

PhD During The Pandemic

Contents

When it comes to providing support and guidance for PhD students during this pandemic, there is no one size fits all.

The challenges you may be navigating will vary depending on your subject, how far along you are, your lived experiences and a variety of other factors.

This document has been created to signpost you to some fantastic support resources that exist. Read through and pick out what you need, leave what you don't.

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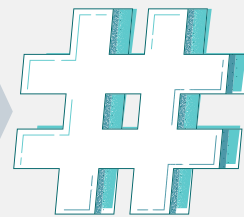
How to Adjust



The PhD journey can be a lonely one, and now with everyone attempting to work from home, it is not as easy as just chatting to your office mate to find out how they have approached the transition.

Below are a number of resources where others share how they have experienced the adjustment to a new 'normal' as well as suggestions on how to adjust.

The following Twitter tags also contain students sharing their experiences and resources. However, if you wish to curate your content for the sake of your wellbeing (such as to remove mentions of Covid-19) you can do that [here](#)



academictwitter
phdchat
phdpandemic



Grad students adjust to a new normal: In this article, PhD students share their experiences of adjusting to working on their PhD during the lockdown one day at a time.

PhDs During the Pandemic: this article covers some potential challenges PhD students might encounter during this time and provides practical suggestions on how they could be approached.



"Pandemic PhD Goal #1: Reset Expectations. The idea that you will be able to simply continue with your PhD as if everything was normal is total bullshit. In most cases, people are trying to adapt to a new way of living." - [How to Survive a PhD During a Pandemic](#).

"Your initial routine may end up not working well for you. Be flexible, and be kind with yourself and others as everyone figures out how to adjust." - [Some Advice for PhD Students and Their Mentors in the Time of Coronavirus](#).

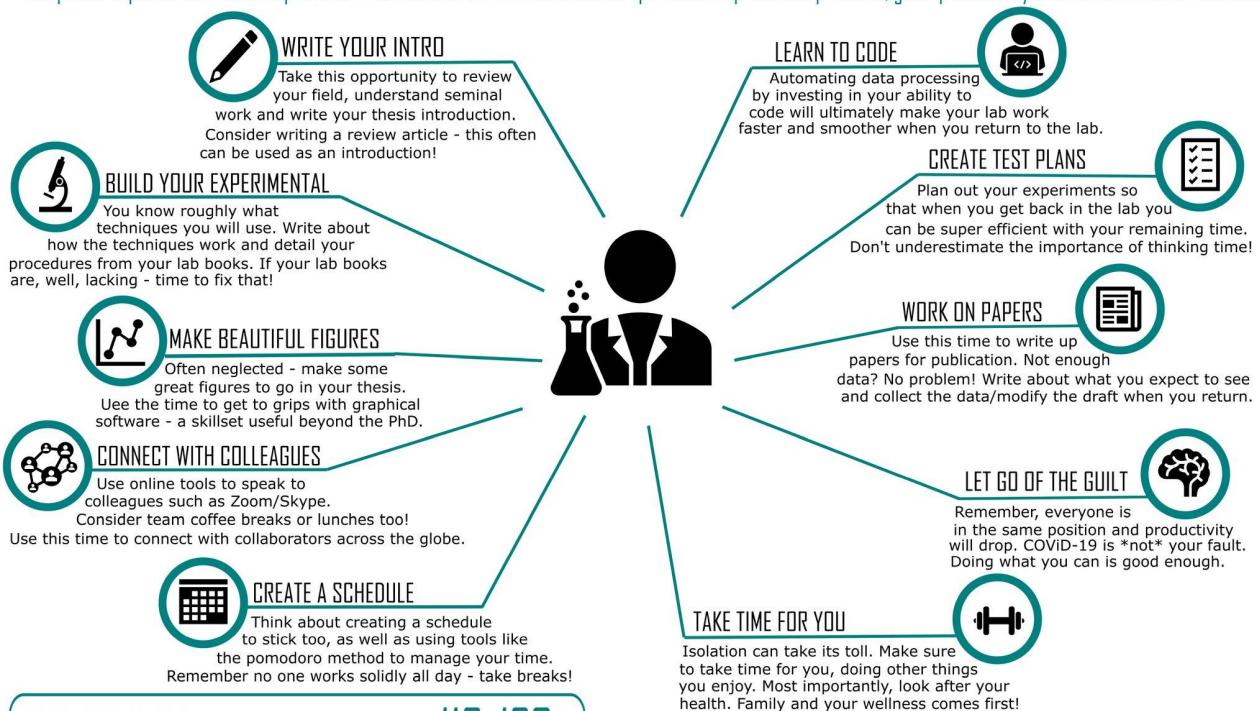


A Scientist Without a Lab? A Fieldworker Without a Field?

A Scientist Without a Lab?

SCIENTIST WITHOUT A LAB? A PhD RESEARCHER GUIDE TO COVID-19

In these unprecedented times, many of us are finding ourselves without the ability to perform lab work and are having to self-isolate. This poster explores some of the options for PhD researchers in these uncertain period to help alleviate pressure, guide productivity and maintain mental wellness.



STRUGGLING WITH ISOLATION?
NEED SOMEONE TO TALK TO? CALL SAMARITANS NOW ON 116-123

Part of the #mentalhealth series by Dr Zoe Ayres (@zjayres). Free to distribute.

Doing Fieldwork in a Pandemic?

The resource [Doing Fieldwork in a Pandemic](#) may be a useful place to start if you're in a position of having to rethink your PhD. It outlines an array of methods useful for conducting social research in the current situation. It also signposts to research that has used those methods as well as to social support groups on Facebook for researchers interested in alternative ways of doing social research.

