

Mental health resources for disability support service providers

12 June 2020

Stopping the spread of COVID-19 has meant that all New Zealanders have had to live differently.

This different way of living may have been particularly challenging for the people you support. During different Alert Levels, they may have had to live with people or be supported by workers that they don't know. It is also common for people to feel very anxious about the virus itself, even if the risk of exposure is now low.

Looking after your wellbeing and supporting the wellbeing of the people you are working with is important even as the restrictions ease. The impact of COVID-19 will likely be felt beyond the time that life returns to relative normality.

Providing support and reassurance

It can be challenging to know what is expected of us at every Alert Level. The people you support may struggle to understand what they can and cannot do even now that most restrictions have been removed.

Ways you can provide support.

- You can help people by answering their questions and making sure they know that the guidelines are not to punish them, but rather to make sure that everyone stays well.
- Encourage and support people to keep in contact with the people they love, and to talk through issues as they come up. At Alert Level 1, you can explain to people how they can have more face to face contact with whānau and friends while still staying safe.
- Explain that we all may be feeling more anxious, grumpy, tired or emotional under the circumstances. Try to focus on the positive things that may have happened during the COVID-19 response, such as how flatmates in a group home learnt new skills or supported each other, or how people living alone showed their independence and were resilient through the restrictions. Talk with people about how they can now return to activities and sports.
- People might continue to worry about their health or be nervous about reconnecting with services or individuals they haven't seen for a while, this may make it hard for them to communicate their feelings or needs, and their behaviour might change. If people are distressed or are distressing others, you can access Explore Behaviour Support Services at healthcarenz.co.nz/explore-specialist-advice/

Supporting wellbeing

The impact of COVID-19 will be significant for some people, who may need additional, more intentional support to maintain their health and wellbeing.

Te Whare Tapa Whā

A positive way to support people's health and wellbeing daily is through using the **Te Whare Tapa Whā** model. Te Whare Tapa Whā is based on the four areas of Māori health. It looks at physical health (taha

tinana), spiritual health (taha wairua), the role of family (taha whānau), and mental health (taha hinengaro). As providers, you can encourage both the people you support and support workers to engage with all aspects of Te Whare Tapa Whā every day.



Taha tinana (physical health)

Taha tinana can be supported by encouraging people to exercise every day as a way of releasing stress, increasing energy, and feeling more positive.

At Alert Level 1, people should be reminded to practice physical distancing and to wash and dry their hands as soon as they come back inside.

Taha wairua (spiritual health)

Taha wairua can be supported, even for people who do not see themselves as being spiritual. There are things people can do to look after their inner spirit (wairua). Simply finding ways to relax and unwind helps a person's wairua.

Some people find activities such as yoga and meditation help them stay calm and relaxed. Free videos can be found online, and you could help people to access and do these activities.

Many faith-based communities like churches and other religious groups have continued to meet virtually at all Alert Levels. Now that there are no restrictions, this is a good time for people to connect with their communities again.

Taha whānau (family health)

Taha whānau is about belonging, caring and sharing with individuals who are part of a person's broader social system.

At all Alert Levels, people can keep in touch with friends, whānau, neighbours and the people they care about.

Now that we are at Alert Level 1, you can encourage or support people to meet their friends and whānau in person.

Taha hinengaro (mental health)

Taha hinengaro might be particularly affected for some of the people you support during the COVID-19 recovery and when we start to return to life as it used to be. If a person you support is feeling upset or anxious, there are things you can do to help them feel better, calmer, or more positive. These might be simple things, like:

- Encouraging them to take some deep breaths;
- Asking them to take a few minutes and focus on what is around them and get them to name a few things they can see, hear, smell, taste or feel right now; and
- Doing something fun that you know makes them feel good.

For disabled people living alone with low levels of support, Alert Levels 3 and 4 restrictions will have meant many weeks without physical contact and in many cases, little social contact. Be aware of the impact that this significant period of isolation may have had on the person's taha hinengaro (mental health).

It is also a good idea to talk to people about the news and information they are accessing. Even though New Zealand is now at Alert Level 1 and the risk of exposure to COVID-19 is low, distressing images and stories in the overseas media are likely to continue. The constant media coverage of COVID-19 can feel overwhelming. If you think the news about COVID-19 is making someone feel bad, encourage them to take a break from it for a while or to check it less often. It may be helpful to suggest one reliable source of information about COVID-19 and to encourage them to focus on New Zealand information such as [health.govt.nz/covid-19](https://www.health.govt.nz/covid-19) or [covid19.govt.nz](https://www.covid19.govt.nz)

Ask for help if you need it.

If you think you need more help to support someone with their mental health and wellbeing you could call or text **1737** to have a chat with a trained counsellor

For specialist behaviour support, contact Explore Behaviour Support at [healthcarenz.co.nz/explore-specialist-advice/](https://www.healthcarenz.co.nz/explore-specialist-advice/) or call them on **0800 000 421**.

Useful online resources for supporting wellbeing

Check out tips and messages designed to help Kiwis cope better and get through COVID-19 at: [allright.org.nz/campaigns/getting-through-together](https://www.allright.org.nz/campaigns/getting-through-together)

Go to the Mental Health Foundation Website for information and downloads on the Five Ways to Wellbeing: Etahi ara e rima ki ti ngākau ora – Help people stay mentally well. [mentalhealth.org.nz/home/ways-to-wellbeing/](https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/ways-to-wellbeing/)

Go to [mentemia.com/covid-19](https://www.mentemia.com/covid-19) for a free app to support mental health and wellbeing

Go to MelonHealth for self-care and support resources during COVID-19 at [melonhealth.com/covid-19/](https://www.melonhealth.com/covid-19/)

Redseed is offering a free, online course for managing stress and anxiety during COVID at [redseed.com/solutions/managing-stress-anxiety/](https://www.redseed.com/solutions/managing-stress-anxiety/)

Go to Ngā Tangata Tuatahi – People First New Zealand for Easy Read information about COVID-19 at [peoplefirst.org.nz/easy-read-information-about-covid-19/](https://www.peoplefirst.org.nz/easy-read-information-about-covid-19/)

Go to the Council for Intellectual Disability (CID) for an Easy Read Resource on looking after your mental health during coronavirus (COVID-19).

cid.org.au/our-stories/look-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus/

Go to Books Beyond Words at **booksbeyondwords.co.uk/downloads-shop/beating-the-virus** for pictorial resources about coronavirus for people who do not communicate verbally, or who understand messages delivered via pictures.

To learn more about the Māori health model Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 2017), go to

health.govt.nz/our-work/populations/maori-health/maori-health-models/maori-health-models-te-whare-tapa-wha