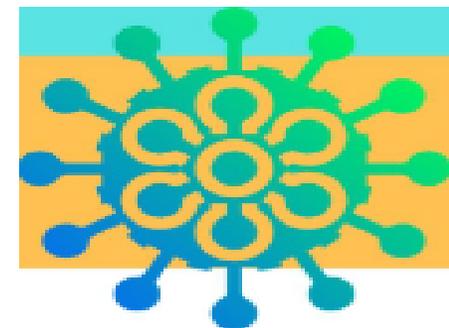


# Beyond Lockdown



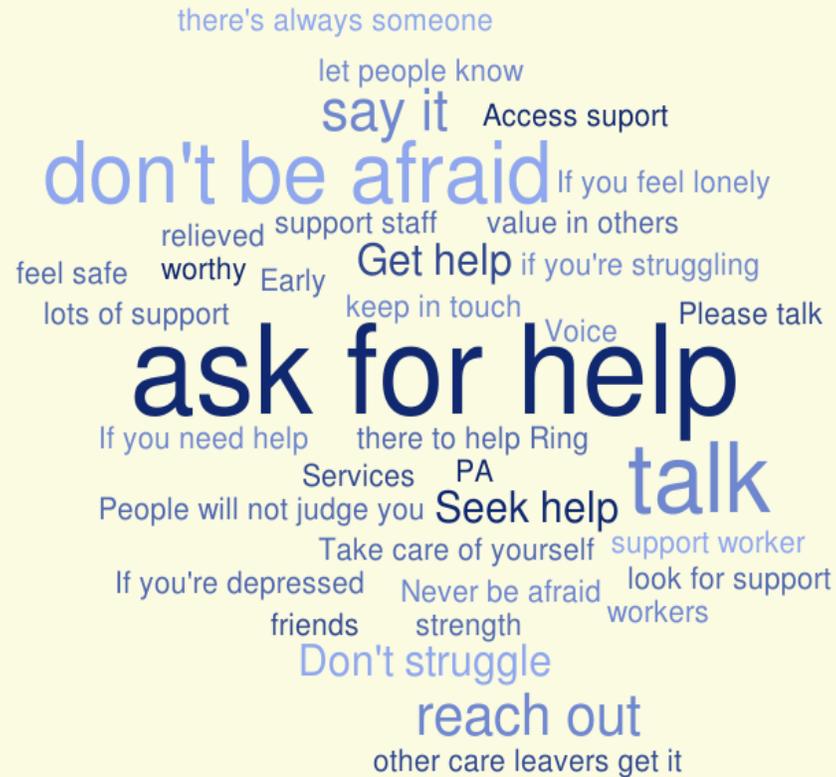
## Messages from care leavers to help other care leavers cope during and after lockdown

These ideas have been put together by researchers based on information from care leavers across the UK who answered our survey and those in Kent, Surrey and Sussex who took part in online workshops.



# Ask for help

The strongest message of all was to reach out, talk, ask for help, even though you may find it difficult



“Try and talk to someone you trust and feel safe with; this could be a friend, family member, or your PA.”

\* \* \*

“Don't be afraid to reach out the help is out there. You're not the only one going through that or feeling like that.”

\* \* \*

“If you start feeling low talk to your PA or friends before you get really low. Don't struggle alone, let people know how you're feeling.”

“Please don't be afraid to reach out and look for support. To admit is not weakness - to see the value in others is a strength.”

## Ask for help

Care leavers want PAs to start conversations about difficult or sensitive issues like feelings, loneliness or mental health. These are a few suggestions about how to ask for help:

"I would say be as **honest and clear** as you can even if that means noting down certain things ... beforehand, in terms of being able to address everything when you have that meeting. I wouldn't advise to ... say one bit and then the next week you are saying something else. I would personally get it all out because that's the only way you can progress ... if you tell like half of the story and then you tell the other half, PAs will be like, '*Oh well you never said that!*' So the full picture is like the best picture if that makes sense."

"Let them know how vulnerable you are feeling before you let out how you are feeling because - if they are a good PA - they will then be braced to understand and know where you are coming from before you start speaking, so you are going to get the ear that you want rather than someone who is busy, thinking about their next appointment. And not just with PAs, but with anyone that you are wanting to speak to."



## Ask for help

Planning in advance what you want to say can help: let them know that you need their time and complete attention.

“If you are meeting with your PA specifically let them know beforehand that there is a fair amount that needs to be spoken about and **please can they make sure that they’ve got enough time to talk** about it. Because one of their favourites is, *‘I’m only here for half an hour...I’ve got someone else to see’*. ... Tell them, “It’s about my mental health. I want to explain everything to you. Please make sure there’s enough time to talk to me. I need more than half an hour.”

“Have that self-independence that they want everyone to have and say, “I want an hour with you. Have you got an hour?”



## Ask for help

Think about where to talk and how to make it happen.

"If there was an outdoor activity or a place you wanted to go that maybe made you feel a little bit safer to talk in that space, say 'This is where I want to go. I'll meet you there.'"

"Form a bubble with a good friend."

"Try set up some zoom quizzes with family or friends."

