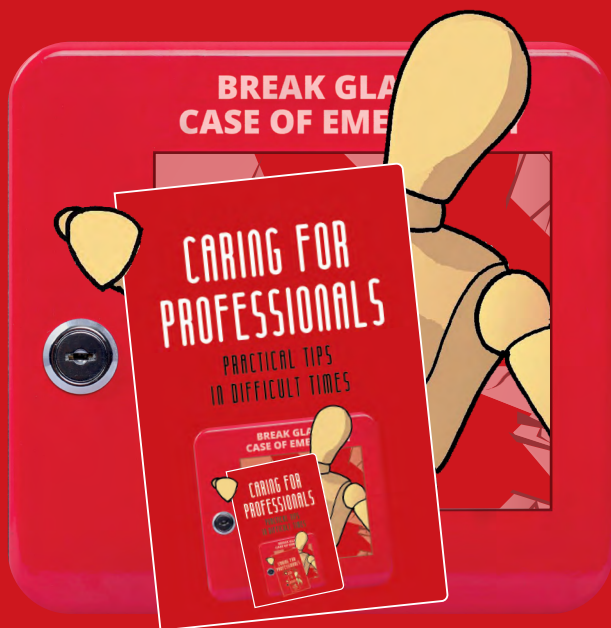
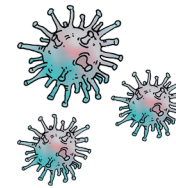


# CARING FOR PROFESSIONALS

PRACTICAL TIPS  
IN DIFFICULT TIMES





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# CARING FOR PROFESSIONALS

PRACTICAL TIPS  
IN DIFFICULT TIMES

*'Take care of yourself.'  
That is easier said than done.  
Especially if you are currently working in  
the healthcare sector.*

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# PREFACE



## Preface

Difficult times demand a lot from us as individuals, and especially now as healthcare professionals. To help you care for yourselves as professionals in the care sector, it is important that you get clear, practical tips on how to deal with some of the difficult things that confront you during these exceptional times. This means ensuring that you, as professionals, can deal with the physical, emotional and psychological challenges that await you every day. That's why we wrote this booklet.

## About this booklet

The booklet contains tips and advice for professionals who are having to work under great pressure. If from all this advice there is one tip that helps you, then we are happy. If you have additional tips, please let us know (see colophon). If this booklet is not helpful to you at the moment, keep it nearby in case you need to refer to it later.

This booklet reflects many years of experience in coaching, training, guidance and education. It is written as a practical, short manual. For legibility, scientific substantiation and references from literature have been omitted.

The booklet was originally written by Dutch experts and was translated into English from the Dutch version.

## How is the booklet structured?

The booklet consists of three parts that refer to three time segments:

**Part 1** helps you to prepare for what's to come.

**Part 2** gives tips for when you are working in the middle of the crisis.

**Part 3** provides tips on dealing with what has happened and what it has done to you once the crisis has passed.

For each of the three parts, focus is given to helping you care for yourself, care for your colleagues and to care for your family at home.

Finally, in **Part 4**, we give specific tips for interacting with your children during these exceptional times.

# Part 1

TIPS  
FOR  
PREPARING  
FOR  
WHAT IS  
TO COME



## Preparing for what is to come

'Take care of yourself.' That is easier said than done. This is especially the case during this crisis if you work in healthcare where there is now so much at stake.

Preparing for what is to come is your own 'system check'. It will help you to be more aware of how you respond and of what you need to do in certain situations. This preparation will help you to be more focused and better able to function later on. Maybe now you think: 'There is no time for that at all! It is all hands-on deck and keep going!' But good preparation is vital so that you are ready to go when it is needed and in the way that is needed. Below are some tips that can support you in your preparation.

## How do I respond when I get into difficult situations?

This is not the first time that you have been confronted with large and complex problems. With a bit of honest self-reflection, you probably also know how you usually react in difficult situations. There are three basic defence responses to stressful conditions: flight, fight and freeze. It is helpful to be aware of what type you are and how you respond to a crisis. If you know how you tend to respond in

a crisis, you will be much better prepared to help yourself in a crisis situation and respond more effectively. If you are a fighter, it is sometimes better to count to 10 before taking action. If you have a tendency to flee, it is useful to remind yourself that fear is not always the best course to follow. If you lapse in paralysis mode, you can, for example, ensure that you keep an overview of the situation you are in.

Furthermore, it is useful to think back to how you reacted in other stressful situations. Make a list of your reactions when you were under pressure. Ask yourself 'how did I react?'. As you self-reflect, think about how you could have reacted better or differently in these difficult situations. Ask yourself 'what do I need to help me react differently'.

For example, if you can get a bit chaotic under pressure, you could make a list to help you structure what you need to do during those situations.

You could also double check everything you do. Or if you know, for example, that you can become rather blunt under pressure, try reminding yourself that sick people or colleagues also need to be treated kindly.

## How can I prepare for self-care during difficult times?

You know you're going to be under pressure, so prepare to help yourself so that you can go on when things get tough.

1. **Make a relaxation plan.** Make a plan, even if only in the back of your mind. The purpose of the relaxation plan is to make sure you know how to deal with all the stress that has built up in your work. This plan can be: How do I make sure I go to work strong or that I stay strong in my work? How do I make sure I leave my work in the workplace and not take it home?
2. **Do some exercise or yoga.** It may be obvious that exercise or yoga can help you relax, but the reality is that if the pressure increases, we relax less than we should. So, here's the motto to keep with you at all times: The greater the pressure, the more I need to exercise or practice yoga. Also ask yourself who can encourage you when you don't feel like doing exercise or yoga, and ask this person for help and encouragement when you need it.
3. **Don't forget your hobbies.** Enjoy yourself, do other things, buy the book you always wanted to read and give yourself some time to sit down and read it. Help yourself to shift your mind away from your work and relax.

