

We are in this together

Welcome to the winter edition of the Family Drug Help newsletter where we reflect on COVID-19, the changes it has brought to our lives, its impact on families, how we have adapted as a service and the valuable learnings we can take moving forward.

In 'normal' times, having a family member who uses drugs can cause stress, conflict, worry and despair. With COVID-19 we have seen an increase in call demand with families presenting complex needs from increased reports of family violence, increased drug use, housing insecurity, mental health concerns and lack of privacy due to lock down restrictions. Other families reported the benefits of staying home and being able to connect more with their loved ones and build on their relationships.

Regardless, you are not alone, and support is always available.

Family Drug Help quickly adapted in how it could support families. We explore how each of the programs has used online platforms to maintain accessible, strong and meaningful connections with families. We also have some family reflections on COVID-19, and photos of local teddies that are a reminder of the innocence and humanity around us.

Out of the current environment will come a chance to re-evaluate and improve the way we support families. Above all, COVID-19, like any situation that challenges us, tells us of the importance to:

'Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.'
Theodore Roosevelt

Connect, reach out for support, now – 1300 660 068
From all of us at Family Drug Help, we wish you a safe, warm winter.

Robert Campbell
Programme Manager
Family Drug Help



'In a world gone bad, a bear – even a bear standing on its head – is a comforting, uncomplicated, dependable hunk of sanity.'

Pam Brown, author

Have you noticed teddy bears and other soft toys strategically placed in windows, trees, balconies and gates in your neighbourhood recently? This spectacle is happening across the globe and has proved to be a positive distraction that has encouraged children to get outdoors for a walk with their parents and 'hunt' for bears during the COVID-19 restrictions.

The hunt is inspired by the children's book *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* by Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury, in which the characters sing: "We're going on a bear hunt, we're going to catch a big one — what a beautiful day, we're not scared." Others have taken up the challenge by collecting teddy photographs and some have even staged elaborate tableaus in their front gardens. Some children have responded to the COVID-19 crisis by using their creative talents with chalk, rainbows and simple but important messages.



Living in a COVID-19 world

I'm not telling you anything new about the adjustment it takes to feel comfortable during these troubled times.

Since I retired some eighteen months ago, my routine has been to play golf two or three times per week. This was deemed too dangerous to continue until now, in order to reduce the possibility of we golfers infecting each other. It brings a whole new interpretation to the possibility of being a 'golfing widow' doesn't it?

My family for one would often give me a severe reprimand for spending so much time on the golf course. When I was home for an additional 20 hours or so per week, well, I get the feeling they preferred me out on the course! Now my golf caddy is dusted off, the household task list can get back to its customary unfulfilled status. Looking at the bright side of COVID-19 is a good exercise. After all, life is so much more palatable if you can be optimistic for the future.

Having been forced to cook the odd meal for the family turns out to be another bonus... I doubt I'll ever be invited to do that again.

I believe that my contribution to the choice of television station is underrated. Our daughter is living at home again and it's almost unbearable when both she and my wife gang up on me to choose television programs. This is proving to be a huge area of conflict – no one should have to suffer through 24/7 reality tv, right? I think I made a wise purchase early on and bought a set of ear buds.

I was tempted to keep the ear buds in over dinner, but the threat of the meal landing in my lap kept me honest. Dinner time has become interesting; once a week we run a zoom 'dinner' meeting incorporating our other three children without having to pay for their food. How good is that? A daughter lives in the country, a son lives in the next suburb, and another son lives overseas – he's having breakfast while we're having dinner.

This is an activity that I'm advocating we keep running post COVID-19. The daughter in the country has two small children, and well, eating dinner with them can be an ordeal. It's kind of nice being able to mute them with a touch of a button when they go out of control.

I'm looking forward to 'the new normal'. And now the whole family looks forward to me playing golf!

FDH Helpline volunteer - a self-professed 'golfing tragic'

Try these free phone apps (that include meditations that may help with stress, anxiety and sleep issues) to support your mindfulness practices.





Mindset Shift During a Pandemic

I'm stuck at home	→	I get to be SAFE in my home and spend time with my family
I will get sick	→	I will self-isolate and wash my hands, this will significantly DECREASE my chances of getting sick
I will run out of items at home during self-isolation	→	I have prepared for this and I will use my items wisely. I have everything I NEED for now
Everything is shutting down, I'm panicking	→	The most IMPORTANT places, such as medical centers, pharmacies and grocery stores, remain open
There is too much uncertainty right now	→	While I can't control the situation around me, I CAN control my actions. Doing breathwork, calling loved ones, getting enough sleep and proper nutrition, prayer, and doing activities I love at home will all help during this time

In uncertain times mindfulness can work to reduce stress and anxiety

Practising mindfulness meditation will automatically and quite naturally cause us to relax by triggering the relaxation response. When we focus on our body or our breath we naturally start to relax and find that:

- the breathing slows
- our blood pressure drops
- our heart rate slows
- oxygen in our blood increases
- our muscles relax
- the mind starts to soften and/or feel more spacious.

