



BALPA COVID-19 Wellbeing Guide

The effects of COVID-19 on the global aviation industry have been devastating and are continuing to manifest themselves in new ways as the virus spreads. Many pilots have been asked to take lengthy periods of unpaid leave, have suffered life-affecting cuts in pay or could face the prospect of redundancy. It is during difficult times such as these that the importance of monitoring one's mental health and that of our colleagues, friends and family is paramount. This guide aims to provide advice on practical ways to maintain your wellbeing as well as signposting services (both within BALPA and externally) should you be experiencing difficulties or need further help.

Tips on Maintaining Mental Health and Wellbeing

Stress Reaction – what is it and how best to manage it?

Stress reactions are psychological and physiological changes that occur in a person who has been exposed to a stressful event or situation. The uncertainty around COVID-19 can create such stress. With thanks to the Air New Zealand Peer Assistance Network [please read more here about this phenomenon](#) and how best to manage it.

Anxiety in Continuing to Work Amid COVID-19

If you have concerns about your health and safety in continuing to work amid the COVID-19 outbreak, then [please follow this link to read about the measures](#) that have been implemented to mitigate the risks.

General Tips on Maintaining Mental Health

- Maintain a structure to your day.
- Limit social media/news – it is sometimes better not to read about the things that concern you.
- Keep physically and mentally active:
 - There are many online resources (e.g. [NHS One You](#) home workout videos) to help with your physical wellbeing – it only takes a small but regular amount of exercise to make a difference.
 - See <https://www.headspace.com/> and <https://www.calm.com> for useful mindfulness apps.
- Stay connected to friends and family – great networking platforms are: <https://www.houseparty.com/> and <https://zoom.us/>.
- Maintain a healthy diet.
- Make sure you are up to date with guidance on how to stay safe during the COVID-19 restrictions.

Financial Considerations

- Check all your bank direct debits, stop all those that you do not need (do not stop any payments for mortgages/loans until you have discussed this with your lender).
- Mortgage/loan payment breaks: talk to your lender and request these.
- Do not spend money on licence renewals, wait until the situation is clearer (note that the CAA has [granted exemptions](#) for licences, ratings and medicals).
- Note also that BALPA has waived its subscription fee for all members in April and will reduce the fee in May on a pro-rata basis according to pilot salary reduction.
- Get advice, there are many useful websites that will assist you.

Links to Further Mental Health and Wellbeing Advice

- Public Health England [guidance for the public on the mental health and wellbeing aspects of coronavirus](#), which includes the following advice:
 - Consider how to connect with others
 - Help and support others
 - Talk about your worries
 - Look after your physical wellbeing
 - Look after your sleep
 - Try to manage difficult feelings
 - Manage your media and information intake
 - Get the facts
 - Think about your new daily routine
 - Do things you enjoy
 - Set goals
 - Keep your mind active
 - Take time to relax and focus on the present
 - If you can, once a day get outside, or bring nature in
- NHS [Every Mind Matters](#) including advice on maintaining mental well-being while staying at home and tips for addressing anxiety caused by the coronavirus situation.
- The Mind mental health charity [guidance on wellbeing](#) and advice for those feeling in need of [more significant help](#).

Company Services if You Need Help or to Talk to Someone

Pilot Peer Support Programmes

There seems to be a misconception that Pilot Peer Support Programmes – PPSP (also known as Peer Assistance Networks – PAN) are only for serious mental health cases. Nothing could be further from the truth. Peers are trained primarily to listen, and that single priceless skill means that they are able to help with a very wide spectrum of issues, which all pilots face. That includes the current environment.

Of course, it is stressful. This much is obvious. At its heart, ours is a solitary profession and we are used to solving problems ourselves. Or at least we think this is the case: in reality, we work as a team in the cockpit to sort stuff out. Why should personal issues be any different? Is the current situation life-threatening? Statistically not. Might you need some help pretty quickly? Very probably. The Big Picture potentially affects everyone; however, there are

many of us who have personal circumstances that we can just about cope with, but the Big Picture is a step too far. That is where these programmes can help.

PLEASE do not suffer in silence. For many airlines, there is a team of outstanding, highly trained and very experienced peers available to listen to your circumstances and help you talk them through. Our data mirrors international data that 85% of pilot wellbeing issues are resolved just by talking to a fellow pilot who knows what they are doing. We are all in this together, and that means looking out for each other. So, if you want to talk about the impact this is having on you and your family, or you see a colleague who would benefit from that, then please look up your local PPSP or PAN (your Company Council reps will be able to put you in contact with the right people).

If your company does not yet have a PPSP, please contact BALPA (via your Company Council reps, your company's National Officer or the BALPA Flight Safety Department). BALPA will take this up with your employer on your behalf. If you need help and you are a BALPA member, but you do not have access to a PPSP, then please contact the Pilot Advisory Group (PAG). The PAG Chair, David Marshall, has written a piece below detailing what the PAG does and all their contact numbers. They are an outstanding group of qualified counsellors – please use them.

Your Company Council

Do not forget that your Company Council reps are always available to listen and to talk.

[BALPA Services if You Need Help or to Talk to Someone](#)

Not all pilots have the benefit of access to a mature and well-resourced peer support programme within their company, in fact some are not yet operational, or perhaps they do not yet have the confidence to use such a service. However, there are a number of BALPA-run services that can help you.

BALPA Pilot Advisory Group (PAG)

The PAG has been running for many years and was formed on the basis of an IFALPA policy, which said Associations should provide a counselling service to its members. It exists purely to provide help and support to any member who has professional or personal problems/issues where they feel that they might benefit from talking to someone in the same profession who is trained to listen and support them. The PAG works 365/24/7 mainly on the telephone, and all of their work is strictly confidential.

All members of the PAG undertake a training course with the Relate organisation and BALPA insists that this step is undertaken before 'accreditation' is given. Continuation training is carried out by the Samaritans training organisation at regular intervals. Just as importantly, they have collectively many decades of experience within the piloting profession, so understand the context in which pilots work.

At the moment there is an equal gender balance across the team, three men and three women, and a reasonable geographical representation across the UK. Amongst them, they have experienced most situations in life including dealing with their own cancer and that of a partner, loss of a spouse/child, training/conversion problems, personality training issues, PTSD problems caused by trauma, marital/relationship problems and issues caused by lifestyle factors.

Remember that the PAG is available to **all** members, regardless of whether they are employed or not.

The PAG can be contacted at: PilotsAdvisoryGroup@balpa.org

Hayley Brewis – Suffolk
01284 386 004

Heather Bennett – Surrey
07939 202 294

David Marshall – Leicestershire
01164 299 213

Russ Jones – Scotland
07713 631 507

Sean (John) Walters – Surrey
07850 077 055

Amanda Calnan – Staffordshire
07743 384 444

BALPA Benevolent Fund

The BALPA Benevolent Fund is a registered charity whose objective is to provide support to those in significant financial need who are, or have been, engaged professionally as pilots, flight engineers, helicopter winchmen or navigators in commercial aviation. This includes current or former employees of BALPA or any of its subsidiaries, and their families, and anyone else dependent on them.

<https://www.balpa.org/About/BALPA-Benevolent-Fund>

Other Services if You Need Help or to Talk to Someone

Samaritans

The Samaritans offers emotional support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

See <https://www.samaritans.org/> or call **116 123** for free.