4. **Make a play/watch** list of great music or clips that will help you to relax. Reading a **poem** can also help. Or you could view **photos** that bring back fond memories. You could also focus your attention on a **plant** and watch it grow over time. You can even find virtual plants on the internet that you can take care of and grow.
5. **Plan your moments of silence.** Just doing nothing at all can be very good for you. There is a danger that if we are already busy, we will always be checking our mobile phones. It is important, if you are under high pressure, to pause every now and then, to meditate and breathe, or find a way to have a moment of silence.
6. **Start a journal.** A tried and tested way to get rid of your stress is to write down your thoughts. Try to briefly write about what you have been through or what is on your mind every day.
7. **What situation will I be in later on?** Imagine how you go to work, how you get there and what situations will and may arise at work. Which situations are familiar and which situations are new to you? What do you look forward to with confidence and what do you dread? How would you like to react? And do you know, if look honestly at yourself, how you are likely to respond? Take



a moment to imagine all of this vividly and look without judgment. Be curious. Think about what you might need in these kinds of situations. Everything you experience in your imagination can help. In case it actually happens later, you will have already 'experienced' it in your imagination. This will make you better prepared for a difficult situation if it arises.

8. **Ritualize your arrival at work.** Get into the habit of starting your day by visualising what you may encounter and how you will want to deal with it.
9. **Think about going home.** End your day by carrying out a ritual to mark the end of the day, for example by no longer making a phone call in the car or by turning off the news. Before you get home, ask yourself: How do I want to get home and in what mood? Give yourself time to consciously come home and be open to your partner, family members and friends. Ask yourself: 'What do I need to do to let go of my work (as much as possible) before I come home?'
10. **Social media and peer pressure.** Know that in hectic times fake news is also a disease. Do not get carried away by the fear of others and possible fake news.

11. **Bucket list.** Make plans for the future. Which restaurants are you going to visit again, where are you going to have a drink or where would you like to go on holiday? Who do you want to meet and what do you want to do differently from now on? What did you always want to do but never did?

12. **How do you want to think back to this period?** Think about what you want to tell your (grand) children about this period in 10 years' time, about how you behaved. And then test yourself: Are you now doing what you want to do? Are you who you want to be now? How loyal are you to yourself?

13. **What is the higher purpose in your life?** What is your added value, your *raison d'être*, your purpose? What do you have to do in this life? And what do you have to do at the moment? Do not make the higher goal too big or heavy. Think about what's important to you. This is often already embedded in your work or activities. Usually it is very obvious, just in front of you, so to speak. But often you don't see the obvious in front of you and you jump towards beautiful but distant goals that are too difficult to reach.

- 14. Why a care profession?** Ask yourself why did you go into a care profession in the first place and why do you continue to work in the care sector.

### **How do I want to deal with my colleagues in these difficult times?**

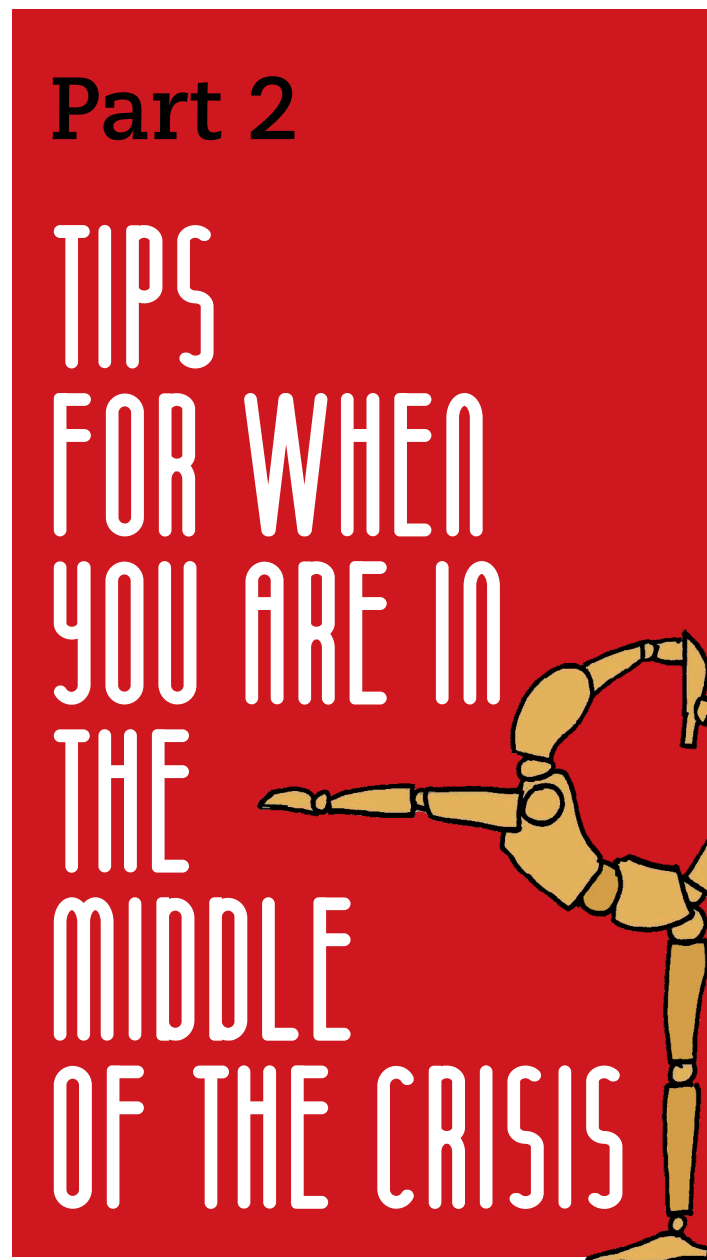
It is useful to make preparations for dealing with and supporting your colleagues. You are all in the same boat and you may really need each other's support.

