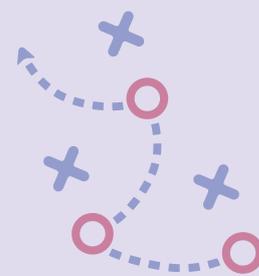# How to manage your online wellbeing during COVID-19

The world has been facing an unprecedented challenge with the COVID-19 pandemic and, although some restrictions are being eased, the impacts could be felt for a long time.

Even if your health has not been directly affected by COVID-19, isolation from or with other people, emotional stresses and financial pressure may be making it difficult to cope. But there is help available.

In many ways, the internet has never been more important. It's allowing us to stay connected even when we are physically apart. Many services have rapidly scaled up their online support, including eSafety.

But during a time like this, spending extra time online is not always a good thing. For example, focusing on all the negatives being reported can heighten anxiety; being worried can make people lash out; and some internet users are exploiting the situation to harm or scam people while they are at greater risk.

More than ever, we need to focus on being respectful, resilient and kind online, on knowing our own limits for time spent online, and on using a broad range of wellbeing strategies to help promote safer and more positive experiences online.

General wellbeing

When things are changing and uncertain, it can be easy to forget that some of the most basic strategies for protecting and promoting your wellbeing are also the most effective.

Australia's Department of Health recommends the following:

1. **Maintain a healthy lifestyle**
2. **Stay informed**
3. **Stay positive**
4. **Access support**

But how do you stay positive at a time like this?

Here are some suggestions from the team at eSafety, to help you more effectively use technology to bolster your wellbeing under these extraordinary circumstances:

- **Staying connected to your friends and family is vital**, so pick up the phone or stay in touch online through video calls, emails and social media — but follow some practical safety steps to ensure your personal information and accounts are secure.

- **Maintaining perspective** can help you see the bigger picture. Remember that while frustration in the face of such uncertainty is a natural response, we are in this together. So, with **compassion, kindness and empathy** driving our response, we can all take measures to look after ourselves and each other – online and offline.

- Sometimes simply **establishing a structure or routine** can bolster wellbeing, helping to achieve a sense of control and stave off boredom. It is also a good idea to **find a social purpose or meaningful aim**, such as taking up an activity that helps others, creates a bit of fun or a sense of achievement.

- Finding time for **solitude and space** is also important — although if you have family or housemates at home this may mean simply having a room or a zone where you can take turns practicing mindfulness or having 'time out'.

- **Gratitude** has been found to help promote happiness, as does **helping others** — simple acts of kindness like telling an elderly neighbour how to make video call or shop for groceries online may make both of you more content. (If you know anyone who needs help getting started online, you could let them know about the Be Connected site managed by eSafety, which provides easy-to-follow guidance for older Australians and others who are inexperienced online.)

- It's also useful to focus on **building your "grit", or psychological armou**r – the skills and resilience that will help you prevent or cope with difficult or upsetting situations or experiences online.
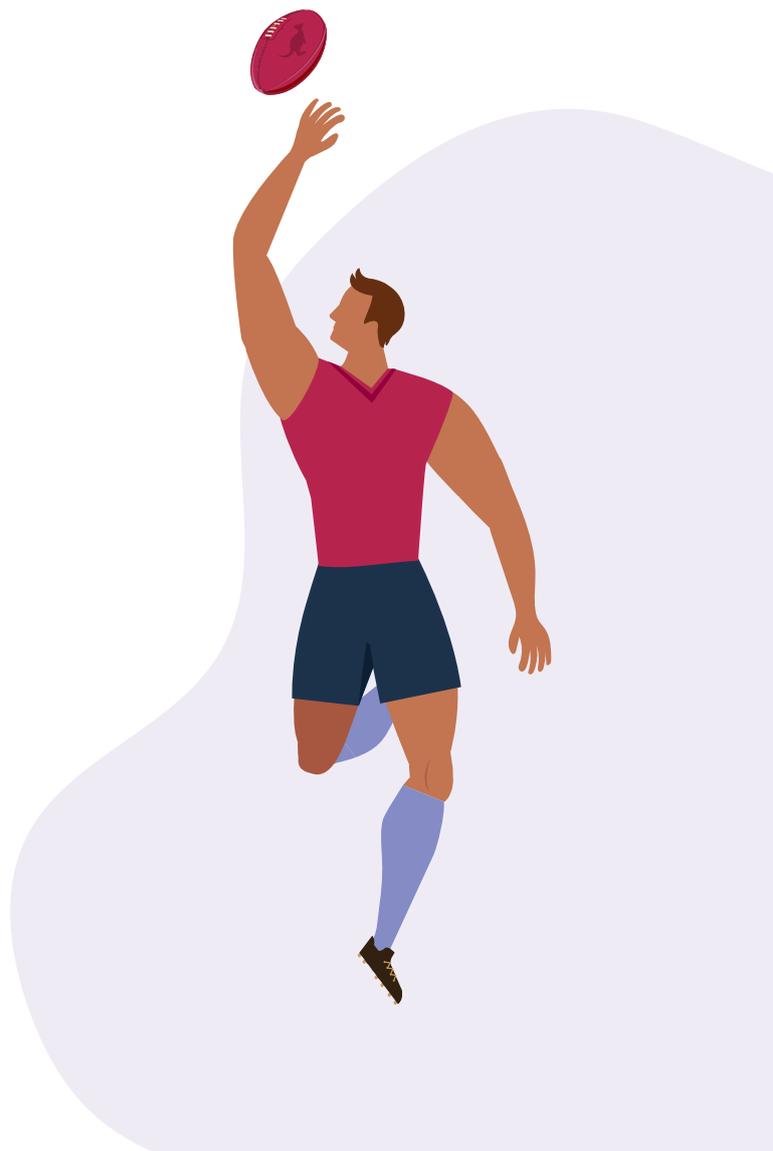
Strategies to manage negative online experiences

