

Managing Anxiety around the COVID-19 Pandemic

**Techniques for
managing anxiety
while following
social distancing
guidelines**

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Managing Anxiety around the COVID-19 Pandemic

As many of you know, the way the CMHTs and NHS are able to provide their services are constantly changing amidst the COVID-19 situation. We are aware that this may leave some people feeling quite anxious so we have made a list of suggestions to help relieve anxiety during this time. This information is designed to reach a broad range of individuals under our service, not all of it will be applicable to everyone; however we hope that these suggestions can help even a little bit in these difficult times.



Figure 1. @heyAmberRae on Instagram. March 18th 2020.

Symptoms of Anxiety

Anxiety can be felt in different ways by everyone and it is a normal reaction to have to threatening or uncertain situations. Some people only feel a couple of symptoms, whereas others have more. Here are the symptoms of anxiety that are listed on the NHS website (2018), so you may be able to recognise them when you're feeling anxious:

- Restlessness
- Dizziness
- Irritability
- Racing heartrate
- Trembling or shaking
- A sense of dread
- Dry mouth
- Excessive sweating
- Shortness of breath
- Difficulty concentrating
- Stomach ache
- Feeling sick
- Headache
- Feeling on edge
- Difficulty falling asleep

News and Social Media Consumption

Whilst there is benefit in taking in information from news and social media, this can become damaging if we spend a large amount of time doing this or if the information we're taking in isn't accurate, trustworthy or helpful (Gallagher, 2020). We can avoid this by:

- Limiting social media consumption – turn off news notifications on your phone, set a limit on the amount of time you spend on social media or news sites and unfollow or mute accounts that are posting a lot of information about COVID-19.
- Only reading information from official sites – use the UK government website (GOV, 2020) or the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020) to get accurate updates. The World Health Organisation has a link on their website debunking myths about COVID-19.

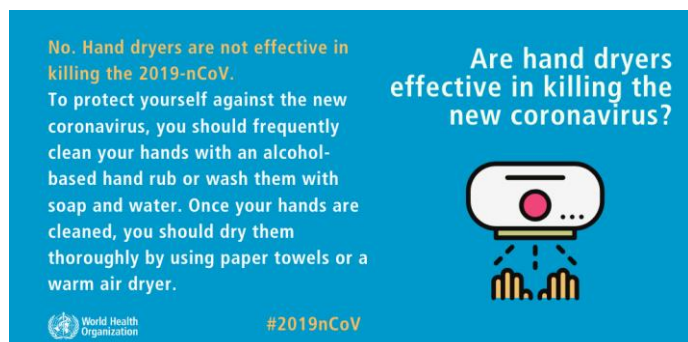


Figure 2. World Health Organisation (WHO) 2020.

Looking after yourself physically and mentally

With the possibility that we may need to self-isolate, it is important we are able to look after ourselves psychically and mentally (GOV, 2020). If we are stuck inside, it will be difficult to take part in common exercises, such as running or swimming. It may also feel difficult to look after our physical health, mental health, hygiene but by doing this, we may feel better while at home. Here are some suggestions:

- Try to stick to your normal routine as much as possible – go to sleep and wake up at the same time as usual, have meals at the same time as usual, this should help mental wellbeing and could help reduce the feeling of discomfort in this situation. It is important to tend to your hygiene so you feel refreshed when stuck indoors; keep on top of your shower and teeth brushing routines, as sometimes the littlest things make the biggest differences.
- Use soothing techniques – this may include meditation, mindfulness, breathing exercises or light exercises, such as stretches. Not all of these techniques will work for everyone so try them out and choose whichever works best for you. There is a wealth of information on the internet on about variations of these different techniques, including information about breathing exercises on the NHS website (2018), which has instructions for a breathing exercise. CMHT Psychology has also recorded mindfulness exercises that can be accessed and downloaded at: <https://mindfulnessexercisepodbean.com/>
- Do your best to get a good amount of sleep and eat healthily (CDC, 2020) – these are both good techniques for looking after mental health, although it is important to recognise that the symptoms of anxiety can make both of these things difficult to do.
- Acknowledging feelings of anxiety rather than ignoring them – supressing these symptoms may make your discomfort worse.
- Have compassion for yourself and others – tensions may rise in this situation and different people are going to have different reactions to this situation, some may be feeling very worried and anxious whereas others may be feeling more relaxed. It is important to be kind to yourself and others for whatever reaction you may have.
- Focus on what you can control – you may not be able to control the COVID-19 situation, the actions of others or even your own thoughts and feelings but it is important to remember what you can control in this situation; your actions. This can be attempted by acknowledging your thoughts and feelings, coming back into your body (grounding techniques could be useful for this) and engaging in what you're doing.
- Seek help when needed – it is important to know which services are still available to help with any mental health issues that arise in this time. Duty, Mental Health Matters, Samaritans, the CMHT and online resources are available for use in times of crisis. We will provide the numbers at the end of this letter.



