acosvo

For Scotland's Third Sector Leaders

2020 Edition

Looking after your wellbeing…

…..whilst being a voluntary sector CEO

00 | Introduction

The importance of mental wellbeing both in and out of work is being increasingly recognised and discussed; there is lots of guidance about what leaders should do in order to support the wellbeing of their team. However, the majority fails to acknowledge the potential burden this creates for leaders, or to address how those at the top of an organisation can look after their own wellbeing (Barling & Cloutier, 2016). Self-care has become something of a buzzword, there are countless articles telling you that if you *"just"* take time off, eat well, sleep, exercise, and maybe do some yoga or meditation then everything will be fine. Those things are important, and can contribute to your mental wellbeing, but they can also feel unrealistic and ultimately become unhelpful by making you feel like you've *"failed"* if you're not continually achieving them.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many of the challenges faced by voluntary sector leaders; for many it has required a complete re-designing of service delivery, furloughing staff, loss of income, uncertainty about the future, and dealing with increased demand but with reduced funding and capacity. An ACOSVO member likened it to redesigning a plane while flying it, and this has, unsurprisingly, taken its toll.

As an organisation which strives to understand the unique pressures faced by CEOs and support them as individuals, we wanted to take a different approach. We've compiled a series of short digital modules which suggest practical changes and tips and tricks to help you look after your wellbeing, whilst also dealing with the challenges of leading an organisation. We know you're busy, so we've tried to make this as simple and easy to follow as possible, we don't want it to be another thing on your to-do list. Not everything will work or be helpful to everyone but we hope that you might find something useful, easy to implement, and which will ultimately support you and your wellbeing as a voluntary sector leader.

A few things before you get started

Don't try to implement lots of changes at once:

- Consider starting one new thing each week, or if that feels too fast, one thing each month. This should help make it easier to turn them into long-lasting habits

- Explain to your team (staff, volunteers, board, friends) that you're trying to implement some new strategies to help protect your wellbeing, then (where relevant) explain your new systems to your team so they can help support you in implementing them

- Think about when to start implementing new habits. As one ACOSVO member put it - "It is sometimes better to plan to change routine and habits the week AFTER a big deadline". Equally, if you feel like you're always facing big deadlines then it might be better to just jump in and give it a go

- Situations will change and unexpected things will come up - you won't be able to stick to any of these things perfectly - and that's okay

- If you get started, then realise you've fallen back into old habits, that's okay, you can always start again another time. You don't only have one chance to find a balance
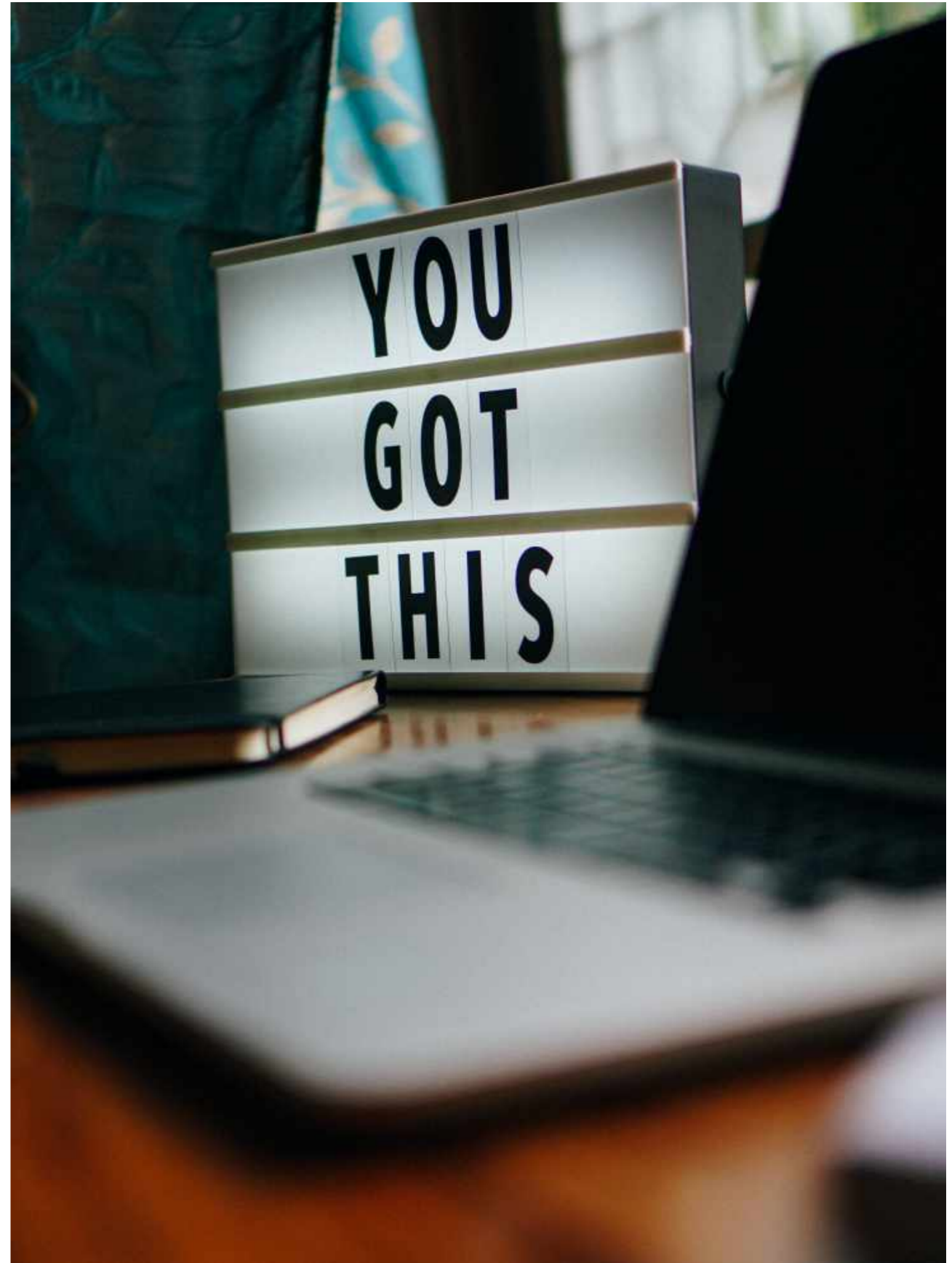
About this guide