There are a number of ways you can respond to a negative experience online. It will depend on the context, circumstances and how you are feeling. You should always do what feels right and safe for you.

Report and block online abuse

Abusive posts and comments are never acceptable. If you are being harassed, intimidated, humiliated or threatened, report it to the site where it is happening and block or mute the person doing it. If the platform does not help you, report the serious online abuse to eSafety. Remember, image-based abuse is illegal — this is when someone shares or threatens to share an intimate image without the consent of the person pictured — report it to eSafety immediately.

Remember your strengths

If you encounter abuse online, try not to let the opinions of others define your self-worth. Remember that the fear and frustration aroused by COVID-19 may cause people to act in emotional or abusive ways, but this is more a reflection of them than of you. Remind yourself of your best qualities and attributes.

Pause and reflect

Negative experiences online can be overwhelming, especially if a constant barrage of COVID-19 is already getting you down. Acknowledge your feelings, but try and keep them measured. Don't deplete your emotional strength and energy by giving negative online experiences online more attention than they deserve.

Think critically

Engaging in public conversations online about COVID-19 and its impacts may help you express your thoughts and engage with others who are experiencing the same things. Clarify your thoughts and keep informed on issues. But think critically about what you see and hear so you are not tricked into believing misinformation or falling for scams.

Be resourceful

The way we are living has changed dramatically. But there are other options for doing your favourite things. There are fitness apps to help you stay active, virtual gatherings you can join and ways to stream your favourite bands playing music. Digital communication means you can connect with people globally and explore new creative ideas and ways of thinking.

Surround yourself with supportive people

More than ever, we all need a safe and supportive network. You don't need to handle any negative online issues on your own, even if you can't see others face-to-face. Talk with family, friends, peers and mentors. Consider professional support, if needed, including online or telephone services. Equally, don't be a stranger — reach out to your friends and family, if you think they are struggling through this difficult period.

Maintain balance

Online social contact can be a lifeline. But it is also important to set boundaries around how much time you are spending in front of a screen. Focus on balancing screen time with other ways of connecting, communicating, learning and working. Consider scheduling in time to read a book, do some exercise or craft, or complete a jigsaw puzzle.

Manage the information you consume

There can be an urge to constantly consume more COVID-19 information. Take breaks from your newsfeed to limit your exposure to COVID-19 information to levels that you can manage. Also focus on exploring news on other subjects, especially positive stories.

Look after yourself. As we continue to adapt to our 'new normal', regularly check in with yourself to monitor your wellbeing in both online and offline environments. Practice self-care through exercise, good nutrition, adequate sleep and relaxation techniques (and wash your hands!).

Focus on your values

It is important to stay committed to your values, especially during adversity. If you come across racism, bigotry or other abuse online stay true to your character and your sense of right and wrong. Call out bad behaviour when it is safe to do so.

Be a role model for positivity

Set the standard for positive online behaviour by communicating with compassion, respect, empathy and kindness. Show support to other people online. Share love. Share positive stories. Share encouragement. Show that, among the challenges of COVID-19, we can cultivate the online world we all deserve.

Further information

The eSafety website has lots of tips for staying safe online, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. There is specific information and advice for women, people experiencing domestic and family violence, frontline workers, parents and carers, educators and seniors.

You can also find COVID-19 information about mental health and support services on the Australian government website at Head to Health.

You can also get help and support from one of these counselling services

Beyond Blue

All ages. All issues. Phone counselling available all day, every day. Online chat available 3pm to 12am AEST daily.

📱 1300 22 4636

🌐 **beyondblue.org.au**

More services

Lifeline

All ages. All issues. Phone counselling available all day, every day. Online chat available 7pm to 4am AEST daily.

📱 13 11 14

🌐 **lifeline.org.au**