- 15. Have a buddy scheme.** Invite a colleague to be a buddy during this difficult period. Explain your pitfalls in stressful situations so that your buddy can bring you back to your professional role if there is a difficult situation. If necessary, agree on fixed times when you will be in contact with your buddy. Make sure that you both do not fall into 'it is going well', and really ask what the other person needs. But above all, know each other's pitfalls if there is tension and agree how you can support each other to overcome them.
- 16. Take breaks.** Plan to spend some time with a group, even if only virtually, for coffee or a rest.
- 17. Take care of each other.**

### **How can I prepare my home life?**

- 18. Preparation.** It is good to prepare your partner or other family/household members for what you think may happen. Let them know how you react under pressure (if they did not already know that) and especially what you may need. After all, in a crisis you are going to be working and performing under great pressure and you may also need and ask for more care and support when you get home. This may be especially important if other members of the household also work under high pressure. Whichever is the case, it is important to agree together when and how you can support each other.
- 19. Communication.** Discuss in advance how and when you would like your partner or family/household members to discuss your day with you. Indicate what you like: Are you the kind of a person who likes to talk about your day, or do you prefer not to talk about work when you get home?
- 20. What to tell and what not to tell.** Think in advance of what is wise to share with your partner or family/household members about what you are going through. How do you think they will deal with your stories? Who can you share your stories with, if it is not possible at home? For people who live alone it is important that you find a way to tell your story to someone.

21. **Indicate what you really need.** Say what you need clearly. If you don't actually know, say out loud what you are thinking.
22. **But also ask,** what they will need from you in these exceptional times.
23. **Mobile phone.** It is wise to indicate how accessible you are and when you really cannot be disturbed. For example, a good idea is to agree on your own 'accessibility protocol'.
24. **Social media.** Tell your your family/household members what they may or may not share on social media regarding your stories from the hospital.
25. **How can you help those at home when you work?** They are probably worried and that makes sense. Try to communicate about this in advance and make agreements about help they may need. For example, you could agree that if there are three calls coming from home, that will be the sign to answer. Another option is to agree to have a code word to indicate that it is not convenient now (and that is something more than 'not now!').
26. **Take care of each other.**



## IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CRISIS

We have prepared well, we know our response patterns under pressure, we know what we should do better and what we need. But then it can still be too much. What more can you do to make it bearable?

### What can you do if it becomes (almost) too much for you?

27. **First of all, take care of yourself.** You can only take care of others if you also take care of yourself. This probably does not need to be explained further. As an example, on an airplane you also first put on your own oxygen mask in an emergency before you start helping others.
28. **Watch out for each other.** It is quite normal to ask your colleague if things are, really, going well and if he or she needs something.
29. **Ask for support and help.** It is important to ask for help in difficult times. You are of no use to anybody if you view yourself as indispensable and burn out at the same time. You can also view this help in a wider context: Pray - or call upon the help of the gods, mother earth, the universe, or whoever you want - for protection and guidance in these troubled times.

30. **Close proximity.** Now that physical contact must be avoided, you can still be close to each other by standing still and looking each other directly in the eye. Through your gaze you can show closeness from your heart and compassion for the other.

31. **Have a good joke!** Above all, keep laughing at yourself, with others and at the situation. Humour is a powerful weapon in difficult situations and it can help us relax.
32. **Resist negative energy from others.** Emotions are also contagious. Feel if someone else's energy is helping you or the situation. If not, avoid these people or talk to them about their attitude or behaviour. Scepticism, ('we've tried that before') and cynicism ('I told you before') or selfjustification ('if I were the government'), deprive hope, and hope is what we need.
33. **Appeal to your colleagues.** If colleagues fall into a negative atmosphere, gossip too much and influence each other negatively, then talk to them about this. Ask them if this gossip is helpful, if they are ready, and when they can get back to work. Consider that your colleague(s) may need some kind of support or help, and see if you are the right person to meet this need. Of course, gossip can also be relaxing, but make sure that you do not make the situation or the

negative feeling worse. We are all responsible for the continued functioning of the whole. Taking each other to task is not always popular - particularly during difficult times - but it really helps.

34. **Observe the situation as an outsider.** Think what it would be like to look at this situation as an outsider. Doing this will help you to visualise yourself acting in this situation. Sometimes having this distance is just what you need to get everything back in perspective.
35. **Food and drink.** Some people start to eat and drink too much, while others forget to eat completely. Keep a good balance for yourself here.
36. **Go play a game.** Playing a game is very relaxing. You can do that with each other or on your own. Playing a game together, of course, is more fun, and even better as it distracts your thoughts from work or your worries.
37. **Write it down.** Don't forget to write down the events in your journal, if you planned to do so.
38. **Make life bearable.** In unbearable moments of life you can make life heavy or light, the glass is half full or half empty. Make life lighter than it may be. Being positive will end up by helping you more.

It is clear that we are not talking about denying the challenges that arise along the way and what they bring to you. Rather, having a positive attitude stimulates you to consciously tackle obstacles and reinforce cooperation.

39. **Breathing exercise.** A good way to relax is the 3 x 5 breathing technique: inhale and hold breath for up to 5 counts, exhale and hold your breath for up to 5 counts, then repeat each step for 5 minutes. There are numerous smartwatches that can guide you in this and there are also many breathing and relaxation apps.
40. **Identification and dis-identification exercise.**  
This exercise redirects the control over your body, feelings and mind back to your self. Take 5 minutes, close your eyes, take a few deep breaths and focus your attention. Carefully scan your body from top to bottom. Ask yourself: How am I doing? Then say to yourself, 'I have a body and I am more than that.' Let go of the attention for your body and focus on your feelings and ask: 'Which feelings are in the foreground, which are in the background?' Observe these feelings, but don't judge them. Then say to yourself, 'I have feelings and I am more than that.' Do the same with your thoughts: Observe them and say to yourself, 'I have thoughts and I am more than that.' Then connect with the

silence, remember that you are a part of the universe and that you are not alone. Take a short rest. Take a few deep breaths, open your eyes and get back to work.

