental, emotional and spiritual health at the present time

1. **Connect with other people** In more normal times, the advice would be against relying on technology to do this, but we may have to for the time being. ‘Phone-visiting’ and various apps can help us all connect with our neighbours and our friends and family further afield. Some churches have set up phone trees so that each person has two other people they phone regularly to pass on information and check on their well-being. We need to connect particularly with the people who really are our neighbours and have a special care for those who live alone. Remember that in Genesis 2.18 one of the first bits of advice for human well being that God gives is “it is not good for the human being to be alone”. As people of faith, we would want to add that connection should also be with God through regular prayer and Bible reading.
2. **Be Physically Active** It would be a terrible temptation to spend our days in front of a screen during this crisis, but the research shows that being active can hugely improve our mental health and wellbeing. So, if you are having a lot of screen time, take a break to stretch, turn on some music and dance, or put on an exercise video. The research says that all this benefit is hugely increased if you can get outdoors. If you are lucky enough to have gardens, you can make the most of them even when self-isolating and, currently, a walk for exercise is allowed. One church is encouraging people to spend time planting seeds, particularly vegetable seeds. This helps with 2,3, 5 and eventually 4 of the simple things.
3. **Be Curious- learn new things** The extra time spent not going places is a good opportunity to learn a new skill, try something different or explore an interest that usually gets overcome by busy-ness. This is easy to do from home in our interconnected world, but friends can certainly help each other by recommending music, books, films or games that others might like to try. Already some of the people self-isolating are saying that their prayer life is hugely improved because they can give time to reading and being curious about scripture and their faith. This could be a chance to give more energy to the seeking, asking and knocking that Jesus promises will be rewarded in Matthew 7.7.
4. **Give to others** No Christian should really need to be reminded of the importance of this (Luke 6.38 for example), but sometimes people need a little help to work out how they can do it practically. We certainly know that the crisis is likely to make life difficult for almost everyone and almost impossible for those who were already struggling. Whatever we can do will benefit both those who receive and those who give.
5. **Pay attention to the present moment** There is nothing new abojut mindfulness, about accepting the blessing that is waiting in the present moment and taking a rest from worry about the future and regret for the past, just read Matthew 6.25-34. In a time of crisis, however, there could easily be a temptation to want to blame the situation on someone or something or become obsessively anxious. Even the World health Organisation has counselled against constantly watching the news feeds. Practically, some people find it helpful to watch the television news earlier in the evening rather than last thing at night or to say a compline afterwards and hand the situation to God, and so be ready to sleep more peacefully. More widely, it will be important to encourage each other to see blessings in the present moment. It might be the kindness of a neighbour or a message from a friend or a joke. Treasure these and pass them on as much as, or more than, the worry and stress. So, while I was typing this, the most gorgeous Gold Finch perched for a second outside my window. I had forgotten or never taken time to see how bright and beautiful the colours of his plumage are.

For me, the five simple things are a useful checklist for helping people to support each other in these difficult times. We have another, St. David’s - “Be joyful, keep the faith, do the little things”.

May God help us to help each other at this time.

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