



**From the Deputy National Welfare Adviser**

12 April 2020

Dear Area/Branch Secretaries, Welfare Officers and Shipmates

## **CORONAVIRUS (COVID 19) – SURVIVING ISOLATION 2**

RNA sends all shipmates best wishes as we continue in lockdown and self-isolation. The last briefing provided advice on protecting the body and this one looks at protecting your mind as lockdown looks set to continue. However do not forget the key advice to all remains as **Stay at Home to protect your life, others' lives and the NHS.**

We all need to keep our minds shipshape during this period, particularly those shielding due to being extremely vulnerable. Loneliness already affected many people, including some shipmates, before lockdown and enforced social isolation can only make it worse and increase the numbers feeling lonely whatever their age. That said, senior shipmates over 70 are more at risk. **So what can you do if you are at home alone?**

**Firstly do keep in touch and ask for help if you need it.** Many branches are running successful virtual support groups under various names and some are also able to offer direct support (but a distance) with food and medicines. There are also many local community groups operating throughout the country aiming to help who would have already been in contact.

If not in a Branch, you must be a HQ Roll member but help is still available to you. Have you used the **RNA Helpline (07542 680082) manned initially from 0900-2100**. Although primarily aimed at HQ Roll members any shipmate in need of assistance who cannot raise their Branch or an Oppo can use it. Depending on need, help can be from within Central Office or via the nearest Branch to you. Also **why not become a member of the HQ Roll Buddy Buddy service** via the same number (**07542 680082**) to pair up shipmates who might find themselves on their own.

**Why not pick up the phone whether mobile or home handset?** Texting is much used but actual calling is better. In these days of 24h e-media do not forget the value of a good old-fashioned phone call. A regular call can make a huge difference. In our branch the Branch Sec and I call shipmates regularly and that chat is much appreciated. I've learnt a lot about my shipmates in Branch since lockdown. It keeps the RNA family going.

**Why not try a new method of (virtual) social contact?** Texting is popular but can be a bit limiting so why not try talking for free to family, shipmates and friends over Skype, Google Duo, Face Time or WhatsApp? The technology is relatively simple and a great way to see how shipmates, family, friends and grandchildren are doing. A chance to talk face to face about anything you have been doing. Guidance on set up and use can be found online but remember Face Time is limited to Apple iPhone and Mac devices and not available on android. Skype, Google Duo and WhatsApp all work on android devices. Download from <https://play.google.com/store/apps> or <https://www.apple.com/ios/app-store/>. All these apps run over the internet with free calling but, to save going over your mobile data allowance, do remember to use these apps on your wifi (you should be at home anyway!).

**Why not set up or join a group chat?** Whats App is a messaging app that allows you create shared chats with branch shipmates, family or neighbours using your mobile number. Many groups are being set around the country and you can quickly share messages on how you are getting on, how they are or ask for help. I belong to one for the two roads of our estate and it works very well. It's a quick way of getting someone to deliver a pint of milk or some bread by your front door. It just needs someone to start it off and invite others to join. The app needs to be downloaded from Google store (see link above).



**Are you keeping your mind active?** Everyone can use the time to keep their mind active. How is up to you but why not try crossword puzzles (free with other challenges in your daily paper), quizzes, Sudoku books or jigsaws? Solving puzzles gives a sense of satisfaction and achievement which refreshes our minds. Reading can take us to other places and, although libraries are closed, why not go back to some favourite books or if you have a Kindle download some freebooks?

**Why not start a new project?** Each day I suggest dedicating a time to a project that you have wanted to get on with for ages. Hobbies give you something to focus on other than isolation. Make a plan and start today! One of mine has been to start archiving photos of which I now realise I have thousands taken over the years and converting them to digital versions (yes I am that old that I have slides and negatives stored). The choice is up to you and it can be a large or small project, that doesn't matter but something to work on is what's important. Getting on with those DIY jobs you always meant to do is a good thing too.

**Are you keeping active physically?** Self isolation can make you less active which we all need to avoid. Keeping active includes both body and mind but it needs to be realistic to suit you. Have a look at <https://weareundefeatable.co.uk/> for ideas. There are lots of activities some of which you do not have to leave the sofa for or there's marching up and down the room or stairs (remember drill shipmates and how much you loved the GI?). Given the warmer weather the garden is a good place to "exercise" in! Exercise can boost your immune system so get some in!

**Are you struggling with or stressed by the current situation?** Do not let this worry you as it's natural. Stress affects us all but can be magnified by social isolation however we are all more resilient than we think. So what can you do? Some suggestions made are:

**Put it in perspective** – Select one of your worries and think of it shrinking to the size of a peanut. In your mind watch that peanut roll out of the door and go away. Feel better? This can help so why not try it?

**Stay calm and stay positive** – Anxiety is bad news for us all and can adversely affect our immune systems, very much not wanted at this time! So try slowing your inner thoughts by saying things in your head slowly and use breathing techniques to calm you as this can calm your body and enhance our immune system. Breathe in through your mouth for four seconds then hold for five then out for five. Other alternatives are yoga or meditation techniques.

**Get enough sleep** – This is so important to maintain physical and mental health. Try calming techniques before bedtime, avoid TV or mobile phone usage and be active in the day. Having a dark bedroom can help too.

**Develop healthy habits** – No we're not talking your runs ashore here shipmates but those of eating fresh fruit and vegetables which help by providing vitamins and minerals to boost your immune system. Stay well hydrated with current NHS guidance that we should drink at least six to eight glasses of fluid (1.2 litres) a day which includes water, lower-fat milks, tea and coffee and particularly so if you have a fever. Exercise as above is good but only do it if you feel well.

**Try tuning out from the "bad" news** – TV coverage and e-media coverage is relentless and often sad and depressing. Whilst you need to know what to do and what's happening, when at home try turning it off or watching humour or other programmes. Your mind needs a change from all the depressing statistics and the many unknowns that are circulating.

**Please distribute this widely and look after yourself and your shipmates.**

Best wishes and stay safe, stay well and stay at home,

*Geoff Apperley*