How can I keep calm during self-isolation?

On top of the stress of work, there are now additional pressures to deal with at home during the covid-19 pandemic. Abi Rimmer asks experts how best to manage these.

"As a former submarine weapons officer in the Royal Navy, I spent several weeks at a time in a steel tube underwater, hundreds of miles from home. These are my tips to keep your mood high during lockdown.

"Life at sea is a clockwork pattern of shifts. Routine gives you direction and keeps the time flowing—so establish one early on, before low mood sets in. Set times for work, hobbies, meals, and so on. Write it down and stick to it. Don’t lie about in your pyjamas—or at least have daytime pyjamas. Do at least 30 minutes’ exercise a day; it breaks up the day and can help lift your mood.

"Food at sea was pretty good; you could tell what day it was by the dinner menu. Food will be something to look forward to, so indulge your favourites.

"On patrol we had little contact with the real world and it was our shipmates who helped get us through. Keep in touch and build a ‘crew’ of supportive people. My work team has a daily coffee catch up on Zoom even if there’s no work to discuss. If you cohabit then give everyone a private space or time. On a submarine your bunk was the only sacrosanct space and the respite was needed.

"Fight to keep perspective. It’s a bad situation but, like all patrols, this one will end. Don’t obsess over the news. Bring your world closer, focus on little things that you enjoy and make plans for the future. My partner is an emergency medicine doctor and my heart genuinely goes out to you all."

"For those in household isolation or working from home, now is the time to get fit. Exercise helps mental and physical health, sleep, and immunity. It’s particularly important for those in vulnerable, high risk groups, so encouraging aged parents, for example, as well as doing it yourself, can make a huge difference.

"Exercise guidance tells us that adults of all ages and disabilities should undertake a minimum of 150 minutes a week, with one hour a day for children. Any amount of exercise, however, makes a difference to mental and physical health.

"Results are rapid. Studies show fewer anaesthetic complications when preparing for cancer surgery with daily exercise for just three weeks. Resources such as those developed by the Centre for Perioperative Care can help you prepare for contracting covid-19."

"All children thrive on routine—it’s the same every day in school. Share a daily schedule with your children and avoid sudden changes or surprises. Short bursts of more formal learning, such as spelling or writing, followed by planned play time will help children to get through the day.

"A key thing to remember is that the unique atmosphere of school cannot be re-created at home. Young children, especially those in early years, spend a significant amount of time at school learning through play rather than working independently. At home, activities such as playing “shops,” cooking, or gardening cover different aspects of learning, but also provide valuable practical experiences and inspiration for other learning."

"Most schools will have provided some form of home learning. The youngest children may not yet be able to write extensively or complete endless worksheets. There is, however, plenty of free content available online. Schools such as mine are also using platforms like Twitter to share these links, and make their own videos guiding children and parents through activities to do.

"A final thought would be to have fun and make the most of your time together. Teaching young children requires patience, and what is important is to foster a love of learning and a positive attitude to it. At school the most productive children can’t wait to show adults what they’ve done—it will be the same at home too."

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Routine is key
Jon Bailey, autonomous underwater vehicle operations engineer at the National Oceanography Centre

Exercise is as a life saver
Scarlett McNally, consultant orthopaedic surgeon and deputy director for the Centre for Perioperative Care

Kids can learn through play
Adam Dobson, head of early years foundation stage at Thames View Infants School, Barking