

# Supporting the emotional wellbeing of care home staff during the Covid-19 pandemic

Developed by Bristol Dementia Wellbeing  
Service, Devon Partnership NHS Trust

May 2020



We are here to help:



Contact your DWS Senior Dementia Practitioner directly  
Call our Access Point: 0117 904 5151 (8am-6pm Mon – Fri)  
Or email us: [dpn-tr.enquiriesBristolDementia@nhs.net](mailto:dpn-tr.enquiriesBristolDementia@nhs.net)

## Reasons for developing this resource pack

This resource pack has been created to help staff working in care homes look after their own wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic.

We are aware that staff are facing significant stresses in both their work and home lives and it is important that people take time to look after themselves.

We believe that the amazing work care home staff are doing during this difficult time should be recognized and celebrated. We cannot thank you enough for the support and dedication you are showing to help your residents.

Alongside this message of thanks, we know that staff may be experiencing all sorts of difficult emotions right now.

Everyone's feelings and reactions will be different but strong emotions are to be expected and it's useful to remember that **'it's OK not to feel OK'**.

We also know that some people will be coping well but may need more emotional support or resources once the crisis is over. If this is the case for you then you can always review this document in the future.

To help staff manage difficulties in their work and home lives, this pack includes some ideas to promote good self-care, as well as organisations to contact should people require more support.

Please note we have also created a separate resource pack focussing on supporting residents in care homes.

## Contents

- [Page 4:](#) Stages of a crisis
- [Page 5:](#) Ideas for how you can look after your own wellbeing: paying attention to your body, mind, heart and work
- [Page 6:](#) Practical tips for coping at work
- [Page 7:](#) Tips for starting and ending your shift
- [Page 8:](#) Managing your worries
- [Page 9:](#) When you have not been able to give the care you would have wanted to
- [Page 10:](#) Additional sources of support that you can access

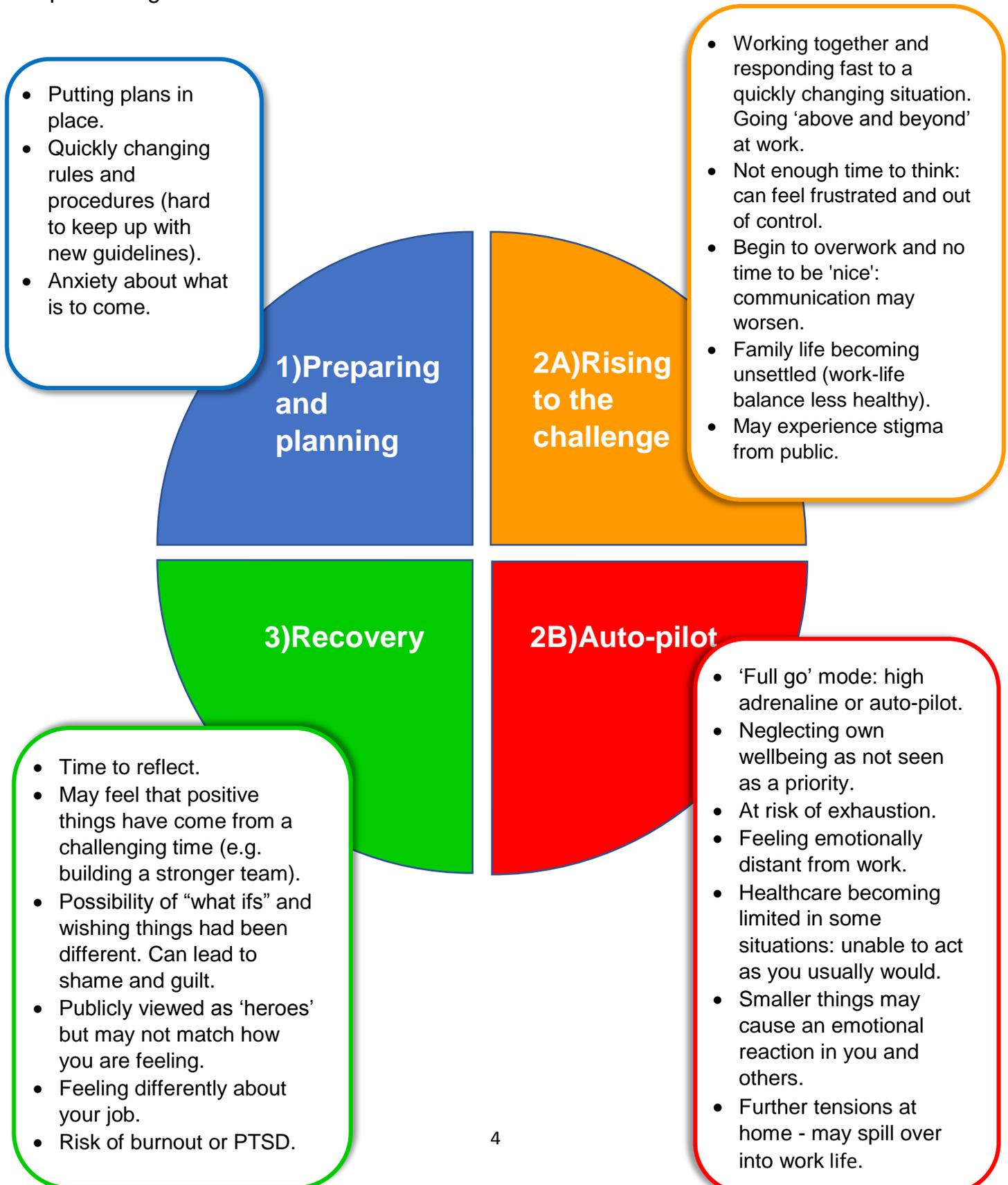
\*To jump to a particular topic press 'Ctrl' key and click on the relevant page number.