Figure 3. Lexi Schmidt. 18th April 2017.

Finding Things to Enjoy

It is a possibility that we may have to spend more time at home than normal in the coming weeks. For some of us this may not be much of a change, however for others this may be a very different experience than usual. It is important that in this situation, we can find some enjoyment while at home. We can do this by:

- Finding ways to enjoy natural light – open curtains during the day, sit by a window or in a well-lit room, go into your garden (if you have one). Along the same lines is make sure to get fresh air by opening windows, if you can.
- Finding different topics to talk about with family/friends/neighbours – whilst COVID-19 is a big topic at the moment, talking about it a lot will not help any anxious feelings you may have. Attempt to bring up different topics of conversation when with family/friends/neighbours. If you feel able to, request that COVID-19 isn't brought up too much when in these conversations. (HelpGuide, 2020).
- Expressing gratitude – whilst this isn't always easy, attempting to feel grateful for things in your life while a crisis is occurring may help to take your mind off COVID-19. This could be for any small thing, such as, having somewhere to live, having supportive peers around you, having hobbies, having good physical health, something you like about yourself or something you've achieved.
- Attempting to reframe the situation (Every Mind Matters, 2020) – this involves thinking about the situation from a different perspective. For some of us, being home may mean you have more time than usual to spend with family members or friends, for others it may mean the pressures of work are released for a short period of time. Some may feel this is time they can get on with something they've wanted to do for a while, whether this is tidying their bedroom or reading a book. This isn't going to solve all worries about COVID-19 however, thinking about the situation in a different way might release some fears and allow us to think in a more positive way.

Managing anxiety around Coronavirus:

Catch the catastrophising- we tend to fill uncertainty with unhelpful certainty, often of the worst-case variety. Notice these and counteract them with evidence based facts from reliable sources

Don't shame yourself for how you feel - recognising this rather than trying to tuck it away reduces stress

Talk through your anxieties with someone sensible you trust- extra brain space can help think about things in different way. However, try to ensure that you allow time to talk about other things too - it is important that we take time to shift our focus away from the things we are anxious about

Figure 4. @mumologist on Instagram. 14th March 2020

Finding Something New

- Try something you haven't tried before (GOV, 2020) – trying something new may provide a useful distraction from thoughts and anxieties around COVID-19. Some suggestions are to start journaling thoughts and feelings (we've left a few pages at the end of this booklet for a place to start), take a walk at a set time each day, call a friend/family member daily or start a puzzle. These new activities may bring something to look forward to each day.

3 THINGS TO NOTICE DAILY

1. What **ENERGIZES** you
2. What you're **GRATEFUL** for
3. What's **NOT WORKING** & why

xo @heyamberrae

Figure 5. @heyamberrae on Instagram. 23rd March 2020

- Try doing one productive thing each day – being at home for a prolonged period of time may bring feelings of restlessness, lack of motivation or inactivity. Attempting to do one productive thing each day may help combat these feelings. This could be any small thing, such as, cleaning part of your kitchen, finding old clothes or items that can be donated,

Helplines

Saying this, we recognise that home is not always a safe, welcoming or happy place to be and many people will struggle with social distancing or self-isolation for a number of reasons. If this is the case for you then here are some important services that you may want to access during this time:

Mental Health Matters: 0300 323 0101. Available 5pm-9pm and 24 hours at the weekend.

