*18th-24th May is Mental Health Awareness Week!*

*The theme for 2020 is ‘Kindness’, so we’re encouraging you to incorporate some kindness into your routine this week, remembering to be kind to yourself as well!*

*We are also pleased to introduce the first monthly blog by St Mary’s Mental Health First Aiders. This month Richard Prescott reflects on working from home, and some of the ways he’s been looking after his own wellbeing.*

**WORKING FROM HOME DURING LOCKDOWN**

**By Richard Prescott**

Around midday is when I usually get asked by my daughter ‘Is it OK if I watch Pitbull and Parolees Dad??’

Of course, I say yes and of course I go and make myself a sandwich while she watches it!

My son usually emerges an hour later and moves straight to his electric guitar. His bedroom is directly above the living room where I sit and work! I’ve become an expert on his playlist from blues to classical to heavy metal!

Notwithstanding other meetings, my morning/daily Zoom calls have finished and I’m working my way through various content, such as press releases, Linkedin and social media posts in the afternoon, and like everyone I need a break.

All of the above proves that working from home during Lockdown is very different! My desk has a wonderful view of my CD player, yes I know CD’s – they came out in the late 1980’s! To my left I can see daylight and to my right my cocker spaniel Elvis growls at me when he wants 1) food 2) a wee and 3) a walk, which he usually gets late afternoon.

It’s not the office is it? Something we are all used to either on campus or at 60, The Naylor Library or the Exchange. I’m sure like me you miss your colleagues, the banter, the coffee chats and the team work.

However, it’s where we are and we’re all following the message of ‘stay safe’ and now ’stay alert.’

So what I have learnt during the last six weeks?

I/we will have some low days and some very good ones. Not much different there, it’s just where we’re located that’s different. The essentials of taking short breaks and a longer one wherever possible to get some fresh air are really important.

Mental and physical health are so clearly aligned and working from home has really highlighted that to me. It’s important that we look after them and on behalf of all the Mental Health First Aiders at St. Mary’s we hope that you’re managing to take care of both, at all times and during Mental Health Week. If you do need support please don’t hesitate to ask for it.

Making time for social as well as work related catch ups as part of the daily Zoom calls also helps. My colleague Sarah McKenna-Ayres had the excellent idea of having a Friday 3.30pm catch up with the Global Engagement team, and it is something we all look forward to.

At your desk all day? Remember to do some stretching! We’re at our lap tops for a long time so do walk away from them and rotate your shoulders, take a few minutes out and try and get some fresh perspective on any issues you might be facing.

The St. Mary’s team and community has maintained its usual high standards during the lockdown of being incredibly supportive and helpful, so do reach out if you need the input and insight of colleagues to help you with a problem. I know it’s a cliché but we are all in this together.

No outside space? Work out a walk that will give you the break you need. It will help clear your head and try and vary it day to day. Try and add extra things to your day by playing different music when you stop working, speaking to different people from outside work and keeping in touch with friends and family. My experience has been that they all appreciate the call, the email and checking in. Also try not to watch too much news. Keep up to date but not 24/7.

All that screen time can cut into sleep, so I’ve been building in some non-screen time by reading and sorting out my vinyl and CD collection, which has given me a welcome respite from evening TV. There’s an opportunity to do something you may have put off for years because of time pressures!

Exercise? Recently I’ve been giving my son some basic boxing lessons. It’s a good way of blowing away the cobwebs but I totally underestimated how hard a 6ft, 15 year old can hit the pads! Back to the exercise drawing board!!

Finally, when the working day is done try and put your work away both mentally and physically by moving it out of sight if possible. Before you do, write up some notes to give you a head start the following day, which will also help you switch off in the evening.