

How to Cope with People not Following the COVID-19 Guidelines

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Why are there guidelines?

Authorities all over the world have set out a list of guidelines to stop Covid-19 from spreading and to avoid too many people getting the virus. If too many people get Covid-19 at the same time our NHS might struggle to cope.

It is very important to follow these guidelines. Not only to protect yourself but also to protect other people.

Most people follow the guidelines

When you go outside, you will see that most people follow the guidelines and adhere to the rules. The majority of the population is doing what the government ask them to do.

They are concerned about their own health but also the health of other people. But you might also notice that some people are not following the guidelines.

Why do people not follow the guidelines?

There are different reasons why people do not follow the guidelines:

- Some people do not know what the guidelines are. Not everybody watches the news, listens to the radio or uses a smartphone to be informed about COVID-19 guidelines.
- Some people do not understand the guidelines. They may find them too vague and unclear. They are not sure what exactly is expected, or what they are not allowed to do.

For example, this guideline:

You can leave your house for basic necessities, such as food and medicine. Trips must be as infrequent as possible. Even when doing these activities, you should be minimising time spent outside of the home and ensuring you are 2 metres apart from anyone outside of your household.

But what is the maximum time?

How often are you allowed then to go out for shopping?

So, people can have difficulties in applying the guidelines because the guidelines are not concrete enough. If you are unsure about this you can ask a family member or a friend, or you could call or email one of our advisors for help.

- Sometimes there are situations when it is impossible to follow the guidelines.

For example, you must stay 2 metres (6 feet) away from other people at all times if you go out.

If you are walking and you are on a narrow path and suddenly there is another person coming towards you on the same path. It is impossible to keep the 2 meter distance.

You could turn round and go back down the path to a place where you can pass each other safely; you could turn away from the person. But this might not always be possible either.

So, there might be conditions where it is impossible to strictly follow the guidelines.

- Nobody is perfect. People make mistakes. So, it could be that someone is not following a guideline, because he or she forgot about it. Or someone might be so happy to see another person and so involved in talking to that person, that he or she comes a bit closer than 2 meters.
- Children and young people may also find it difficult to follow the rules all the time, as they may not understand them either.

These are the main reasons why you can see people doing things that are not in line with the guidelines. In each of these examples, people want to do the right thing and follow the guidelines, but there are good reasons why they are not able to.

There are also people who are not following the rules because they either disagree with them, because they find them exaggerated, or because they don't care about public safety. They don't want to follow the rules and they deliberately break the rules.

Good to know: these people are a very, very small minority.

Most people do care not only about their own health but also yours and that of everyone else.

What can you do when you see a person not following the guidelines?

- First of all: nobody can look into another person's mind. So you can never assume why someone is not following the guidelines. As mentioned above, there are many reasons. So, do not immediately assume that the person is willingly breaking a rule.
- You can kindly tell the person what the guideline is and ask them politely to follow it. Do this only when it is people that you know and where you are sure they will react in a positive and understanding way.

For example, if someone gets too close to you, you could say: "According to the guidelines we should be standing 2 meters from each other. Can we please take a step back?"

Ask, do not command.

- If you don't know the person or if you are not sure that they will react in a positive and understanding way, don't speak to them.
- Do not try to enforce the rules onto the person or start commanding them. It is the task of the police to deal with people who are breaching the rules and to give instructions and commands.

What can you do when you see people doing things that are not in line with the guidelines and it causes you stress and anxiety?

- If seeing other people not following the rules causes you stress and anxiety, this means you are concerned about your health and the public health.
- Although stress and anxiety are not always easy to manage, managing other people's behaviour is even harder. So address your stress and anxiety, rather than trying to change other people.
- Talk to a person you trust, e.g. a relative, a good neighbour, a friend or a professional. Telling them about your stress is something that helps. This person can help you, not only with your stress, but maybe also with the decision of whether you should warn the police or the authorities about what you have seen.
- Please keep in mind that a large majority of the population is following the guidelines. (Some positive thinking might counter your stress).
- Do your relaxation or mindfulness exercises immediately when you come back home if you find these helpful.
- Stim if this helps you relax and find calm.