- 41. Sound.** If the sound around you is too loud, distracting, and maybe even becomes intolerable, imagine being inside a glass bell jar. The bell jar moves with you and is constantly protective around you. The sound does not stop, but is now outside the bell, and it is quiet inside the bell. Outside the world races on, inside it is quiet.
- 42. Our thoughts determine our behaviour.** What makes us unhappy? Do we have influence over what makes us unhappy? Are your thoughts about the event making you (un)happy, or are your feelings aroused by the thoughts, or vice versa? We often have no influence on the event itself, but we do have a choice about how we respond to what is happening to us. That's not easy, but the tips in this booklet may help. For example, stop the thoughts that don't help. Surrender to the event or situation. It is what it is. Shift your mind or make sure you think about other things. After all, worrying does not help. For example, the identification/dis-identification exercise can help with this.

- 43. 'Blame frame' or 'solution frame' thinking.** In essence, you can look at each problem in two ways: the first is to blame 'why did it go wrong?', the second way is to find a solution 'how are we going to solve this?' In situations where we need to resolve problems and find immediate practical situations it can take too long to analyse and find a solution to a problem. However, there is a way that you can arrive at a solution quickly. Instead of asking 'why are you late?' you can be constructive by asking 'how can you get here on time'. Or you could find a solution by consciously shifting your focus from 'how could you have done such a thing?' to 'how can you limit the damage?' A real advantage in using the solution frame is that it takes away the blame and focusses on finding a solution to a problem that is constructive and helpful to everyone concerned.
- 44. Tension, relaxation and sleep.** When you feel tension, you usually feel it somewhere in your body. It could be in your neck and shoulders, maybe in your stomach or jaw, or in your face or hands. Tension can appear anywhere in your body. In practice, our body is well equipped to handle stress, but preferably not all the time. It is not always necessary (or possible) to fully relax, but it does help to realise where exactly in your body you feel tension, so that you can become aware of where the tension is.

a) **Do a body scan.** While you are at work you can do a mini body scan. Imagine your breath flowing through your body. Fast or slow, it doesn't matter - as long as you imagine your breath going through your whole body. Perhaps you can feel where your breath can flow freely and fully, and also where your breath is constricted. Breathe a little more space into the place where your breath was constricted. Do not force yourself. If it still feels blocked somewhere, just tell yourself it is okay. It is not necessarily right, it is not necessarily wrong; it is exactly what it is. And by paying attention to it and to the constriction that persists, you agree with how you feel, that's just the way it is.

b) **Relax in the present moment, wherever you are.** Stand still, literally. Feel how you stand on the soles of your feet. Some people stand somewhere between the outside and inside of their feet, others stand more on the heel or ball of the foot. Any standing is good, feel the soles of your feet on the ground for a few seconds. Then stand on your toes for a moment, stretch out, and slowly lower your feet back down to the ground. Then when you lower them back to the ground, try landing on the whole sole of your feet. Both soles of the feet can now rest completely on the ground. You will feel a soothing relaxation in your feet, in your legs, in your back. Some people can feel it - with a little

concentration - in the back of their head: a relaxed energetic feeling. Now continue walking and always let the soles of your feet land on the ground by unrolling them fully. This exercise only takes 15 or 20 seconds.

c) **Sleep.** You cannot continue without sleep. Even if you only sleep for a short time, that helps. Do you have trouble falling asleep? If you do, try a relaxation exercise. Start by lying down or sitting with your back supported. Make sure you sit or lie where you can fall asleep peacefully. Close your eyes and focus on relaxing your eyelids. Exhale, wait a moment and let your body decide when you breathe in again. You don't have to do that yourself, your body arranges that. Now relax your face - your skull, your brain, your forehead, your eyes. If your eyelids now want to open again, just release them and close them gently again. Relax your cheekbones, your cheeks. Feel your tongue and relax it, your lips and the muscles around your mouth. Pay attention to your jaw and relax it. When your mouth opens slightly, lower the tip of your tongue between your teeth and relax. Relax your neck, your throat. Roll your head back and forth and relax your neck. If this doesn't work right away, gently concentrate your attention on your face, your neck, and imagine that all your muscles are relaxed - or at least doing their best to relax.

You now imagine yourself in nature. You are in a rocking boat on a lake, or in a hammock in a forest. You are there alone. The boat, the hammock, carries you, and while visualising the image pull your shoulders down. Then let go of your shoulders, and relax. You feel the sun on your skin, you hear the rippling of water in the distance, you feel how you are becoming relaxed and that you don't have to do anything right now. The rippling water sounds further and further away...

**45. Avoid empathy exhaustion.** In order to care for someone who is suffering, you sometimes have to delve into that suffering. We are social beings, and you now feel some of that suffering too. It is not primarily your suffering, but it is secondary, and so it will become a part of you. After all, you can feel it. It will not be possible to completely shut off from other people's suffering, but it is unwise to merge with it. This creates tension and feelings of exhaustion, so-called 'empathy exhaustion'. In order to continue working and to be able to keep going, you need resilience. Here are some things that can help. Talk to a colleague and if necessary, complain about how you feel, that you are disappointed, that you are exhausted, that you are shocked, that you are sad, that you are afraid, that you are angry. Together just swearing at the whole situation helps. However, don't end with name

calling or negative feelings. Find out if it is giving relief to your colleague or if you are relieved, and share the relief.

Keep an eye on each other, if only by raising a thumb, making eye contact or giving a nod as you pass in the hallway. It can also help to close your eyes for a moment and breathe. Think about who is your pillar of social support outside of work. This could be your partner or children, friends, or even former school mates or a funny colleague from a long time ago. If you have a pet, think about the nice moments you can have with it. Acknowledge that you suffer from secondary suffering, from empathy exhaustion. Above all, realise that you function normally and that there is a limit to what you can afford when you delve into other people's suffering. It doesn't matter what other people's limits are, such as those of your colleagues, this is your limit.