We've organised this guide into 5 themes, with 3 tips in each. You can either jump to the section which feels most relevant to you by clicking the link below, or read through all of it, it's entirely up to you.

Looking after your wellbeing…

…When there isn't enough time

(tips to help you manage and regain control of your time)

…When there is too much to do

(tips for managing tasks and relieving overwhelm)

…Whilst managing a team

(tips to help you set boundaries and manage expectations)

…When you feel isolated

(tips for accessing support and asking for help)

…When you're exhausted

(tips to help you recharge and prevent burnout)

N.B. Throughout the guide any text formatted like this is an active hyperlink

Section 01

…When there isn't enough time

"One of the challenges we have is the pull to work IN the business rather than ON the business—when budgets are tight and resources stretched, keeping the organisation alive (and thus being able to make a difference to the communities you are there to support) becomes the day-to-day challenge and the chance to step back, plan for the future and try new things becomes a luxury we are ill able to afford. [ACEVO's Pay and Equalities Survey (2019)] showed that on average third sector leaders work 'three months of the year for free', working roughly 10 unpaid hours per week."

Pat Armstrong, OBE, CEO of ACOSVO

Tough at the top – lessons on leadership (2019)

As a CEO it often feels like there just aren't enough hours in the day; you get started on a task only to find yourself distracted by new emails or messages, you try and do five things at once only to realise you haven't made any real progress on any of them, you end up working long hours but still feel like you'll never get everything done.

The move to home working as a result of COVID-19 has increased the temptation to work longer hours by blurring the boundaries between work and personal life; and the increased dependence on technology exacerbates the feeling of being unable to switch off (Stawarz et al., 2013; Washington, 2020).

There are dangers in allowing this to become the norm, working more is unlikely to solve the problem, and may in fact end up having a negative impact on both your personal wellbeing, and the quality of your work.

The first thing to do is to remind yourself that you are only human, you are only one person, and you genuinely might not be able to do it all. But, to try to help, we've gathered a few tips which might **help you manage and regain control of your time.**

TIP 1: TASK/EMAIL BATCHING

TIP 2: POMODORO TECHNIQUE

TIP 3: THEME YOUR DAYS

TIP 1: TASK/EMAIL BATCHING

The basic idea

You only read and respond to emails (slack, teams etc) two or three times a day

How to do it

Some people take an extreme approach to this technique by applying it to their entire day.

We'll include some links below which explain more about that, but we're going to start with what we think is slightly more realistic, and certainly less daunting - email batching.

• Turn off email notifications on all your devices

• Set aside two or three times a day to check and reply to emails – e.g. 10-10:30am, 12:30-1pm, 4-4:30pm

• Try to take some time first thing to set your own priorities before opening your emails

• Schedule these blocks into your calendar (as you would a meeting)

• Do not look at your emails outside these times

• Ideally you should try to do this for internal messaging systems and social media as well!

Why to try it

It's easy to get so caught up with/distracted by reacting to emails and messages that you get to the end of the day and realise you haven't achieved what you wanted to; email batching can help alleviate this (Gupta et al., 2011).

It stops emails being missed when you open them quickly then forget to reply later.

It manages expectations in terms of how quickly people expect a reply (Tyler & Tang, 2003) - some people say this means they get less trivial emails.

It can help you be more thoughtful about the tone and language in your emails (Akbar et al., 2019) and allow you to take additional time for emails which require a more sensitive reply.

For anything "urgent", people can still get a response within half a working day which is more than reasonable.

Find out more

For emails

Article - How I Batch Process Email Only 2-3 Times A Day

Article - Productivity Hack: Batching Emails

To apply this technique more broadly

Article - Time blocking: what it is and how to do it (plus apps)

Article - How to improve productivity with time batching

TIP 2: POMODORO TECHNIQUE

The basic idea

Spend 25 minutes focusing on a single task, then take a 5-minute break

How to do it

- Choose a task to be accomplished

- Set a timer to 25 minutes (put your phone on aeroplane/silent and turn off notifications on other devices)

- Work on the task until the timer rings, then put a tick on a sheet of paper

- If you think of other ideas or things you need to do during the 25 minutes, note them down on a piece of paper and continue with the task at hand

- It can be tempting to ignore the timer and keep working through your breaks, try to resist doing this if you can—the breaks are one of the most important parts of the approach

- Take a short break (5 minutes)

- Every 4 Pomodoros take a longer break (15-30 minutes)

- You're unlikely to suddenly be able to work like this for a whole day, but you could start by trying to include a couple of 25-minute sessions each day and build up from there

Why to try it

Research shows that you can get more done by focusing on one task at a time (American Psychological Association, 2006; Rosen, 2008).

It can help relieve the frustration of getting to the end of a day and feeling like you haven't "got anything done". If you've done one or two Pomodoro sessions, that's a couple of things which you have definitely made progress on.