## Appendices

- [Appendix 1:](#) **Focus on ACE – Coping Strategies.** Material adapted from FACE COVID-19 document by Dr Russ Harris, 2020 by Sophie Trees, Molly Laybourn and Dr Sally Stapleton, Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. Included with permission from Dr Sally Stapleton.
- [Appendix 2:](#) **Grounding and soothing techniques.** A collection of techniques that can be used throughout the day.

## Stages of a crisis

The British Psychological Society has suggested that there are three stages linked with a crisis, such as the Covid19 outbreak. We may experience different reactions depending on the stage we/our team are in. Try to think about which stage you are experiencing now.



## Ideas to promote wellbeing

### My Body



- Try to make sure that you get enough food, drink and sleep – all are important!
- Engage in some form of physical activity: running, walking, yoga, gardening or household tasks etc.
- Avoid less helpful coping strategies, such as drinking or smoking more.
- Try to follow a set routine as much as possible, since this helps us feel in control.

### My Mind

- Slow down – try to slow both your movements and thinking.
- Try to make sure you carry out some tasks or activities that take your mind away from Covid-19 and your work.
- Talk to people you are comfortable with about how you are feeling: maybe even write a journal.
- Focus on the things that you can control.
- Try to pay attention to things that have gone well and celebrate small 'wins' or successes.
- Take time out from the news/social media – only allow yourself certain times to check for updates.

### My Heart



- Stay in touch with people you care about - if not in person then by phone/video calls.
- Be kind to yourself- **It is OK not to be OK** right now.
- Give yourself praise after finishing each shift: know you are making a difference. Be thankful for good things in your life.
- Allow yourself to feel emotions and let yourself cry.
- Let other people support and help you when needed.
- Make time for things that help you feel good or reduce stress.

### My Work



- Make sure you take breaks.
- Take some time out between shifts and rest on your days off.
- Tell your manager if you are struggling or see 'sources of support' on page 10.
- Friends and family may be worried about you and be contacting you more often – even when at work. If this is too much, consider a text update that lets them know you are OK and provide a time when you will contact them.
- Give care and TAKE care – even though it can be hard for healthcare workers to receive care from others.
- Try to leave work at work.

**Remember this is a marathon, not a sprint – but it won't last forever and will end.**

## Practical tips for coping at work

Summary from “*Taking care of you: Tips and techniques guide*” (Mind, 2020).

### Before your shift:

- **Prepare yourself:** Take six deep breaths to calm your body and mind before starting work.
- **Have a motivating motto** (like an athlete uses before a race) and say this to yourself: for example, “*I can do this*” or “*I am part of a strong and capable team*”.

### During your shift

- **90 second rule:** If you notice stress or tension building up, allow yourself a 90 second break (ideally in a different room) as this is often enough time to calm your mind and body down.
- **Counting backwards:** If you cannot take a break or move environments, try counting backwards from 20 in your head.
- **Tense and relax:** If you notice physical stress in your body, tense the muscles that feel tight for 5 seconds, then breathe out and relax for 10 seconds. Repeat as necessary.

### After your shift/going home

- **Celebrate success:** Try to end your day by thinking of something that you achieved or went well on your shift.
- **Coping with worries:** Writing down any concerns or worries can help to clear your mind. If you have tasks or things that are troubling you, write these down in a notebook and then try to let go of these ideas if you can.
- **Get active:** Do something physical (such as going for a walk) to relieve stress and clear your mind.