"I found setting up WhatsApp groups with friends really useful."

It can help to talk to people with shared experiences

"Sometimes it's easier to open up to someone when there is common ground...talking to someone whose experiences are similar can make it a whole lot easier, like another care leaver."

"It helps people to open up if their experiences are relatable."

"... having someone who is more on your level to help you get through it together."



## Ask for help

In a nutshell ...

“If you need help say it.  
If you feel lonely say it.  
If you’re depressed say it.  
It kills and hurts more to keep to yourself.  
Please talk to anyone you feel safe to talk to.”



## Stay in contact

"Talk to people you feel safe talking to."

"Stay in contact with other people as much as you can. If you can't meet them, text, WhatsApp, Zoom quizzes."

"Reach out, you are not alone, you are not the only one feeling like that or going through that, there are things out there and people can help."

"There's always someone to talk to."



## Routine and structure

Many care leavers said that, during lockdown, they had lost their regular routines and daily patterns, like sleeping, eating and exercising. This often led to loss of motivation too and affected their mental health.

"Keep to pre-lockdown routine as much as possible. This is hard but it helps."

"A good thing is to remember that it takes 30 days to form a habit - so build, or build back, a routine gradually in small steps."

"If you didn't have a pre-lockdown routine, ask for support to build one in small steps."

"I think you need a point and a reason."

"Find ways to be motivated."

"Search for something to motivate you, to get back your routines."



# Do things you enjoy and that benefit you

Care leavers made lots of suggestions:

Take care of yourself

Read a book you love and enjoy

Focus on the small, good things

Save money if you can and then treat yourself

Find things out

Rationalise, reflect, move forward

Listen to podcasts

Stay busy and distract yourself

Keep healthy through diet and exercise: It's amazing how much good a bit of exercise can do.

Get outside into nature



# Stay positive and hopeful

Care leavers thought optimism was important.

"There are only so many bad things or not so great things that can happen before you have a string of good things. There's always going to be good times that come after so try not to dwell on the bad times."

"Look for the light at the end of the tunnel and that sort of stuff. Because there is always going to be that light. And I know everybody always says don't walk towards it, but do because it works."

"DO NOT GIVE UP."

"THE ONLY WAY IS UP."

"It might be crap now but every storm has a **rainbow** waiting at the end."

But if you're feeling anxious, low or lonely, staying positive can feel like "a thought... it's not a reality sometimes" ...

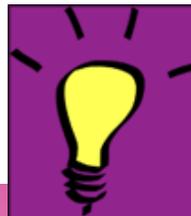


## Stay positive and hopeful

Care leavers shared a couple of things they'd found helpful to stay positive and hopeful.

"Maybe you could do some little grounding techniques that would put you in a position to be able to think positively. When I used to have panic attacks one of the techniques I used to use was to name five things that are surrounding me and it does like physically ground you to your space. We all understand that when you are feeling negative just saying be positive is not going to work. You need tools that you can use to alleviate that negativity to take the burden off yourself."

"When you are depressed it is self-hate as well. It's like, 'Oh god I'm failing at everything!' I do compare myself to my peers that don't have care experience but we need to look at our lives as our lives and no comparison to anyone else. And if today you've got up and changed your underwear and had a little wash...that is great. Like, that's enough. You've done that today and be proud of yourself for it. It's not about comparing...It's about comparing you to yesterday's you if you know what I mean."



## What NOT to do

Care leavers suggested avoiding certain things...

Don't watch the news, read it or use an app instead as its less worrying and you have control over what you see.

Avoid drink and drugs - they're 'not good for your mental health'

Don't make new "internet" friends just because you are lonely; not everyone wants to get to know you in that way and people will take advantage of the situation we are in.

Don't waste money at the pub.

**DON'T GIVE UP**

Don't expect too much of other people



## And finally ...

The same things won't work for everyone. It's important to find out what works for you...

"... we all have complicated issues..."

Care leavers may be struggling during lockdown, so it's important to remember to

"... take small steps..."

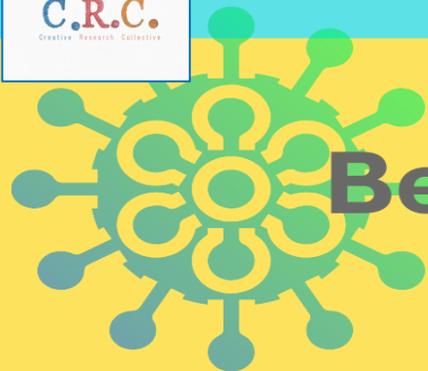
GOOD LUCK

C.R.C.

Creative Research Collective

US

UNIVERSITY  
OF SUSSEX



# Beyond Lockdown



For further information about this project please contact  
the Beyond Lockdown team at  
[beyond-lockdown@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:beyond-lockdown@sussex.ac.uk)

or Becca Randell  
Kent, Surrey and Sussex Implementation lead – CYP Mental Health  
[becca.randell@nhs.net](mailto:becca.randell@nhs.net)

This research was funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Applied Research Collaboration Kent, Surrey, Sussex. The views expressed are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NHS, the NIHR or the Department of Health and Social Care.