Having a couple of times a day when you're not trying to switch between different tasks will reduce your mental load and help you feel a little less overwhelmed (Liefooghe et al., 2008).

There is almost nothing which is so urgent it can't wait for 25 minutes—this technique may help remind you of this, and help relieve anxiety which you feel if you don't do something immediately.

It might help you remember to take more frequent breaks.

Find out more

The idea was originally developed by Francesco Cirillo in the 1980s (Cirillo, 2007)

Article - Productivity 101: An Introduction to The Pomodoro Technique

Article - Take it From Someone Who Hates Productivity Hacks—the Pomodoro Technique Actually Works

Article - How to Pomodoro Your Way to Long-Lasting Productivity

TIP 3: THEME YOUR DAYS

The basic idea

Dedicate each day of the week to a specific area of focus or responsibility

How to do it

- Think of four broad themes/categories for your work, then allocate one day a week to focus on each area (including meetings, tasks etc)

- For example:
  - Monday – projects
  - Tuesday – governance
  - Wednesday – finance
  - Thursday – marketing
  - Friday – overflow

- To begin with, build in an "overflow" day - this gives you time to catch up on or finish off anything you didn't manage to complete during the week, and to plan your tasks for the following week

- You won't be able to do this perfectly and there will be unexpected interruptions, but it might help you refocus and prioritise when these come up - and remind you of where to focus your time and energy

Why to try it

As CEO, your tasks will often cover a huge variety of areas and constantly jumping between them can sometimes become overwhelming (Hodges & Howieson, 2017; Liefooghe et al., 2008).

Theming your days can help you make decisions and complete tasks more easily and efficiently because you are staying in one "headspace" for a prolonged period of time.

It may help prevent you from spending too much time on one area—it's easy to get caught up in perfecting one task and then realise you've fallen behind on something else equally important.

Find out more

Themed days are used by business leaders including Elon Musk and Jack Dorsey.

Blog - Themed days - The productivity secret of Elon Musk

Article - The Jack Dorsey Productivity Secret That Enables Him To Run Two Companies At Once

Section 02

…When there is too much to do

"It's not just the topic switches—it is also the lens switch. From high level strategy to tiny details, the point of view switch, from internal issues to external relationships, and the audience switch; different languages, assumptions, etc.. Some days my brain literally overheats!"

Janet Thorne, CEO of Reach Volunteering

From Strategy to Sandwiches: Small Charity CEOs do it all (Johnson, 2018)

As CEO you need to balance a huge range of competing demands: operations and strategy, staff and beneficiaries, finances and board members; and it often feels like everything is equally important making it incredibly difficult to know where to start. This issue can be compounded by the fact that resources are limited, which means sourcing extra capacity isn't an option.

Add to this that you are also human, you have a personal life with its own challenges and responsibilities; something which has been brought to the fore for many people in the last few months (read more about this in a recent blog from ACOSVO's CEO, Pat Armstrong here), and it can become overwhelming.

You are not alone in feeling like this, and in fact, academic research has noted that the "responsibility inherent in senior leadership positions might be sufficient to tax the wellbeing of even the most resilient" (Barling & Cloutier, 2016, p.6).

So, we wanted to share some **tips for managing tasks and relieving overwhelm.**

TIP 1: BRAIN DUMP

TIP 2: HOW TO EAT AN ELEPHANT

TIP 3: STRATEGIC MEETING

TIP 1: BRAIN DUMP

The basic idea

Clear space in your head by writing down everything you're thinking about

How to do it

• Set aside about an hour the first time you do this

• Grab a pen and paper or open a new document

• Write down everything you're thinking about (not just for work): tasks, concerns, questions, ideas, include urgent and non-urgent things

• Don't worry about putting it in a specific order and don't read it back

• Take a 15-minute break - maybe go for a walk if you can, or do something else to help you decompress - you'll think of other things during your break, note them down as they come to you

• Go back to your list, and try to start organising it, this will probably look different every time you do it, and will depend on what feels natural to you

• You could try to organise your list according to category, project, urgency or how long it will take

• If you do this regularly it'll be much easier to keep on top of and will take you less time

• A possible variation or extension of this is using morning pages (Cameron, 1992). This involves writing three sides of stream-of-conscious thoughts every morning - lots of people find it a helpful habit and you can find out more about it here or here

Why to try it

Your brain's capacity is limited, and overloading it can have negative impacts, including causing anxiety; reducing the number of things you are trying to store and process can help relieve this (Gruszka & Nęcka, 2017; Kirsh, 2000).

As a CEO you often have so many things going on, and so many thoughts running through your head, that you end up panicking, unable to concentrate or feeling distracted.

Getting everything out of your mind will help you focus on tasks without being distracted by other thoughts.

It might feel overwhelming at first when you see how long your list is, but, after that it can allow you to start regaining some control.

It might also help you see that you genuinely do have too much to do, and you need to delegate, postpone, or cancel some things.

Find out more

This idea was originally suggested by David Allen in his book Getting Things Done (2001)

Article – How to Get Started With Brain Dumping in 2020

Article – Brain Dumping for the Stressed and Anxious

Podcast – The Life Changing Magic of Brain Dumping

TIP 2: HOW TO EAT AN ELEPHANT

The basic idea

Break tasks and projects down into manageable bites

How to do it

- Look at/think about your to-do list, maybe focus on up to three main projects to start with

- Break these down into small, and genuinely manageable tasks

- For example, consider a report for a funder:
    - Break this down into the different components you must submit
    - Break each of these component down into smaller parts
    - For narrative reports you could try allocating rough word counts to each section; knowing you need to write 500 words each on X, Y and Z is less daunting than thinking about trying to write 1500 words about everything
    - For supporting documents; list all the documents you need to include

- Once you've done this, you can decide which bite to take first: either find the quick wins so you can feel like you've made progress, or tackle the most difficult bit first so it's out of the way—whichever feels best for you

- If you want, you can try to estimate how much time each task will take to complete and use this to help plan your days

Why to try it

You can't eat an elephant in one go, in the same way, you can't complete a project in one go, it's made up of lots of little bites.