Imagine that there is a boundary that takes the form of a visible line somewhere in your body or around you. Imagine that you keep unpleasant feelings about other people's suffering behind that line. If you've ever taken a mindfulness course or something similar, talked to a coach or therapist about tension or rigidity, or talked to a trainer about secondary suffering and resilience, remember what that was all



about. Think of the techniques that you learned and allow yourself to experiment with it at work.

**46. Know that there will be feelings of guilt and failure.** There is a limit to what we can do as care professionals. People are dying, there is a maximum number of people that we can help. Whether we want to or not, in the extreme case as a care professional we have to leave someone to their fate, whereas in a 'normal' situation that would not be the case. With what we have and what we can give, we offer the maximum to the patient. We simply cannot give more than the maximum and this can be terrible.

Feelings of inadequacy then arise, and sometimes feelings of failure and guilt. We feel even more guilty if we must consciously choose between who will be helped and who will not be helped; when we have to determine for whom there is no more room and when decisions have to be made through triage in disaster scenarios. Reasoning and rationalization do not help to relax those feelings. Be aware we may experience psychological injuries. Correctly followed agreements and protocols will not heal our own psychological injuries. It is important to realize that everything you do or don't do is happening in the light of something bigger than yourself. It is happening in the light of the whole of healthcare

or medicine, in the light of a philosophy of life, of God or life itself. Although this perception can be different for one person to the next, it is important to remember that there is always something bigger than yourself that you serve. In that sense, you are not guilty or responsible. You are not the entirety of healthcare or medicine itself, you are not life or God, you are an instrument and part of it, and you have given everything you had to give. The rest is up to medicine, life, the universe, God.

**47. Fear and courage.** Feeling fear means that your brain wants to protect you - against danger, against ambiguity, against aggression, against guilt or failure. Fear is also very practical, such as protecting you or your loved ones from infection by bacteria or a virus. It could also be that you have fear of confrontations with patients and/or their families. Or of the decisions you have to make that may look insurmountable. Continuing while feeling fear is called courage. You are brave if you dare to acknowledge your fear, and still take the next step. Many things help in dealing with this anxiety, and what works for you also depends, for example, on your experience, views and character. What always helps and is of great psychological importance is to share your fear and your courage. You can do this with a colleague, at home with other adults (but only share with children if you manage your fear), or even with your pet. If you

are part of a faith community, call someone from that world and talk to them. A fellow believer, preacher or priest, a pandit or imam, will want to listen to you if you want to share how you feel. But it is important to know that you do have to share. Even if you didn't find a solution, you did get attention and the most important thing is that you could express what you felt. Although you might in fact still be alone, it will help you to feel supported and connected again. If you have talked to a therapist or coach or trusted colleague about deeper mental or psychological issues in the past, and if you have a good memory of it, just call, they will speak to you with love. Even if it's been a long time and they may not even know exactly who you are again - they will listen and talk to you. Your courage is worth a compliment from others and also from yourself. Dare to receive compliments about your courage and hard work generously. Reward yourself with what you personally experience as a reward. Take a rest, smoke (quitting will come later), eat pastries (losing weight can wait) but remember that alcohol and drugs ultimately backfire. Remember that you have colleagues who are also brave. Show them that you see and appreciate that too.

- 48. Your moment to stop.** Know when to indicate to colleagues/others when it is your time to stop. Do not continue when you have reached your limit.

If you know what is your limit and when really have to get out, it is wise to indicate that moment clearly. We have no use for people who are burned out and cannot return to our tasks. We all need rest from time to time.

- 49. Pray.** Even if you've never done that before.