Over time and with consistent practice, both the structure and the chemistry of our brain changes so that we are relaxed and at ease more often, even when our minds seem busy and full of thoughts.

Source: <https://mindfulnessworksaustralia.com.au/>

Family Drug Help Program Updates

Family Drug Helpline

When COVID-19 restrictions were introduced and our helpline volunteers were unable to access the phones within the head office, the staff stepped up to assist. We continued to operate, ensuring we could be responsive and callers were supported. In early May, our volunteers were able to commence working remotely from their homes. We would like to acknowledge our volunteers, donating their precious time, skill and energy to the FDH helpline. A big thank you to those that could accept the challenge of answering the helpline calls from their home base!

Annette & Danielle, FDH Helpline Coordinators

InFocus

Utilising Google Classroom, we've uploaded the InFocus program sessions along with some relevant links and materials such as videos, articles and audios to support our participants. We have also recorded sessions with a weekly live Zoom session, that includes a summary of the week's content, stories, insights and Q&A. It has been a huge success and we hope to continue with this format, moving from 6 weeks face-to-face to 8 weeks online. Participants can access the classroom and content whenever it is convenient.

Kate and Manal

Breakthrough

The Breakthrough team has been working to bring a face-to-face program to life in a world of physical distance, developing online presentations as a useful resource for families. Our commitment to supporting families remains unchanged. Online meetings may not seem to replace the warmth of face-to-face interactions at first but the strange can become familiar within a short time, as people connect through shared knowledge and experience. In fact, such perceived barriers may actually increase connection in the future as our service loses the restriction of distance.

Glenn and Nikki

Support Groups

These challenging times have created some difficult, but exciting, opportunities to evolve how we work. Our new FDH On-Line Support Group Meetings are a new frontier, providing a safe, and supportive place for families/friends to connect, reflect, learn, and share their stories. The possibilities are exciting as we recognise that accessible connection is so vital in these times. We also want to acknowledge the incredible dedication of our Support Group Peer Leaders, who have taken on the new role as on-line facilitators with great enthusiasm. Their resilience and commitment to their groups and participants never ceases to amaze us. Thank you!

Fiona and Steph, Support Group Coordinators

"It's great to see the smiling faces (when they finally work out how to turn on the video!), to share our experiences and ideas, to support each other while having a laugh at the same time! People joining us by phone, tablet, laptop or desktop, exiting and muting themselves at random, complete with feline zoom bombing, calls of 'which button, where, what?' At our very first meeting we had three members sign in who had been unable to attend for some time, due to moving state, family commitments or illness. Positive things come out of the most difficult situations. If you haven't already, give Zoom a go!"

Jan, Support Group Peer Leader

Counselling

How have the team at Family Drug Help adapted to COVID-19 culture?

In one sense the transitioning of the counselling service at Family Drug Help to being remote has been relatively smooth. Naturally we miss seeing our family members in real life and there are some things the counsellors cannot detect when talking on the phone or via video; the sudden tear emerging, a subtle glance to another family member or a slight fidgety hand. However, there have been some unexpected positives. Seeing clients interact with their beloved pets is quite charming and clients can actually open up even more when tucked behind the safety of a screen and in the comfort of their homes. We recognise it can be a challenge for families to find privacy for a session and we have found that clients sometimes use their cars. Whatever works! If you are a returning client or never tried counselling before, rest assured confidentiality is still of prime importance to us and you will be welcomed and treated with the usual care that Family Drug Help strives towards.

Tracey, Family Counsellor

Family Gambling Help

BROWSE our interactive website of films, quizzes, and resources - www.familygamblinghelp.org.au

JOIN our online Zoom support group on the 1st & 3rd Tuesday of the month for support education and group chat. Contact Angela: aireland@sharc.org.au

LEARN how we supported the establishment of a remote support group in Tumut, a small rural village in the snowy mountains. SHARC provided sessional training for the facilitators and the provision of specially produced material and films for the educational content of each meeting.