When you're feeling overwhelmed it can be difficult to know where or how to begin, this can help your biggest tasks feel more manageable.

It can help you identify where you might need some additional support or input to complete a project.

It allows you to start making progress on tackling big projects, this momentum can give you a sense of accomplishment and help you feel more motivated to complete things.

It will help you feel confident that you aren't missing something.
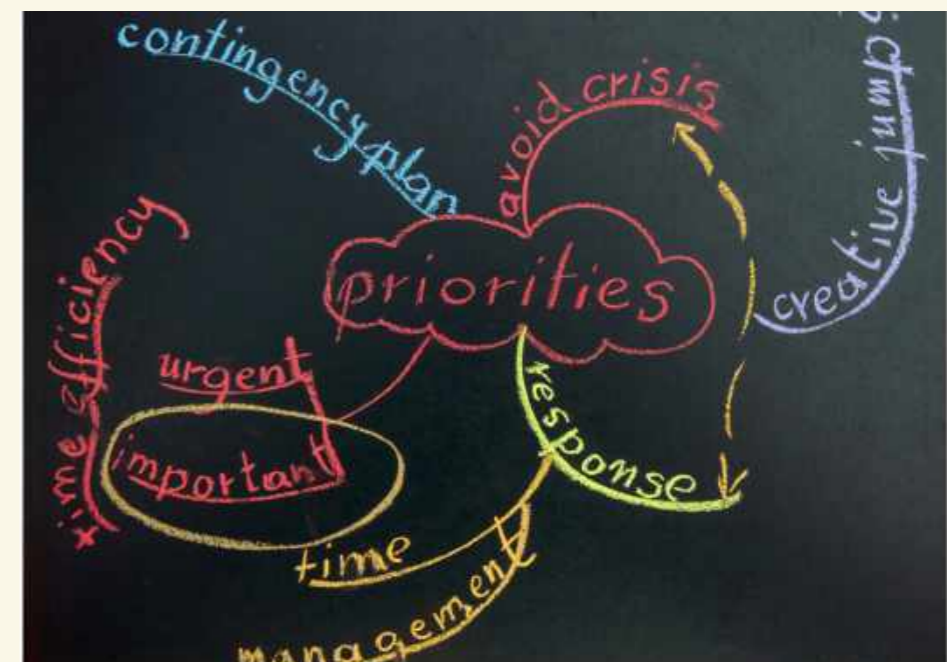
TIP 3: STRATEGIC MEETING

The basic idea

Schedule a regular meeting with yourself for strategic thinking

How to do it

- Schedule a meeting in your calendar, ideally a couple of hours long at least once a month — call it something which other people won't think they can move/book something over

- Use this time to step back and think about the bigger picture, review progress against your strategic plan, and think about what you could do in the short and long term to move closer towards these goals

- You might need to be quite strict with yourself so you don't end up using this time to get caught up with emails or your to-do list!

Why to try it

One of the biggest challenges for CEOs is getting so caught up in day-to-day tasks and operations that they don't have time for strategic or creative thinking.

This isn't a perfect solution but we hope it might help prevent you feeling like you're losing sight of the bigger picture.

Knowing you've got some "protected" time booked in your calendar can help you feel less frustrated by the day-to-day because you know you will definitely have chance to reflect and think creatively.

Section 03

…Whilst managing a team

"It's not easy being a non-profit CEO. People expect the CEO to have all the answers. The ideal CEO is inspiring, strong, visionary, articulate, persuasive, down to earth, and, of course, good with numbers. Poet, warrior, spiritual leader, bean-counter: the perfect leader. And when I meet the person who has all of those qualities, I'll let you know."

Alan Cantor, Non-Profit Consultant and Former CEO

Lonely at the top (2016)

Managing a team can be one of the most challenging, and time consuming, aspects of being a CEO; this was highlighted by the insights drawn from our leadership support calls during COVID-19 which found that people management was the most common theme of discussion (ACOSVO, 2020), with members often mentioning focusing on others health and wellbeing over their own.

As a CEO, it's easy to continually put your teams needs first, to carry the burden of their negative emotions and challenges (Frost & Robinson, 1999), and end up involved in the minutiae of day-to-day operations. But, it's important to remember that doing any of these things can be incredibly draining, and therefore ultimately be detrimental to your team (Byrne et al., 2014).

So, you need to find a way to continue supporting your team, whilst also protecting your own time and wellbeing. David Marquet's model of Intent Based Leadership (2013) provides an interesting and valuable approach to addressing this which you can read more about here; however, fully embracing this requires a significant shift in mindset, actions and organisational culture.

For this guide, we want to focus on smaller and, we hope less daunting, **tips to help you set boundaries and manage expectations.**

TIP 1: LEADING CONVERSATIONS
ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

TIP 2: PUSHING BACK

TIP 3: HAVE "OFFICE HOURS" / TEAM
FOCUS TIME

TIP 1: LEADING CONVERSATIONS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

The basic idea

A practical guide to help you: handle conversations about mental health, protect yourself and set boundaries whilst still being supportive; and support your line managers to do the same

How to do it

Acknowledge their feelings using neutral statements

• "I am very sorry that you have experienced this…"

• "This sounds like an upsetting/frustrating situation for you…"

• "You must be having a difficult time"

Provide validation/reassurance

• You can tell them that many people have similar experiences

• "Thank you for sharing, I know that can't have been easy"

Ask them what would help

• "Do you feel there is anything we can do to help/support you?"