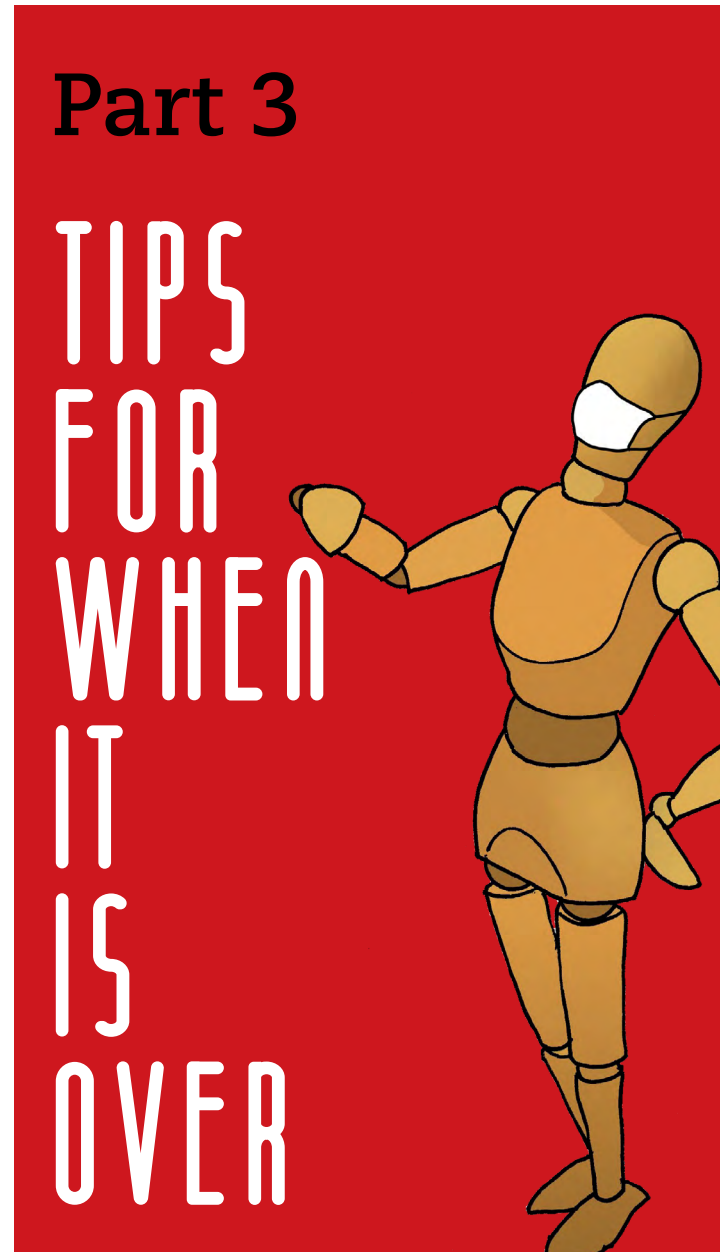
- 50. Take care of yourself.**

### **How do you deal with your colleagues when you are under high pressure?**

- 51. Your colleague is also experiencing pressure and can fly off the handle.** That is a fact that you also need to take into account. Just like you, your colleague will sometimes overreact. Have compassion, give support or use another tip from this booklet. And remember that sometimes it is best to just shrug your shoulders and above all not respond.
- 52. Saying sorry.** What if you lose your temper? Then just apologise and say it was just too much for you.
- 53. What can you do to help a colleague who has reached their limit?** First check with yourself whether you have the energy and if you are the person to help

your colleague. Above all, ask your colleague about their needs and listen, do not respond too quickly with good advice. Sometimes it helps to sit quietly next to someone without talking. Suggesting someone else that your colleague can contact may be the best advice you can give. This is particularly important if someone is or becomes more than usually dependent, aggressive, anxious, apathetic, worried, angry, lonely, insecure, passive, gloomy, quietly disappointed, withdrawn, sad, confused or desperate. Then it is time to call in external help.

- 54. **Relativity.** Remember, you are only a small cog that is part of a bigger global problem that you cannot solve alone. You're not the only one dealing with this. You just have to do your part in your place, no more and no less. It is a joint effort.
- 55. **Convenient maxims.** Perhaps it is helpful to keep in mind: 'Those who give, will be rewarded'. And if that doesn't work, you can always fall back on: 'Don't do to others, what you would not want to happen to yourself'.
- 56. **Take care of each other.** We all need help and together we can do more.



## EVALUATION: HOW TO DEAL WITH WHAT HAPPENED

It is only when the crisis is finally over and the dust settles, that we will really be able to see what happened when you were working so hard. You may no longer want to look back but want to look forward. It may be too painful, too annoying and you've just had enough of it. Still, taking enough time for evaluation has a healing effect on yourself, your environment and the organisation.

It takes courage to look back at what has happened. What exactly happened? Who have you been for yourself and for your fellow men? How loyal have you been to yourself? Who else could you have been? What did you do and what did you fail to do? Evaluating is mourning, acknowledging and celebrating what has been and what could have been. It is getting recognition for who you have been and what you have done. When you take the time to evaluate, you create a tipping point from the past, for the future, in the present. It gives a clearer view of what you want to get back on the road for.

## How can you learn from the crisis together with colleagues?

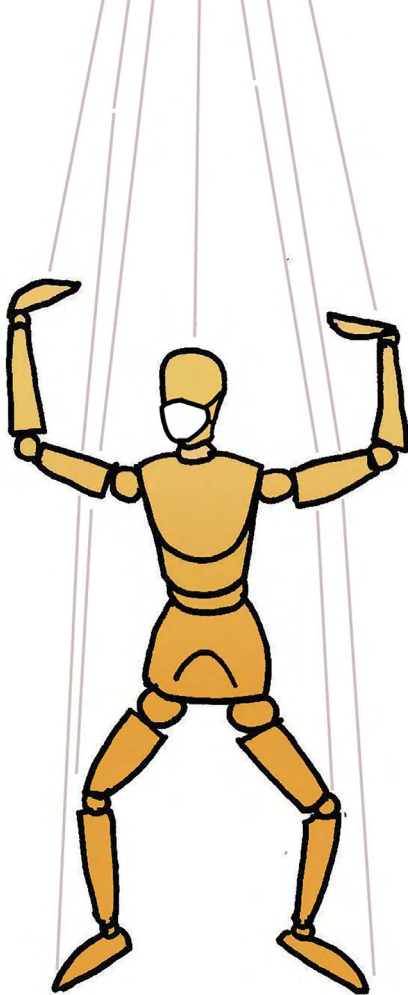
57. **Debriefing.** Organize debrief meetings and peer review moments together. These meetings consist of three phases:
  - a. **Check-in.** Simply by acting consciously and connecting with the others, we settle down and begin to heal and learn. Each of the participants speaks at the check-in and is given time to tell their story. Facts are much less important here than what this person is currently occupied with and what they feel. In this 'share, compare and find-out' phase you can get a chance to be heard, you learn that you are not the only one, but that others have 'it' as well. And you find out how your colleagues are doing. Often you will also find some first solutions for yourself.
  - b. **Processing.** Once you've checked-in, you can start processing and learning from each other as colleagues about the stress you've experienced and the difficulties you've faced. It is important to give the 'contributor' all the time they need to say what they need to say undisturbed, to speak fully about an issue, and to put a problem on the table. Just give and take your time for this, and let silences exist if necessary.
  - c. **End of the meeting.** Reflect on how the meeting went. At the end of each meeting, take the time to

look at: How did we do it? What do we take with us? With what feeling are we leaving here now? Say goodbye to each other in a dignified and personal way and thank each other for all the support given and insights shared.

- 58. Evaluate.** The known evaluation questions are: What have I/you/we done well and what can I/you/we do better next time? An even safer way is: What have you seen that could be improved? You can do this without necessarily mentioning names and numbers.
- 59. Lessons learned.** It is especially important to look at the lessons learned. What have I learned, what have we learned as a team and as an organisation from this experience. Reflect on what could I do better if this happened again? It is always useful to adapt or create scenarios based on these lessons.
- 60. Thank and reward.** Let the Board thank all people and put some special employees in the spotlight. Don't forget to thank your colleagues and/or loved ones.
- 61. Aftercare.** For many people catastrophic and stressful events can be quickly exchanged for normal work. Their view is that everything was in the past, and they move on. For some people,

however, these events often rumble silently in the background long after they have taken place. Because of stigma and shame of being affected in this way people may shut themselves off even further. How someone handles a stressful event differs from person to person. Again, some wounds heal slowly, be alert and take care of each other. Do not hesitate to seek help if necessary.

