

## Space from COVID-19 Descriptor

*The Space from COVID-19 programme has been designed to help users manage their mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic, acknowledging that it is normal to feel anxious or low in the face of such an unprecedented global crisis.*

*The programme provides the user with quick access to practical tools and strategies, to assist them in dealing with the difficult emotions and situations associated with such a challenging time.*

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### Target Audience

- People impacted by COVID-19, including parents, frontline staff, individuals providing other types of frontline services, people in self-isolation etc.
- Age group: 18+ adults
- Language requirements: English speakers

### Module Goals

**Challenging Times:** Normalise worries and difficult emotions (e.g. fear and anxiety), provide emotional coping strategies (e.g. relaxation) and give practical solutions for maintaining well-being in a time of crisis (e.g. self-care, staying connected, prioritisation, hope and resilience)

**Building A Routine In A Crisis:** Acknowledge the impact that the loss of familiar routines can have, while providing strategies to proactively build and maintain new routines within the confines of a crisis (e.g. time management and activity scheduling)

**Sleep Difficulties:** Facilitate users understanding the sleep cycle and common reasons for sleep disturbance, and empower users to implement sleep hygiene techniques

**Relaxation:** Encourage users to try a variety of relaxation techniques and integrate relaxation practices into their daily life

**Mindfulness:** Introduce users to the core principles and benefits of mindfulness and provide them with guided audio meditations to bring them into the present moment and help them tune into and sit with uncomfortable emotions or physical sensations

**Grief & Loss:** Support users experiencing loss during this time, by exploring their own unique grief response and providing them with practical strategies and healthy coping mechanisms for dealing with grief

**Money Worries:** Help individuals to understand how financial difficulties can impact mental health, providing solutions for reducing the levels of worry and self-criticism associated with money problems, while increasing hope and confidence in the individual's ability to cope around finances in the future.

## Theoretical Framework

### Challenging Times & Building A New Routine In A Crisis

There is little research in early psychological interventions for the distress experienced in response to a major emergency such as the Covid-19 pandemic. It has been recommended however (e.g. NATO/TENTS 2008), that the following principles should be used in designing any interventions in such a context; Hobfoll et al. (2007) from their systematic review identified five principles and devised guidelines for the development of intervention practices and programmes in the aftermath of emergencies and mass violence. The principles are: Promote a Sense of **Safety**, Promote a Sense of **Calming**, Promote a Sense of **Self-Efficacy** and **Collective Efficacy**, Promote **Connectedness**, and Promote **Hope**.

## Sleep Difficulties

Sleep Hygiene refers to a variety of behaviours and environmental conditions that aim to restore good quality sleep and are conducive to sleeping well on a regular basis (American Academy of Sleep Medicine, 2005; Perlis, Aloia & Kuhn, 2011; Stevenson, 2010). Sleep Hygiene techniques aim to develop, restore and maintain healthy sleep habits. The sleep module aims to provide education regarding sleep disturbance and sleep hygiene techniques to empower users to restore a healthy sleep pattern. A number of evidence-based techniques can be utilized to break the maintaining factors of sleep disturbance and improve sleep such as reduced caffeine consumption, restricted napping, improving the bedroom environment and breaking negative associations with bedtime. Within the module, users are encouraged to reflect on the impact of these various factors on the current quality of their sleep. Users are then offered advice on how to create a more relaxing sleep environment and develop positive behaviours to encourage a healthy sleep cycle (Irish et al., 2014).

## Relaxation

Relaxation is an over-arching term used to describe the physical state of deep rest that can be characterised by a sense of calm, low muscular tension and low blood pressure (Benson & Klipper, 2000). Relaxation has many benefits including the reduction of symptoms of anxiety and stress and the improvement of mood (Benson, Casey & Dadoly, 2008). The goal of all relaxation techniques is to produce a physiological reaction which is characterised by low blood pressure, slowed breathing and a sense of calm (Smith, 2007). Relaxation techniques are simple and powerful tools that have been shown to be effective in the treatment of stress and mental health difficulties such as anxiety and depression (Manzoni, Pagnini, Caselnuovo & Molinari, 2008; Dusek & Benson, 2009) as well as having positive impacts on hypertension, insomnia and pain (Dusek et al., 2009; Morin et al., 2004; Posadzki & Ernst, 2011).

## Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the practice of non-judgementally paying attention to the present moment experience (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Practicing mindfulness strategies has been

shown to have many benefits such as promoting self-awareness, self-monitoring and positive emotional states as well as reducing stress through the development of healthy coping strategies and the reduction of avoidant behaviours (Brown, Warren & Richard, 2003; Roemer & Orsillo, 2002). Since its initial use in therapeutic settings by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, Mindfulness based practices have been shown to be beneficial in a variety of physical and mental health difficulties including chronic pain, heart disease and fibromyalgia as well as depression, anxiety and stress (Branstrom, Duncan & Moskowitz, 2011; Gotink et al., 2015).

### **Grief & Loss**

This module provides psychoeducation regarding common emotional reactions to loss, to assist users in reflecting on their own unique and changing grief responses. The module facilitates users in developing healthy ways to both express their feelings (confrontation) and rebuild their lives (restoration), following the dual-process model of coping with bereavement (Stroebe & Schut, 2010). Users are helped to move forward from their grief by planning ahead for triggers and anniversaries and reflecting on what they value most in life and how they can remember the person they have lost.

### **Money Worries**

A number of studies with a range of different populations have shown that financial difficulties increase the risk of anxiety and poor overall mental health (Richardson, Elliott & Roberts, 2017). This module seeks to ease the impact of financial hardship on mental health through improving psychological variables such as personal agency, self-esteem, coping, hope and shame (Frankham, Richardson & Maguire, 2020a; Frankham, Richardson & Maguire, 2020b).

Table: Program Modules, Therapeutic Goals, Objectives, Content and Tools

Module	Goals & Objectives	Content	Tools
<p><b>Challenging Times</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normalise and validate common emotions and reactions in a time of crisis</li> <li>• Provide a simple mental framework for dealing with challenging situations</li> <li>• Support users to tolerate and regulate distress, emotional responses and worry</li> <li>• Empower users to focus on what is within their control</li> <li>• Provide helpful strategies for maintaining well-being in times of distress</li> <li>• Educate users on the importance of maintaining social connections while needing to maintain physical distance</li> <li>• Promote the maintenance of self-care for optimal physical and mental health</li> </ul> <p>Encourage the user to actively engage in methods for increasing their sense of hope, resilience and balanced optimism</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normalising anxiety, fear and other common reactions to crisis situations</li> <li>• A simple mental framework for how to deal with challenging situations - differentiating between what the user can and can't control</li> <li>• Tolerating and regulating challenging emotions, psychoeducation about the function of negative emotions</li> <li>• Relaxation exercises to help coping with distressing emotions</li> <li>• Tips for focusing on what the user can control, linking to content in the rest of the program</li> <li>• The importance of social networks, communities and supporting others, ideas for how to connect with others at this time</li> <li>• Importance of maintaining one's self-care e.g. physical care,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How Are You Feeling?</li> <li>• Journal tool</li> <li>• Grounding and relaxation exercises</li> <li>• My Backup and Support Network</li> <li>• Ideas for Staying Connected</li> <li>• My Self-Care Activities</li> </ul>

		<p>enjoyable activities, flow, self-compassion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tips for surviving self-isolation</li> </ul> <p>Tips for staying hopeful, maintaining balanced optimism and building resilience during challenging times</p>	
<p><b>Building A New Routine in A Crisis</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support users in prioritising what is most important, in order to reduce overwhelm</li> <li>• Encourage maintaining normality and routine as much as possible, particularly for families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normalising difficulties experienced in juggling life roles, prioritisation strategies for time management</li> <li>• Building new routines and keeping up activities to maintain a sense of purpose and structure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time Management</li> <li>• Activity Scheduling</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sleep Difficulties</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide education regarding common causes of and behaviours that maintain sleep disturbance</li> <li>• Facilitate users to gain insight into their sleep patterns and the factors contributing to their sleep disturbance</li> <li>• Empower users to integrate sleep hygiene techniques into everyday life</li> </ul> <p>Support users to reflect on the impact of sleep</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychoeducation regarding common causes of sleep disturbance</li> <li>• Maintaining factors in poor sleep quality</li> <li>• Impact of worrying about sleep pattern</li> </ul> <p>Making changes using sleep hygiene technique and reflecting on the impact</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking a closer look at sleep</li> <li>• Tips for Sleeping well</li> </ul>