## Tips for starting and ending a shift

It is important for wellbeing that we start and finish a shift well. The following exercise has been found to be useful and could be used for handovers (with each person answering the questions below at the start/end of the day).

### *Just before we start our shift*

- Right now, I am feeling...
- A challenge to me today is...
- I am looking forward to...
- What I need right now is...
- Something I need to say is...

### *Just before we go home*

- Right now, I am feeling...
- A moment I found difficult was...
- I was pleased when I...
- Something positive I want to say to a team member is...
- Something I am really looking forward to is...

## Managing your worries

It is normal to feel anxious, emotional and stressed in the current situation. Feeling this way does not in any way mean you are 'weak' or cannot do your job.

However, if we worry too much, we can quickly find ourselves feeling overwhelmed. Try some of the following ideas to see if they help you:

**Talking:** Remember, it's OK to share your concerns with others you trust – and it might help them too.

**Worry time:** Write down anything that's on your mind and set aside a slot each day for 'worry time' to think about these things. When worries pop up, which they always will, just write them down and only focus on these once a day.

**Focusing on the present:** When we are worried, we tend to think ahead to the future and imagine the worst-case scenario. This stops us staying in the present. However, if we can bring our attention back to what is happening *right now*, this can help us cope with difficult emotions and improve our wellbeing. See the handout '**Focus on ACE – coping strategies**' to help with this.

**Grounding, relaxation and self-soothing techniques:** Try breathing exercises to help calm a racing mind. Remember your thoughts are just thoughts and not facts: try not to get too caught up in them. Use coping strategies that you know work for you rather than trying to learn something new. There is a handout at the end of pack with some grounding/breathing exercises.

**Problem-solving versus letting it go:** Some worries we can do something about whilst others are things we that have no control over. It can help to work out what type of worry you have. By doing this you either problem-solve and put together an action plan, or you can recognize that there is nothing you can do apart from letting that worry go and focusing your attention on something more helpful.

**Be kind to yourself (and others):** We can be very hard on ourselves during times of stress, but this can increase the difficult feelings we are experiencing. Try and be kind to yourself and remember you are just doing your best in a very difficult situation.

## When you cannot give the care you would have wanted

### Why might this happen

- This crisis is forcing care staff to work in different ways, for example minimising contact.
- You may be facing huge challenges in your personal lives which limit the amount that you are able to give to work
- You may need to protect your own health or that of your family is at risk
- The number of staff available may just not be enough to give the amount of care that is needed in these challenging times
- The expectation to be a 'hero' may mean it does not feel ok to say you are human and struggling

### How it may leave you feeling

- Distress about actions or lack of actions you have taken that violate your ethical code - we call this a MORAL INJURY
- You may feel angry, guilty or disgusted at yourself or others
- You may criticise yourself or others 'I'm not good enough at my job' or 'they are a terrible person' or 'it is the managers' fault'
- This may leave you feeling isolated at work or unable to function

### What might help

- Reminding yourself and each other that you are human beings just trying to do your best in awful circumstances
- Finding a 'buddy' that you can debrief with and talk about how you are feeling
- Managers can help by helping staff make sense of the decisions they are making and discussing difficult decisions
- Managers can help by giving information and acknowledging the difficulty of what staff are going to face each day
- Notice people in the team who avoid talking about it and make sure they know who to go to if they need to but do not force them to talk if they are not ready.

## Sources of support

If you find that you are needing additional support, there are many resources that you can access:

### Frontline19 Emotional Support

Free and confidential service for frontline workers

Frontline 19 is a UK nationwide service delivering supervision, debriefing and emotional support to frontline workers (including doctors, nurses, auxiliary staff, paramedics, ambulance drivers, midwives, social workers, care home staff, firefighters and police officers) during times of crisis. They have a vast network of qualified therapeutic practitioners and can organise help which is quick and easy to access, confidential and free: <https://www.frontline19.com/>



VitaMinds offer a range of short term talking therapies\* (1:1 and group courses) and resources for support with depression, anxiety, stress and long term conditions.