• "What would be a good first step for us to take?"

Don't rush into action or overpromise

• "There will be things we can change, and things we can't—but let's work together and see what we can do"

• "Thank you for talking to me today. I need some time to reflect on what you've shared, then we will work together to agree some next steps, let's speak again in X days"

Establish your boundaries and offer signposting

• "I appreciate it helps to talk about the situation. We can help you with X, but we're not able to help you with Y. However, I can suggest some options for where you might be able to find further help or support, if you would like."

• "I'm not the best person to advise you on that and do not have the knowledge, skills or experience to help you with this. I am not a mental health professional and stepping outside of my abilities might be unhelpful to you. But I can suggest other sources of help and support you may wish to access."

Why to try it

Speaking about mental health at work is becoming more and more common, and whilst this is a genuinely positive thing, it can be also be incredibly draining for managers.

You have a legal obligation to make "reasonable adjustments", you can, and should (to a certain extent) be supportive and accommodating - but you also have to establish boundaries to ensure any measures don't have a detrimental impact on the organisation, other members of the team, or you personally.

We know conversations about mental health can seem quite daunting so we wanted to give you practical suggestions for what you can actually say, for you to use yourself, or for you to use as a resource for staff who are line managing other people.

Find out more

Councillor's Guide to Mental Health (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2013)

MHFA Line Managers' Resource (MHFA England, 2016)

People Managers' Guide to Mental Health (CIPD, 2018)

Let's make mental health part of the conversation (Open Minds, 2017)

TIP 2: PUSHING BACK

The basic idea

Some questions and tips for pushing back and protecting your time on a day-to-day basis

How to do it

Firstly, remember that it's okay to say no, even if it's not popular

Try not to overpromise

- It's better to say "I don't have time for this at the moment", or "I won't be able to get to this for another X weeks", than to say yes and then let someone down

If someone asks for a meeting

- Ask them to explain what their query is/give you a bit more information in an email
- This can help you decide if a meeting is needed, or if you can resolve it via email
- If a meeting is needed, do YOU really need to attend the meeting, or can another team member make the decision/answer the query

If someone asks you to look over/check something

- Consider whether YOU really need to look at it
- If you don't, this gives you an opportunity to empower your team—let them know you're happy for them to go ahead, say you trust their decision/judgement

For "small" internal requests think about the following things before saying yes

- What will be the knock-on effect of saying yes: will you have to work more hours that week, postpone something else, let down another person?
- Remember to be conscious of "death by paper cuts"—you might think it's only a small request, but 10 "small" requests later, you haven't got anything done

If someone approaches you with a new idea/opportunity

- Try asking yourself the following questions:
  - Does it fit with your organisation's purpose and mission
  - Do you have capacity to do it WELL?
  - Is it going to be sufficiently resourced?
- If the answer to any of these is no, then you might want to think about saying no
- If you feel that you need to have a justification then you can frame your explanation using the questions above

Why to try it

Asking yourself these questions might help you stay focused and make progress on the most important aspects of your role. It can help make your workload feel more manageable and make you feel less stressed.

It may empower your team, improve their confidence and make them feel more fulfilled. Over time, this may reduce the number of questions and unnecessary interruptions you have to deal with.

TIP 3: HAVE "OFFICE HOURS" / TEAM FOCUS TIME

The basic idea

Establish boundaries with your team about your availability

How to do it

Office Hours

- Have a fixed hour each day when your team can come to you with ad hoc queries, arrange last minute meetings etc
- This will help prevent interruptions throughout the day and empower your team to make their own decisions
- We know that this could feel quite extreme and might take some adjustment, so a slightly easier approach might be to implement "focus time"

Focus Time

- Allocate one morning or afternoon a week as "focus time", for yourself or your whole team, in which there isn't any internal communication
- This will allow people to concentrate on specific pieces of work without distractions or worrying that they're missing important messages/decisions

Why to try it

It's easy to fall into the habit of having lots of "quick" and unnecessary chats - this can have a detrimental impact on your ability to focus, and make your team feel like they should/could ask you about every little thing.

You may find that you get less questions as people realise they can answer or resolve things themselves.

Ensuring everyone has protected time to focus on their own work could help improve the wellbeing of your whole team by removing the pressure of communication and allowing them to make genuine progress on their most important pieces of work (which will probably also help relieve some of your stress about things not getting done).

Section 04

…When you feel isolated

"The really surprising thing when you get to a senior position in an organisation is how lonely you feel. It's a weird feeling but you get to a point where you feel there aren't many people around you who understand what you're going through, have been in this position, or know what to do, and sometimes you can get a bit paralysed by that sense of not being able to consult with people."

Jon Evans, CMO of System1

Is it lonely at the top? (SynergyMode, 2020)

Lots of our members talk about feeling isolated, an experience shared by CEOs across sectors and around the world; a survey by Harvard Business Review found that "half of CEOs report experiencing feelings of loneliness in their role, and of this group, 61% believe it hinders their performance" (Saporito, 2012).

This issue is often exacerbated as a voluntary sector CEO, because it can feel as though you are held to higher moral and ethical standards, and like you're going to let others down if you admit you don't have everything under control.