	hygiene techniques on quality of sleep		
<b>Relaxation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide education regarding relaxation and its benefits</li> <li>• Encourage users to try a variety of relaxation techniques</li> <li>• Support users in the continued practice of relaxation techniques to develop relaxation skills</li> </ul> <p>Empower users to reflect on the impact of relaxation techniques on their wellbeing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychoeducation regarding the benefits of relaxation</li> <li>• Relaxation as a skilled practice</li> <li>• Breathing Exercise</li> <li>• Progressive Muscle Relaxation</li> <li>• Visualisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breathing Space</li> <li>• Progressive Muscle Relaxation</li> <li>• Guided Visualisation</li> </ul>
<b>Mindfulness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide education regarding mindfulness, its core concepts and the benefits of practicing it</li> <li>• Support users to improve ability to practice mindfulness</li> </ul> <p>Empower users to integrate mindfulness into everyday lives to reduce symptoms of mental and physical distress</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychoeducation regarding the core concepts of mindfulness; awareness, acceptance and kindness</li> <li>• Benefits of mindfulness</li> <li>• Preparing to be mindful</li> <li>• Using mindfulness in daily life</li> <li>• Mindfulness Exercises</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breathe</li> <li>• Mindful Eating</li> <li>• Mindful Walking</li> <li>• Sounds</li> <li>• Body Scan</li> <li>• Watching Thoughts</li> <li>• Soothing Presence</li> <li>• Safe Place</li> <li>• Compassionate Companion</li> </ul>

<p><b>Grief &amp; Loss</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normalise the grief process and encourage users to actively express their grief</li> <li>• Introduce common emotional responses to grief and support users in identifying their own unique responses</li> <li>• Promote restorative practices that help the user to rebuild their lives</li> <li>• Enhance the user’s ability to engage with their social support network</li> <li>• Facilitate the development of a plan to deal with triggers and anniversaries</li> <li>• Support the user in identifying their values and finding ways to remember the person they have lost</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding grief and common emotional responses to grief</li> <li>• Past losses and their impact on current grief</li> <li>• Dealing with grief - dual process model (confronting/restoration )</li> <li>• Expressing emotions, rituals, self-care, self-compassion</li> <li>• The importance of social support; communication and grief</li> <li>• Planning for the future - triggers and anniversaries</li> <li>• Values and making meaning from loss (includes personal stories)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grief Myths and Facts Quiz</li> <li>• My Grief Symptoms</li> <li>• My Past Losses</li> <li>• My Grief Emotions</li> <li>• Confronting My Loss</li> <li>• Restoring Myself</li> </ul>
<p><b>Money Worries</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve understanding of relationship between finances and mental health</li> <li>• Understand how users’ behaviour around money might be creating a vicious cycle</li> <li>• Find new active ways of coping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impact of COVID-19 on money problems</li> <li>• Helpful ways of coping with money worries</li> <li>• How to make and stick to a budget, avoiding impulse spending</li> <li>• Facing financial fears and learning to be assertive about money</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Money and Mental Health quiz</li> <li>• My Financial Resources links</li> <li>• My Helpful Thoughts Tool</li> <li>• My Activities</li> <li>• My Values Tool</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Find activities to boost mood, even when money is tight</li><li>• Recognise practical or hypothetical worries about money</li><li>• Become more accepting around difficult financial situations such as bankruptcy</li><li>• Increase hope for the future</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strategies for coping with and managing money worries</li><li>• Getting in touch with values and increasing hopefulness and acceptance</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mindfulness</li></ul>
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