\*Appointments will be either on the phone or through digital platforms

Self-refer to VitaMinds online at:

[www.vitahealthgroup.co.uk/nhs-services/nhs-mental-health/](http://www.vitahealthgroup.co.uk/nhs-services/nhs-mental-health/)

Or call: 0333 200 1893



**Our Frontline** offers round-the-clock 1:1 wellbeing support to care workers by phone or text message, along with a collection of resources, tips and ideas chosen to support mental health and wellbeing:

<https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/toolkit/ourfrontline-socialcare/>

**In a crisis** – if you are in a crisis and need help urgently you can call:

**Bristol Mental Health Crisis Helpline: 0300 555 0334 (24/7)**

**Samaritans: 116 123** (24 hours)

**Shout: (Text) - 85258** (24-hour text service)

## Online resources

### General mental health support

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>

## Online courses or workbooks

- Complete an online course, “*Coping during the pandemic*”, through a Recovery College:  
<https://lms.recoverycollegeonline.co.uk/course/index.php?categoryid=13>
- Download an *anxiety workbook* specifically designed for use during the coronavirus pandemic. While it may be helpful to complete the workbook, you can also pick out the bits most helpful for you.  
<https://thewellnesssociety.org/free-coronavirus-anxiety-workbook/>
- Information about employment, finances and links to other resources that may offer advice:  
<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>  
<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/health/coronavirus-what-it-means-for-you/>

## Relaxation and mindfulness links

### Compassionate Mind exercises:

<https://www.compassionatemind.co.uk/resources/audio>

**ACT Companion: The Happiness Trap App** is free for the next three months due to the coronavirus outbreak. Download the App and then enter the code: TOGETHER on the subscription page to unlock all the App contents.

### Free audios:

<https://jackkornfield.com/compassion-in-the-time-of-coronavirus/>

<https://jackkornfield.com/steady-heart/>

### **Mindful exercises for everyday life (Solent NHS Trust) FREE**

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLFbeQITqQPGTLAmNgKs0srX9Vau7mctFf>

A series of mindfulness, acceptance and compassion-based exercises on YouTube.

### **Mindfulness: Finding Peace in a Frantic World (Danny Penman) FREE**

<http://franticworld.com/resources/>

Includes recordings of the body scan, 3-minute breathing space, chocolate meditation, mindfulness of the body and breath, befriending meditation etc.

### **Compassionate Mind Foundation website (FREE)**

<https://www.compassionatemind.co.uk/resources>

Recordings for addressing self-critical thoughts and building self-compassion.

### **Apps to download**

**Sleepio (for sleep difficulties):** [onboarding.sleepio.com](http://onboarding.sleepio.com). Can register for free if either an NHS or care home worker.

**Headspace** – free trial and then subscription required.

**Calm** - free trial and options to pay for additional functions if you wish.

**Aware** – free (you can pay for additional functions if you wish)

# Appendix 1

## Focus on ACE – Coping Strategies

### FOCUS on what's in your control



Fear and anxiety are inevitable: they are normal, natural responses to challenging situations that feel uncertain and worrying.



You can't control what happens in the future. You can't control Coronavirus itself, or the world economy, or how your government manages the situation. We have far more control over our behaviour. So, our number one aim is to take control of our behaviour.



When a big storm blows up, the boats in the harbour drop anchor. If they don't, they'll be swept out to sea. Dropping anchor doesn't make the storm go away, but it can hold a boat steady in the harbour until the storm passes in its own good time.



Similarly, we may experience 'emotional storms'. These can include unhelpful thoughts spinning inside our head and uncomfortable or painful feelings whirling around our body. If we're swept away by that storm inside us, the first practical step is to 'drop anchor' using the simple ACE guide.

**A =**  
**Acknowledge**  
**your thoughts**  
**and feelings**



**C =**  
**Come back**  
**into your**  
**body**



**E =**  
**Engage in**  
**what you're**  
**doing**



You can run through this ACE guide slowly and peacefully 3 or 4 times. Please turn over to find out more!

# Appendix 1 (continued)

## A = Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings

Silently and kindly acknowledge your thoughts, feelings, emotions memories, sensations, urges.

Take the stance of a curious scientist, observing what's going on in your inner world.

For example, "I am thinking that something bad is going to happen, which is making me feel scared and my tummy feels full of butterflies".



## C = Come back into your body

You could try some or all of the following, or find your own methods:

- Slowly push your feet onto the floor
- Slowly straighten up your back and spine; if you're sitting, sit upright and forward in your chair
- Slowly press your fingertips together
- Slowly stretch your arms or neck, shrugging your shoulders
- Slowly breathe in 1-2-3-4 and out 1-2-3-4



## E = Engage in what you're doing

Get a sense of where you are and refocus your attention on the activity you are doing:

- Look around the room and notice 5 things you can see
- Notice 3 or 4 things you can hear
- Notice what you can smell or taste or sense in your nose and mouth



Try to have a go at this ACE guide slowly 3 or 4 times.