LISTEN to our regional radio Airwaves program across the state, funded by the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation

Angela, Gambling Project Officer

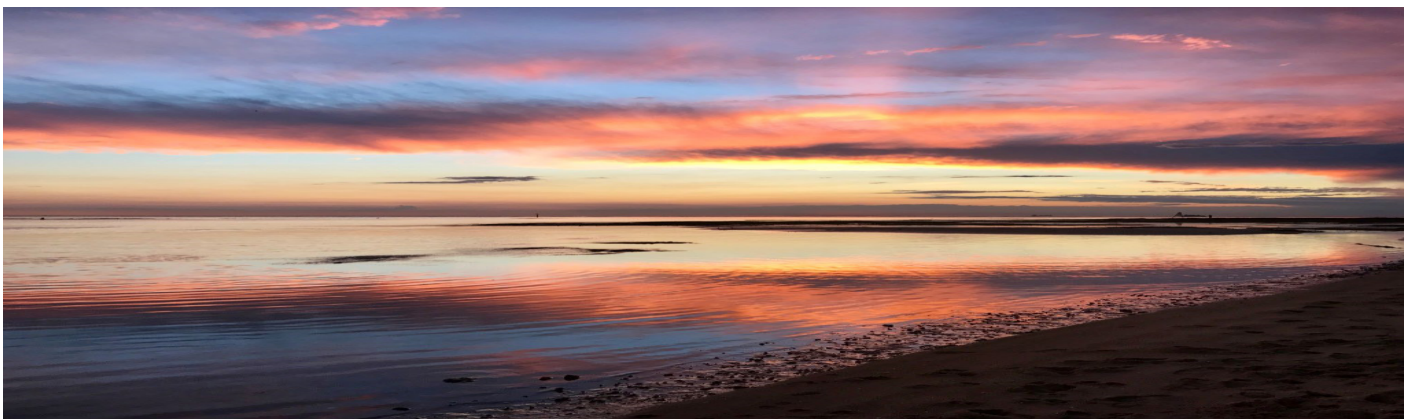
Reasons to be cheerful

A popular song from the 70's by Ian Dury and the Blockheads has come to mind over the past weeks. *Reasons to be Cheerful Part 3* had a positive theme that used verse to simply list items and experiences that brought cheer to its complex composer. Adjusting to a life of social isolation has forced me to take stock and compose a list of my own; *Reasons to be Cheerful Part 4*.

- A healthy body, a bit worn around the edges, but still in good working order despite decades of use.
- A comfortable, modest home complete with all (almost) modern conveniences.
- Three supersized rolls of toilet paper bought before the madness of panic buying.
- Supplies of fruit, vegetables, and grocery items delivered by my adult child.
- Friends and a family that keeps in touch.
- Technology that allows me to join with all of them no matter where they happen to be.
- Surprise letters and a parcel containing things to delight and entertain me during lockdown.
- Mother Nature boldly defying the present threats of climate change and pandemic to shamefacedly flaunt her autumn glory.
- Paperwhite jonquils bursting into bloom in the garden beds. Tender green tendrils confirming germination of the sweet peas I planted in March. Maybe by the time they unfurl their delicate petals, things will be better.
- Raucous cries of wheeling mobs of corellas making their way to roost by the nearby creek reserve at sundown.
- The pair of yellow tailed black cockatoos who I frequently spot when on my daily walk. They are usually busy in the casuarinas and look down disdainfully on all passing human traffic.
- The dainty little crested pigeons trotting along the grass verges like fussy little old ladies doing their shopping, carefully selecting and sampling tasty titbits.
- The chalk drawing of a rainbow spanning the childish message 'Be kind' on the suburban footpath I use daily.
- Friendly neighbours who ask, 'How are you?' and really mean it.
- Groups of teddy bears waving to passers-by from front windows.
- Clean washing drying in the afternoon sun.
- My mother's recipes for comfort foods.
- Sticking to a routine.
- Making lists, and the warm glow I feel from ticking off tasks completed.
- Politicians who at last are listening to scientists and following their advice to keep us safe.
- The news that our country seems to be succeeding in 'flattening the curve'.

There are so many solitary small pleasures in every day, and like Ian Dury I could go on for ever, but will conclude instead with the much-used reminder, 'This too shall pass.'

Sylvia, Support Group Participant




Stay safe. Stay home.

Do your part to stop the spread of COVID-19.
If dogs can stay, so can you.

Other services that can help

- Locum doctors 13 74 25
- Health advice www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- Lifeline 13 11 14
- Mindspot 1800 614 434
- Men's Referral Service 1300 766 491
- For women experiencing family violence 1800 018 188

Call our helpline for enquiries or bookings for any of the programs, including counselling, or go to www.familydrughelp.org.au for further information.

 **1300 660 068**



Interpreter service available



fdh@sharc.org.au