Headspace: The usual group service is not available currently however, 1:1 phone call appointments are available, booked via the Headspace Facebook page.

Samaritans: 116 123. 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. A confidential listening service.

Plymouth Domestic Abuse Service: 0800 458 2558. For refuge: 01752 562 286.

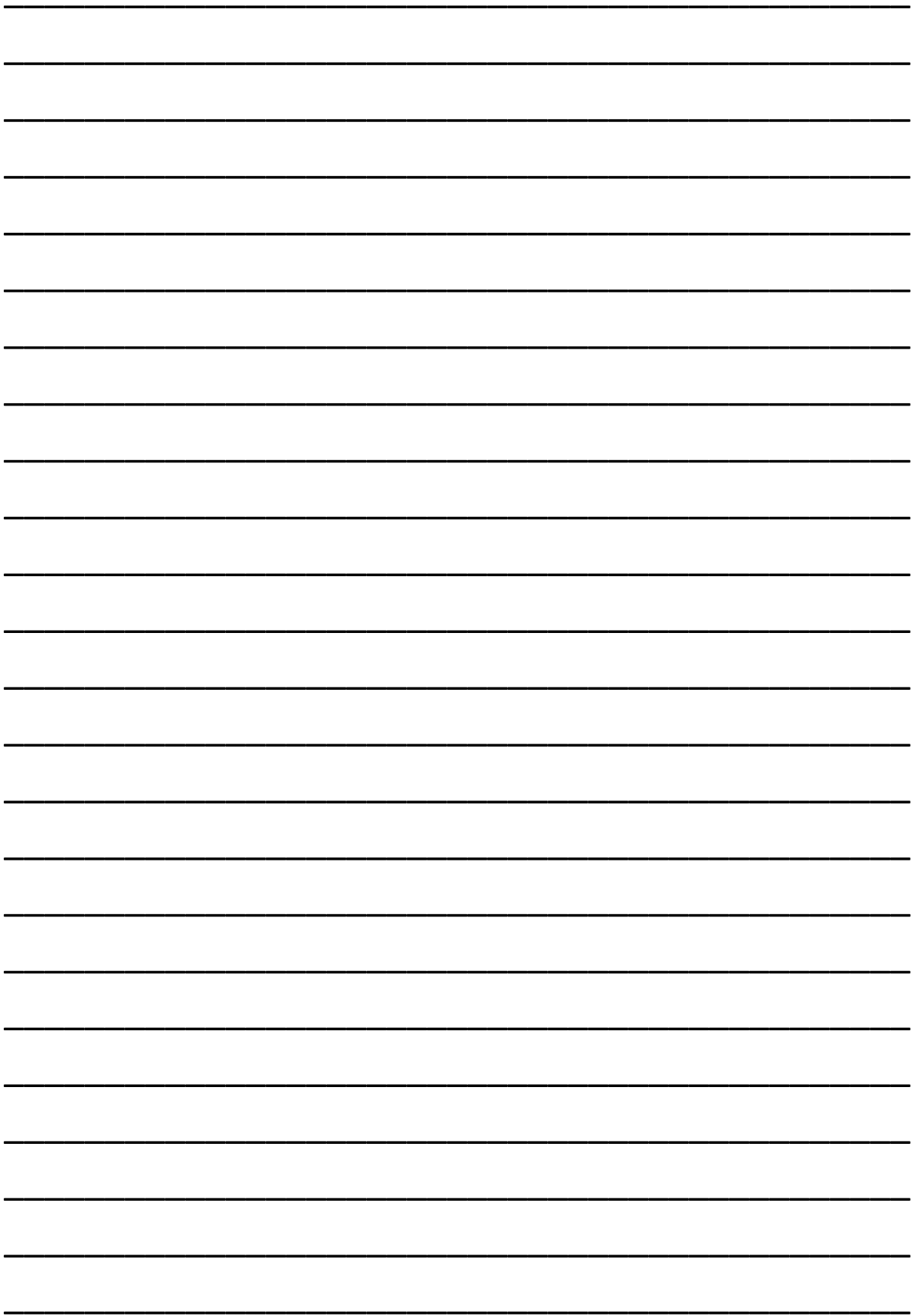
Women's Aid 24-hour helpline: 0808 2000 247.