- 62. Commemorate.** As an organisation it is important to commemorate important moments, to reflect on what has been and how it has been experienced.
- 63. Also evaluate at home.** You can also apply all the above suggestions in a modified form at home with your partner or other family/household members. Take time there to look back, process, learn and celebrate.
- 64. Make plans for the future.** And...
- 65. Take care of each other.**



## Part 4

# TIPS FOR DEALING WITH YOUR CHILDREN

## DEALING WITH CHILDREN IN EXCEPTIONAL TIMES

This final section addresses the question of how best to deal with your children. You are exhausted, you have worked hard, but your children also need attention. Through all the media, they know or feel that this is much more than an ordinary busy day. Difficult times for parents and children require special attention.

- 66. Unconditionality.** Realise what the effect of this event can have on a child and the uncertainty it can bring to a child. Unconditional love must be the rock solid foundation of the relationship between parents and child in this situation. Can I trust my parents in this difficult time? Can I depend on them? Reassure your child.
- 67. Taking into account both yourself and your child.** Parents must of course also be able to show their vulnerability and uncertainty. You don't have to deny your worries, fear and sorrow. Not to yourself, nor to your environment. But it is important to think about how to take the impact of your work back home and to your children.
- 68. Coming home.** When you take your worries, fears, sorrows (in part) home with you, please be aware that:

- a. you can be irritable, curt or absent-minded more quickly,
  - b. your children feel how you feel,
  - c. your children can react to how you feel in their behaviour and emotions.
- 69. Sharing concerns.** It is important that your child is able to share their concerns. Listen to your child. What questions does he or she have about your work? Is there something that has worried them that they heard on the news?
- 70. When to share your feelings with children?** Don't hide your worries and emotions, but share them, preferably with adults, such as your partner, friend, colleagues, etc. Preferably do this when the (young) children are not around. They often hear more than we think. Do share, but keep it in moderation, if you have children. Prevent them from making it into their own story or fantasy and check if they have understood it.
- 71. Be honest and clear.** It is important to be honest and clear with children so that they know where they stand. It prevents them from making it much worse in their imagination.
- 72. How old and what do I tell?** As a guideline you can distinguish between children up to 12 years old and

those over 12 years old. With children up to 12 years old you talk about topics that the child understands and that relate to his own world. Preferably tell serious things only when they are a fact, not just speculation. Older children can put things into perspective, empathise, discuss problems or concerns with peers, and look up information themselves. This means that you can involve them more in what's going on.

- 73. **Boyfriends, girlfriends and social media.** Make sure that your children do not freak out because of friends who do not understand the situation and mess around with ideas from each other and social media. Know that they are likely to be on the Internet more than usual because schools are closed.
- 74. **Attention.** It is better to give your child 15 minutes of your full and undivided attention instead of an hour with half an ear while you are on your phone.
- 75. **Comfort and confidence.** Comfort your child if they are concerned, and also give them confidence that we are all working very hard to bring this situation to a successful conclusion.

76. **Hopeful thoughts.** Help your child think in helping, hopeful thoughts, rather than fearful thoughts.

77. **Routines.** During crises, your children also experience a lot of change in their daily routines. Follow the regular routines at home as much as possible and think of the 'old-fashioned' 3 axioms: Rest, Cleanliness and Regularity'. Having a structure in the day provides an overview and therefore provides support in an uncertain time.

78. **Hobbies, fun and relaxation are important.** Try to be creative about the possibilities for fun and relaxation when, for example, sports clubs are closed and there is no more entertainment outside the home.

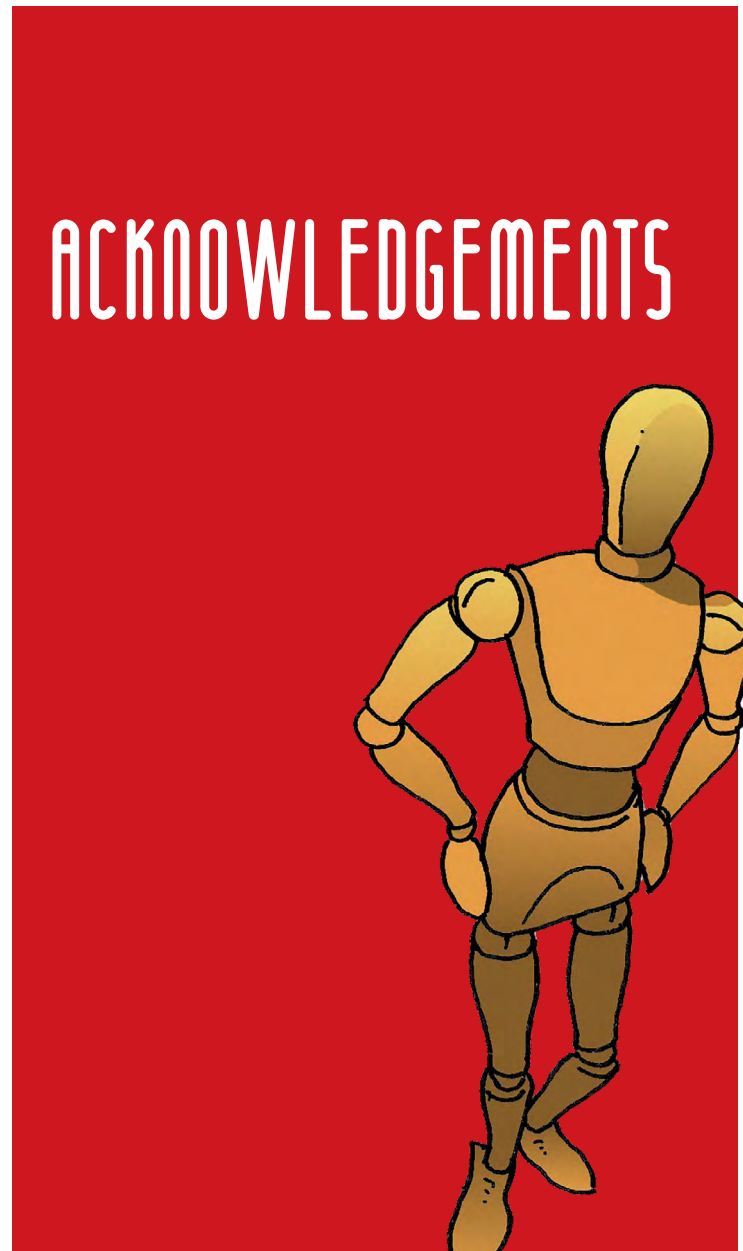
79. **Understanding.** Also show understanding for their disappointments about the loss of training, play appointments and parties, and find alternatives such as planning to cook together, working in the garden, or setting up a craft project for several days.