Research has found that mentoring and peer support can help reduce emotional exhaustion and prevent burnout (Thomas & Lankau, 2009); it's therefore important to give yourself permission to make time for these things and to remember that it's okay to have time away from your team in the company of your peers. Sometimes, you might also need some time completely on your own, and that's okay too.

We know it isn't always easy to admit that you're struggling or that you don't have all the answers so we've compiled some **tips for accessing support and asking for help.**

TIP 1: PEER SUPPORT

TIP 2: FIND A MENTOR

TIP 3: A DIFFERENT TYPE OF BOARD SUPPORT

TIP 1: PEER SUPPORT

The basic idea

Connect with other CEOs, for advice, support, a general chat, or just to share experiences

How to do it

- Accessing peer support can feel intimidating, but you could start by joining an online event and just listening

- ACOSVO offers peer support for voluntary sector leaders via online events and networks, as well as a range of other support services

- The Leadership Worth Sharing podcast from ACEVO features a series of interviews with voluntary sector leaders in which they share their experiences, challenges and advice

- Inspire* facilitates free peer support through hubs of 6-8 non-competing organisations, and provides access to group meetings, 1-2-1 sessions, events and online resources

- Remember, peer support almost always operates on Chatham House Rules, and so provides a safe space to speak openly

Why to try it

Just hearing about other people's experiences can help you realise you're not on your own. You might learn useful tips and advice, or find out about opportunities and you can speak to people who genuinely "get it".

It can provide you with professional and emotional support and reassurance (Kennedy, 2015).

TIP 2: FIND A MENTOR

The basic idea

Find a mentor to provide you with support, and to act as a sounding board for issues and ideas

How to do it

Lots of organisations offer mentoring in Scotland, we've highlighted a few which are focused on mentoring in the voluntary sector below

ACOSVO

- Cost: Free for ACOSVO members
- Overview: "ACOSVO has volunteer mentors available throughout central Scotland who have a range of skills and experience to help you to reflect on your work and your leadership role."
- Find out more

Kilfinan Group

- Cost: Free
- Overview: "The Kilfinan Group is a group of senior business people who provide free and informal mentoring to charity chief executives." They have 6 chapters, including 2 in Scotland
- Find out more

Small Charities Coalition

- Cost: Free
- Overview: "We match small charities up with a person or organisation that can help with a problem or challenge…The match can be anything from a one-off phone call to a 3-month relationship where you are guided through a particular problem, challenge or period of transition."
- Find out more

Why to try it

Speaking to someone who isn't connected to your organisation might allow you to be more honest and let down your guard, because what you say won't have the same consequences.

Mentors usually have lots of experience—this allows them to ask you useful questions which can help you think through issues and ideas in a new way. Research has found that mentoring can make you a more effective leader (Stead, 2005).

A mentor's goal is to support you and your development, they can therefore help ensure you're looking after yourself as well as your organisation.

TIP 3: A DIFFERENT TYPE OF BOARD SUPPORT

The basic idea

Ask for extra board one-to-ones where you can share concerns or challenges and ask for advice

How to do it

We know that board relationships aren't always easy, and sometimes your board is part of the problem, but there is value in trying to invest in and improve these; this is one strategy which might help you do that.

- Speak to your board, or if there is one board member you feel most comfortable with, maybe approach them individually

- Explain that whilst you understand the importance of "actions" based one-to-ones, they don't always provide you with the support that you need/you don't always feel able to be honest

- Say that you would like to have additional one-to-ones, ideally with a different board member, which will be a safe space where you can share concerns and things you're struggling with, personally and/or professionally (a place to vent, work through issues, get genuine advice etc)

- It might be useful to gently remind your board that they have responsibilities as your line managers, and if you have a workplace wellbeing policy then you could reference this

- It is up to you to set the boundaries in terms of confidentiality around these conversations and to agree how much is shared with other board members

Why to try it

As a CEO it often feels like you have to sugar coat things, and one-to-ones and board meetings are focused completely on organisational actions and progress (or, if you're struggling, the lack of these) (Jones, 2019). Your board should be there to support YOU as a person (in the same way you are for your staff), but it can be difficult to combine these two very different types of conversations.

This may help your board have a better insight into the challenges you're facing, which may help to make them more supportive and understanding.

It also provides an opportunity for your board to give you extra support or put in place strategies for supporting you and protecting your wellbeing.

It could help you develop a more open and honest relationship with your board and may help ease some frustrations.

Section 05

…When you're exhausted

"A report from the Lords Select Committee [on Charities] (2017) described charity leadership as being like 'juggling on a unicycle'(p.31) - balancing a huge range of tasks and skills while simultaneously facing unrealistically high expectations. Also the stress of knowing if one ball drops, that will be the one that is noticed, not the many others that you are still successfully managing to juggle.

Sit this alongside what is now being described as operating in an environment of VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity), together with recent studies which have shown in times of austerity, the third sector buffers the impact on frontline provision by managing with less staff and less money but trying to provide the same level of service—all indicating the potential for burnout in our third sector leaders."

Pat Armstrong, OBE, CEO of ACOSVO

Resilient leaders: resilient sector (2017)

We'll keep this introduction short; in our most recent leadership support calls we've noticed a lot of our members talking about being exhausted; this isn't surprising given the extreme professional and personal challenges which everyone has had to deal with over the last few months.