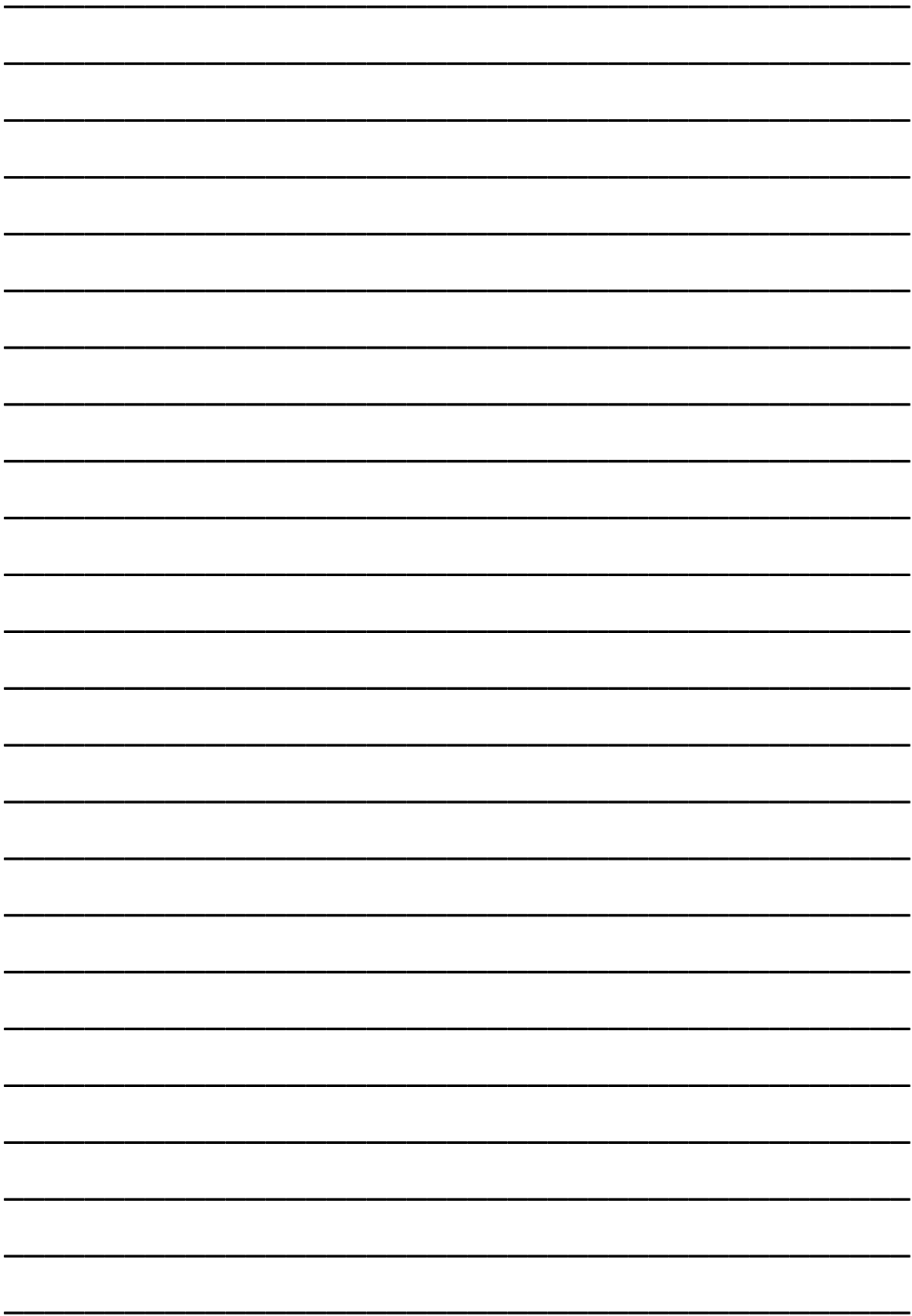
Shelter Devon: 0344 515 2399. Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm. For housing and homelessness issues.