Information adapted from FACE COVID-19 document by Dr Russ Harris, 2020  
Sophie Treas, Molly Laybourn and Dr Sally Stapleton, Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust  
COP and Language Services by Spring of Heather [www.springofheather.co.uk](http://www.springofheather.co.uk)

## Appendix 2

# grounding and soothing techniques

Firstly, well done for thinking about looking after yourself.

Stand up, put your feet firmly on the ground. Move about – stretch, stamp your feet, walk around a little



Use the **54321** technique:

- 5 things you can see in the room
- 4 things you can hear
- 3 things you can touch (and touch them)
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 slow breath

**Breathing exercise** – take a normal breath in, and then try to breathe out for a long time. It might help to think or say “in and ooooooooouuuuutttt”. Repeat this for 10 minutes

Do **progressive muscle relaxation** – gently breathe in and squeeze your feet muscles tightly, then slowly breathe out while you gently release. Repeat with your legs, stomach, shoulders, arms and hands, and face. Notice the relaxation and calming feeling

Say **positive coping statements** out loud such as “I am (name), I am safe right now, this is just a feeling. This will pass”

**Other soothing / distracting techniques:**

- Call a friend or helpline
- Take a warm bath or shower
- Go outside and look closely at a plant or flower
- Eat something or have a cup of tea or coffee. Really notice the taste and texture
- Pet an animal
- Go for a walk and really pay attention to what is around you
- Do a mindfulness meditation if you can (from apps, youtube, CD, computer etc)
- Do some housework
- Crossword or Sudoku
- Read a book or magazine
- Describe out loud what you are doing right now in great detail

Calm

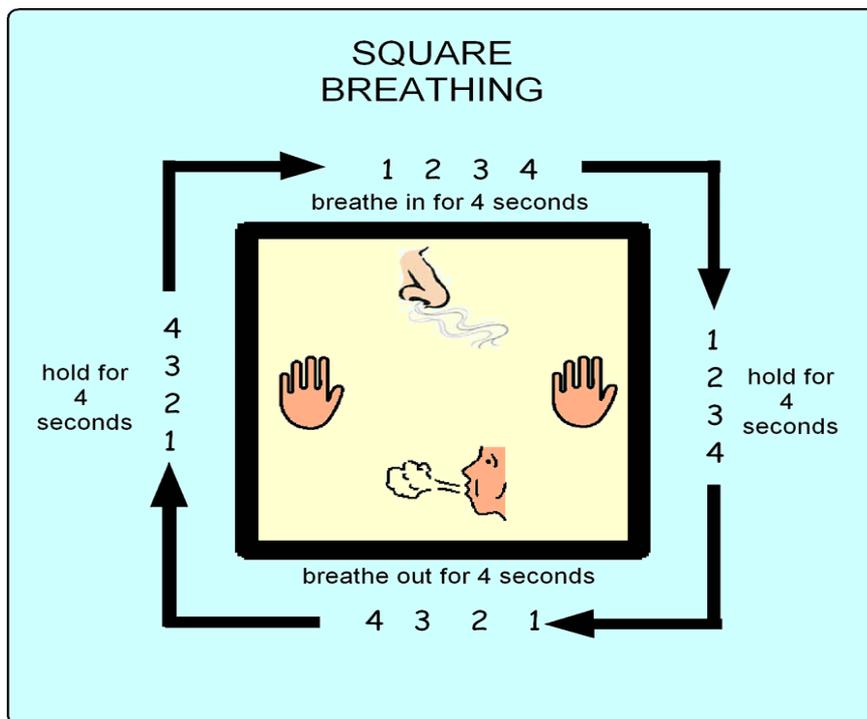
## Appendix 2 (continued)

### Square breathing

Square breathing is a useful skill for calming yourself down when you feel stressed, anxious or upset.

By slowing down your breathing, your body will start to feel calm and this helps our minds to relax too.

Find a square (window, table, bedroom wall etc.) and practice breathing in as you follow one side of the square, then breathing out along the other side.



### Take 10 breaths

1. Take 10 slow, deep breaths
2. Focus on breathing out as slowly as possible
3. Notice how it feels as your lungs empty and then refill
4. Notice the gentle rise and fall of your shoulders
5. See if you can let your thoughts come and go as if they're just clouds in the sky
6. See if you can notice both your breathing, and then your body, and then the space around you
7. Notice what you can see, hear, touch, and smell in the room
8. Think of something you feel grateful for now (e.g. help from others, having a comfy bed, the taste of tea or coffee, receiving a message from a friend, seeing spring flowers etc.)