**Staying mentally healthy during lockdown**

Lockdown has affected everyone over the past year, and people with learning disabilities are no exception.

Mental health, especially, has become a hot topic. Isolation is universally difficult, but especially for those with learning disabilities who are at greater risk of suffering with their mental health than those without (Burke, 2014).

These individuals often have smaller friendship and support circles due to difficulties integrating with their communities, and are also likely to experience greater obstacles when trying to access health services. As such, the prolonged sense of loneliness and disruption to normal routines can pose a particular risk to their wellbeing.

**Ways to stay engaged**

Like all of us, being involved in something meaningful is important. That sense of belonging, feeling valued and included. Although people with learning disabilities currently have reduced access to social networks outside the home, there are several ways to improve their sense of wellbeing and connection from within the home.

* + **Stay occupied** – keeping individuals engaged and busy will reduce anxiety and frustrations while continuing to develop their skills and independence. Activities, such as online cooking clubs and other accessible groups, can go a long way to creating engagement in an activity while also building knowledge, in this example around nutrition.
  + **Make the most of your environment** – make the most of what you have. For example, if you have a garden, why not turn it into a quiet sanctuary to escape to, or start a small gardening project. Alternatively, you could buy a yoga mat or some simple boxing equipment and develop a hobby around that.
  + **Have fun** – fun is the key to turning a potentially worrying time into a positive experience. Games, funny videos, podcasts, online groups; there are countless ways to stay occupied, both on and offline. Overcome anxieties by regularly incorporating enjoyable moments into your day.

### Bonus tip: Use time-based language

To make the current situation seem less scary, use time-based language that indicated that this lockdown is only temporary. For example, ‘this is how it is at the moment’ which implies restrictions will eventually be lifted and things will be ok. It’s a subtle way to calm fears and end catastrophising.

And lastly, don’t forget to look after YOU. As a carer or relative of someone with learning disabilities, it’s essential that you have your own support mechanisms in place that are separate from the loved ones you’re caring for.

Find time for yourself and keep to a routine. What are some ways you can carve ‘you-time’ moments in your week? The key is to keep it regular, even if it’s tiny. Because you can’t give to others if you’re feeling empty, yourself.