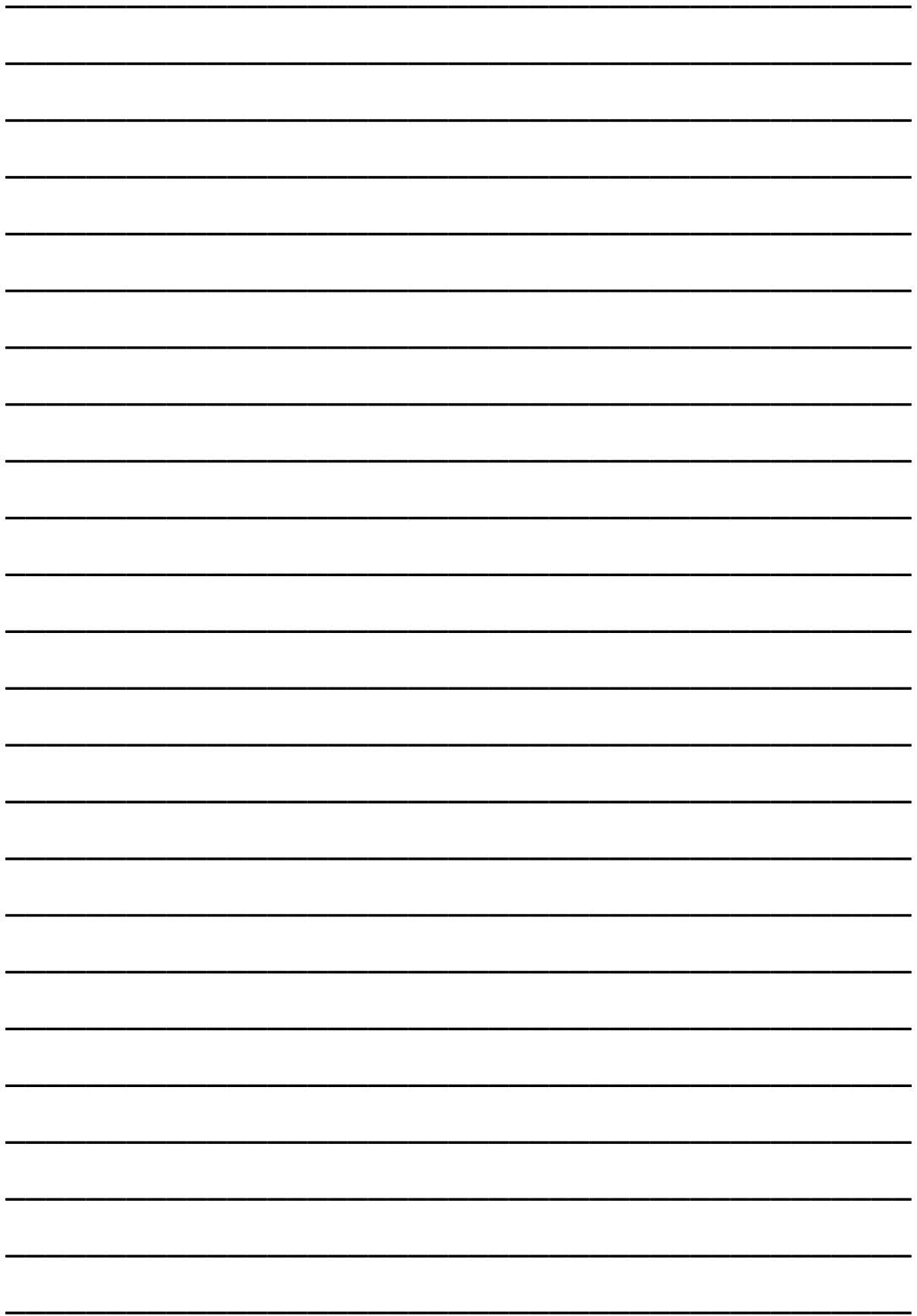
Childline: 0800 1111.