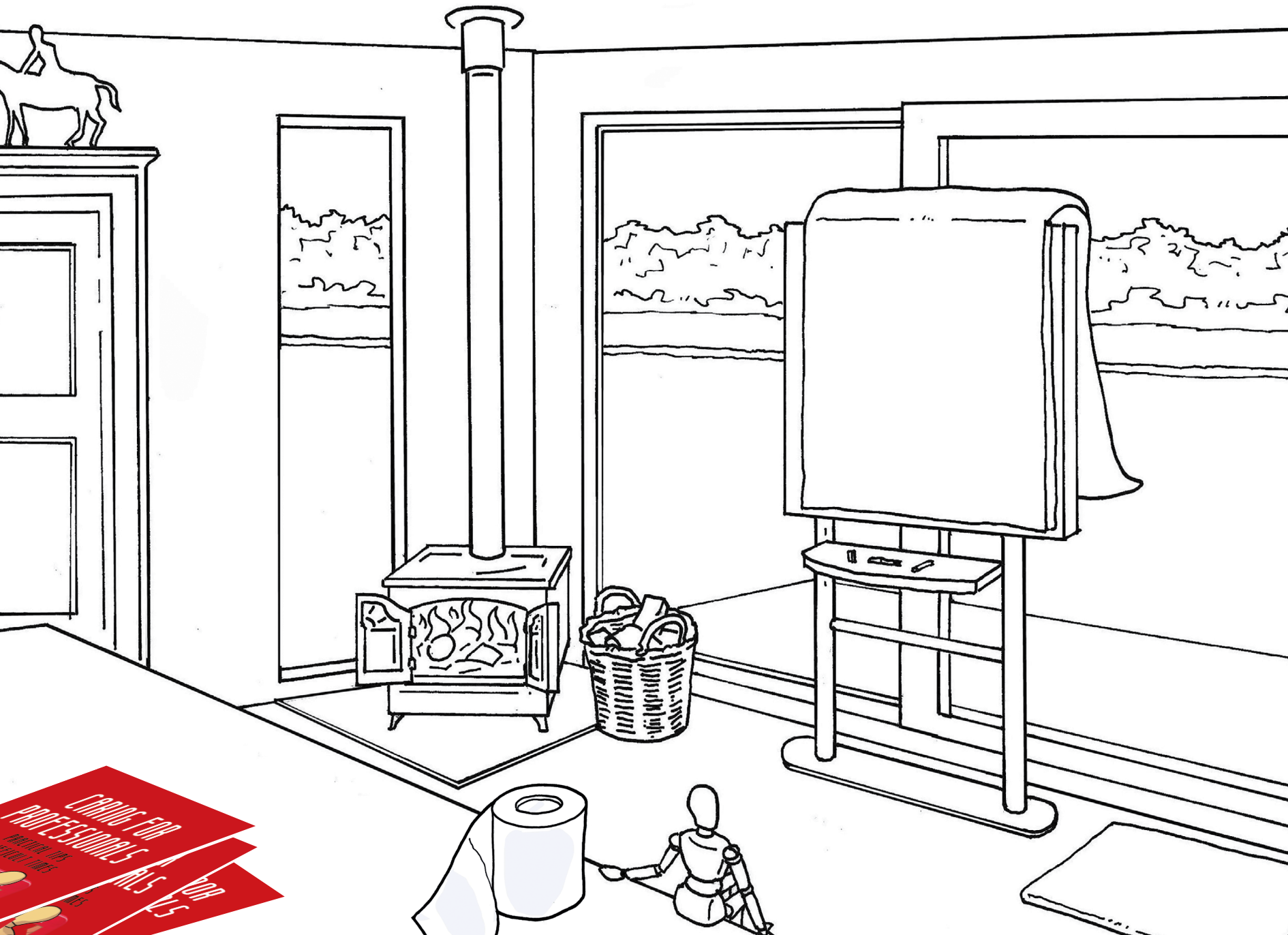
80. **Feelings.** Consider what your children may feel. Recognising and naming their emotions helps understand and accept them. What you feel is allowed to be there as well. Also let your child express their emotions, it is okay to show that



you are sad or scared or angry or happy. Find out together what helps them: it could be to talk, run, dance, cry or draw a picture. You can lead by example and express your own feelings in an appropriate way.

- 81. **Relax.** How can your child best relax? Think, for example, of talking about what happened that day, playing a game, taking a walk, having a massage or being read to.
- 82. **Time.** Just like you, your children also need time to relax and recover from their (own) worries and emotions.
- 83. **Initiative.** Consider encouraging your children to take small initiatives themselves, such as a regular FaceTime call with their grandparents, shopping for a vulnerable neighbour or taking care of their garden. It's a great way to teach them to give meaning to togetherness and to be there for someone else.
- 84. **And finally, take care of yourself and each other.**





TRAINING FOR  
PROFESSIONALS  
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