Looking after your wellbeing is more important than ever when you feel like this, but it is also the time when doing so can feel the most difficult. So, we've tried to make the next few tips as simple and achievable as possible to **help you recharge and prevent burnout.**

TIP 1: PAUSE AND BREATHE

TIP 2: SMALL STEPS TOWARDS TIME OFF
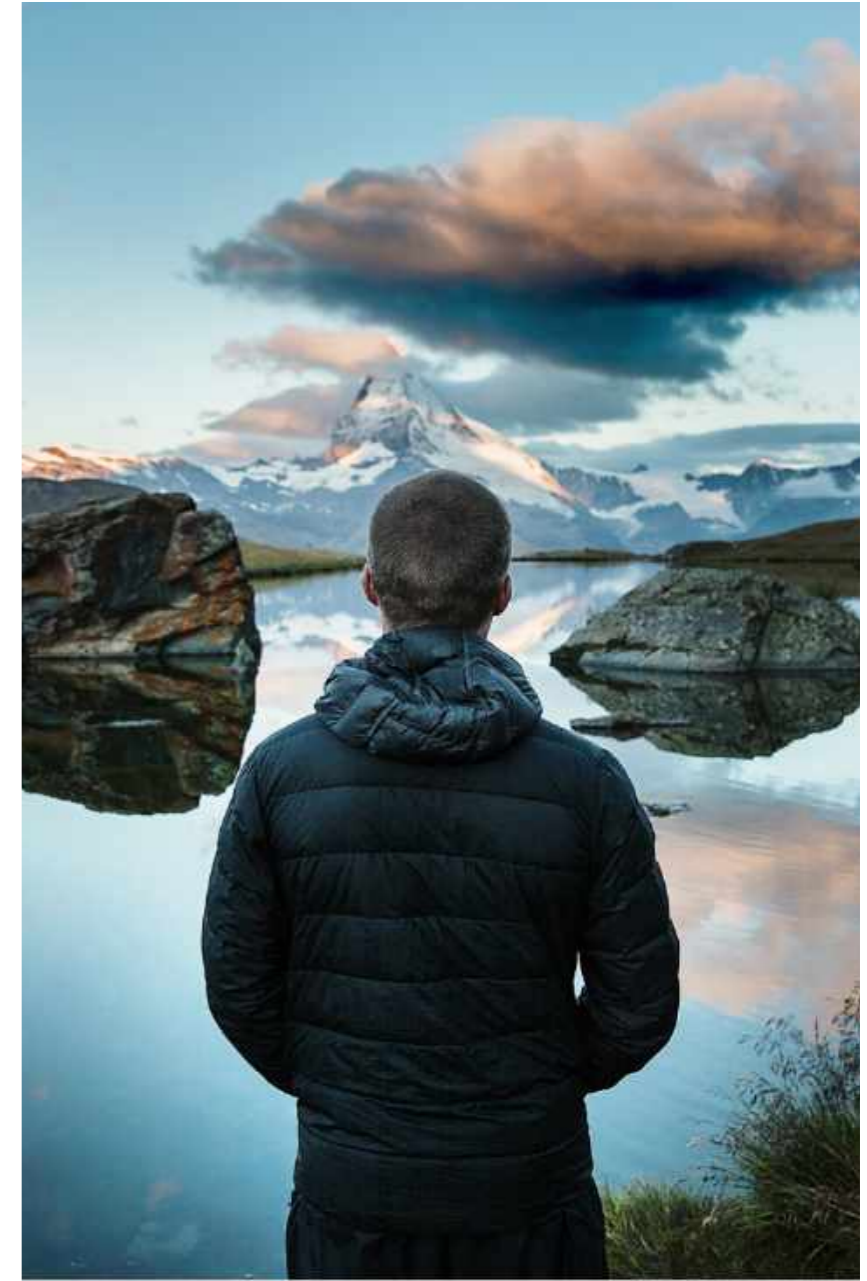
TIP 3: A MANTRA FOR VOLUNTARY SECTOR CEOS

TIP 1: PAUSE & BREATHE

The basic idea

Set a reminder to correct your posture and take 10 deep breaths

How to do it

- Set an alarm/reminder on your phone at regular intervals - you decide how often, but try to start with having one at least every couple of hours (although remember to avoid scheduling it in the middle of a meeting)
- When your alarm goes off - correct your posture and take 10 deep breaths

Why to try it

It's incredibly easy to get so swept up by work that you forget to do the simplest things.

This can help you remember to pause, re-fresh your thoughts and reset.

TIP 2: SMALL STEPS TOWARDS TIME OFF

The basic idea

Start by learning to take "micro" breaks then build up to longer periods of time

How to do it

Almost every person we spoke to about this guide talked about the importance of taking time off, but we know you've probably heard it a million times, and it's MUCH easier said than done, so we want to try and make it seem more manageable.

This isn't about taking two weeks off to do nothing, or adding to the feeling that trying to take time off becomes a pressure in itself.

This is about learning to allow yourself, and your brain, to have chance to recharge.

- Start by trying to spend an hour, twice a week, doing something which you enjoy, and which isn't related to your day job - cooking, exercise, jigsaws, art, reading, volunteering - it doesn't matter what it is, as long as it helps to re-energise you

- Try to turn your phone off, or if that feels too uncomfortable to begin with, put it on do not disturb

- Think about how you feel after an hour - you might be surprised how much of an impact it has - and if you feel able to carry on for another hour, or even another 30 minutes, go for it!

- If you have a moment of work-related inspiration or suddenly remember something really important, that's okay, just make a note of it on a piece of paper then go back to what you were doing (or not doing)

- See if you can do this for a month, then have a go at increasing it, try to take a full morning or afternoon

- If you're already managing this - try to take a whole weekend

- Remember other people aren't generally working at weekends, so the chance that you will miss a genuinely urgent email is incredibly low

- Sometimes it's easier to go somewhere without Wi-Fi or mobile signal to help enforce these boundaries (although we appreciate that isn't always possible or practical, and that this might feel like a step too far just now), or to ask a friend or family member to be your accountability buddy

Why to try it

Sometimes, the most productive thing you can do is rest, because you will be in a better mindset, better able to solve problems, and get more done in less time if you have had chance to recharge.