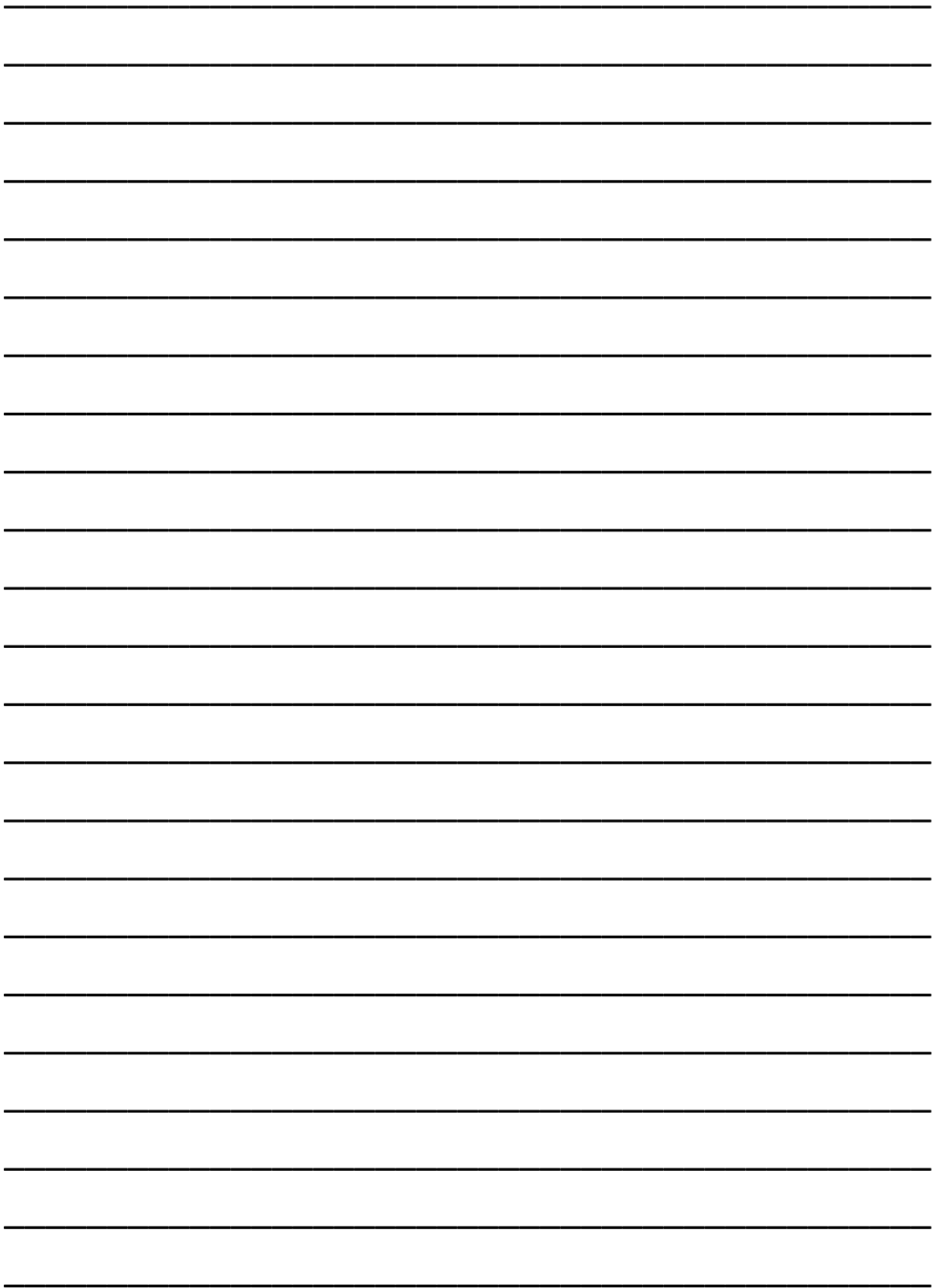
Cruse Bereavement care: 0808 808 1677. Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm

Mencap Learning Disability Helpline: 0808 808 1111.









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