Adapted from APS Tips for Maintaining Mental Health During Social Isolation

To help control the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) across the country, all Australians have been asked to practise social distancing. In some cases, people are required to, or may choose to, self-isolate. Understandably, the challenges associated with social distancing and isolation, including separation from loved ones, loss of freedom and reduced income, are leading some people to experience feelings of anxiety, boredom, frustration and fear.

This information sheet outlines some useful strategies you can use to maintain good mental health during this unprecedented time of social distancing and isolation.

Helping your child

As a result of the coronavirus outbreak, many children are spending significantly more time at home, not taking part in out-of-school activities, and some are even required to self-isolate with their families. Below are some ideas on how parents can help their child cope with periods of social distancing or isolation.

Set a daily routine

Routines can help children cope with change and help them understand what is expected of them.
Work with your child to develop a routine that suits the whole family and includes a range of activities, for example, schoolwork (literacy and numeracy), physical activity, creative play, family time and limited amounts of screen time.

Structure your day

Working from home can bring a whole set of challenges. The need to provide structure to your day is important. While in isolation it is beneficial to plan out your days to restore a sense of purpose and normality to your daily life. Schedule tasks such as school or household chores, as well as activities you enjoy to help you stick to your routine. Structuring activities around mealtimes and bedtime can also help you keep to your schedule while ensuring you eat regularly and get enough sleep.

Stay connected

Positive social connections are essential for our mental health and can help us cope in times of stress. Currently we are being asked to distance ourselves from others so it is important that we maintain our social networks using available methods of communication. This can be as simple as phoning a friend to share your experience, using videoconferencing technology to check in with a family member, or spending quality time with the people you live with.

Maintain social relationships

Use technologies (such as FaceTime, Zoom or Skype) to help your child maintain contact with friends and other family members, such as grandparents. For older

children and teenagers, it is important to monitor their use of social media accounts as excessive use can lead to increased levels of anxiety.

Have fun
For many children, their out of school activities (e.g., swimming, football) have been cancelled but it is important for them to stay active. Harness their interests and have fun with them at home (e.g., play cricket in the backyard or dance to music inside). You can also take this opportunity to spend quality time with your child by teaching them a new skill or game, read with them, or research a new topic together.

Seek additional support when needed
If you feel that the stress or anxiety you experience as a result of self-isolation is getting too much, a psychologist may be able to help. Psychologists are highly trained and qualified professionals skilled in providing effective interventions for a range of mental health concerns, including stress. A psychologist can help you manage your stress and anxiety using techniques based on the best available research.

If you are referred to a psychologist by your GP, you might be eligible for a Medicare rebate. You may also be eligible to receive psychology services via telehealth so that you do not need to travel to see a psychologist. Ask your psychologist or GP for details.

There are number of ways to access a psychologist. You can:
• use the Australia-wide Find a PsychologistTM service. Go to findapsychologist.com.au or call 1800 333 497
• ask your GP or another health professional to refer you.