TIP 3: A MANTRA FOR VOLUNTARY SECTOR CEOS

The basic idea

If you don't feel able to do any of these things at the moment, that's okay. For now, we want to leave you with a mantra from Vu Le at the Non-Profit AF blog

How to do it

Read the following paragraph: *"I am a non-profit unicorn. I try each day to make the world better. I am good at some stuff, and I suck at some stuff, and that's OK. There's way more crap than I can possibly do on any given day. On some days I am more productive than on other days, and that's OK. I know sometimes there are things that I certainly could have done better. I know that I can't make everyone happy or spend as much time as I could on everyone. I know there's a bunch of crap I don't know. Sometimes I make mistakes, and that's OK. I will try my best to learn and to improve, but I'll also give myself a break. I will be as thoughtful and understanding with myself as I am with my co-workers and community members."*

The courage for mediocrity: We non-profit professionals need to give ourselves a break (Le, 2014)

Why to try it

Sometimes you need a reminder that you can only do so much, you're not a superhero and that's okay.

Helplines

If you're worried about how you're feeling or just need to talk to someone, you can always contact:

The Samaritans

116 123 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

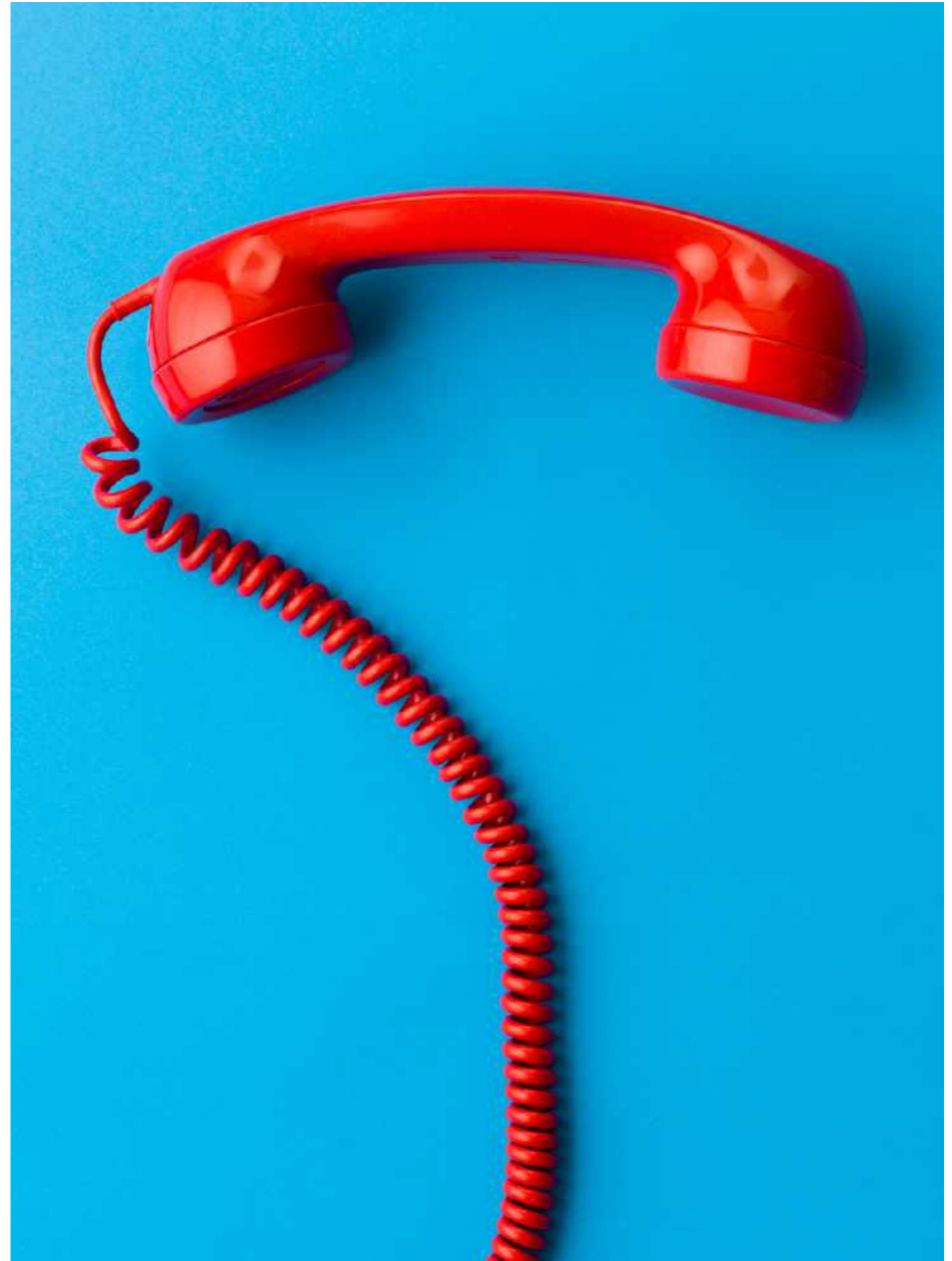jo@samaritans.org (you will usually get a reply within 24 hours)

www.samaritans.org

CALM

0800 58 58 58 (17:00-00:00 every day)

www.thecalmzone.net

Befrienders Worldwide

If you live internationally, you can find your local helpline at www.befrienders.org

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