Working from Home: Pandemic Productivity



If your productivity during the pandemic looks very different to your productivity pre-pandemic - that is okay!

For many, working from home can be a challenge in and of itself without the added personal, social, psychological and financial stressors that one may be experiencing as a result of Covid-19.

There have been a number of articles written about the pressure to be productive during this time that are worth a read if you are feeling guilty about 'not being productive enough', not 'making the most of lockdown' or feeling like a 'failure' compared to your peers when it comes to working successfully during this time.



'I still feel twinges of guilt for falling behind on deadlines and promises to pick up a hobby. "Why aren't I working more quickly, doing more?" [...] There is a tendency [...] to be self-critical, as opposed to being self-compassionate' - from [Monica Torres, Huffington Post](#).

'Ignore the people who are posting that they are writing papers and the people who are complaining that they cannot write papers. They are on their own journey. Cut out the noise.' - [Aisha S. Ahmed, The Chronicle of Higher Education](#).

'Some people may feel like failures because they are not sufficiently "seizing the moment" within this pandemic. Because they are struggling to cope. [...] There's nothing wrong with being productive or creative. It can be a helpful, constructive way to cope. But we must also allow ourselves space to not be "amazing."' - from [Dr. Susan Biali Haas, Psychology Today](#).



Working from Home & Wellbeing

However, if you are looking for resources to support yourself in working from home during this time, then the following resources could be of use.



Keele
UNIVERSITY



Keele University
[Tips for PGR Students Working from Home](#)

Charlie Waller Memorial Trust
[Working From Home: Your Wellbeing Action Plan](#)



MHFA England

MHFA England:
[Supporting Your Mental Health While Working From Home](#)

Student Minds:
[Adjusting to Working from Home During Isolation](#)

**student
minds**

Remember, treat yourself with compassion during this process and use these resources to help you adapt to working from home as opposed to using them with the sole goal of trying to match your pre-pandemic levels of productivity. It is okay to put the wellbeing of yourself and your family first.

Working from Home: Further Tips and Tricks



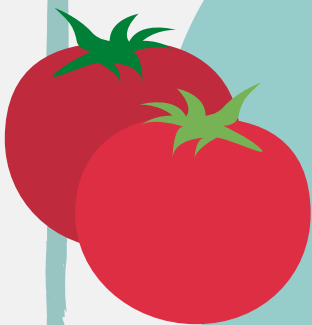
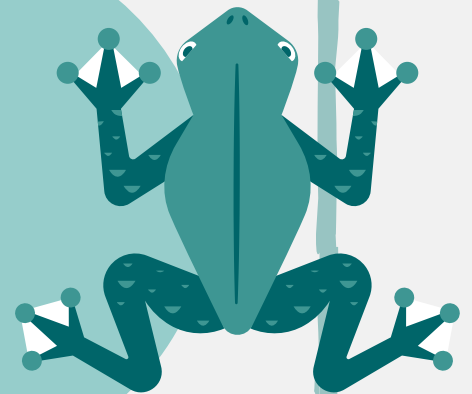
Accept help!

If you find yourself struggling and don't know where to begin, reach out and ask for advice from your supervisor or your peers. Talking things over can be a great way of organising your thoughts, and just because this is an independent project does not mean you have to be alone on the journey.

Trouble procrastinating? Eat the Frog!

"If it's your job to eat a frog, it's best to do it first thing in the morning. And if it's your job to eat two frogs, it's best to eat the biggest one first." - Mark Twain

Eating the Frog can be a great way for some people to get started with work. However, it is important to recognise the time we're living in and the fact that this won't work for everyone.

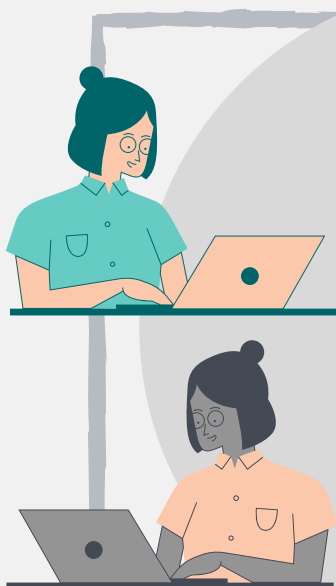


Take one step at a time

If eating the frog doesn't work for you, My tomatoes might be a better option. This technique allows you to set a bite-size target of doing 25 mins of work at a time - this may be enough to get you started and may help work come a little easier. If it doesn't, be kind to yourself and take a break to go do something enjoyable and come back to it.

An added bonus of this is that it provides you with a means of recording your achievements and allows you to look back on all you have done.

Working from Home: Further Tips and Tricks



Set up virtual study sessions with other PhD students

Sometimes it is easier to work when others are also working. You could set up study sessions with fellow PGR students.

Keep the session relatively short, an hour is good. Begin the session by discussing what it is you will be working on and what you want to achieve, then mute your mic and get started.

Once the allotted time is up, chat about what went well and problem solve what didn't. Finish up by deciding when you want to study together again.

Feel like you're not doing enough? Be kind to yourself - take note of and celebrate your achievements, no matter how 'small'.

If you have an inner critic berating you for not being productive, or comparing you to your peers, it is good practice to take note of what you have done well. My Tomatoes, mentioned on the previous page, can be a great way of doing this. Additionally, [these self-compassion exercises](#) are a good place to start to help you develop a kinder way of talking to yourself. It is hard to feel motivated or encouraged to do anything when all you hear from yourself is how terrible you are at everything!

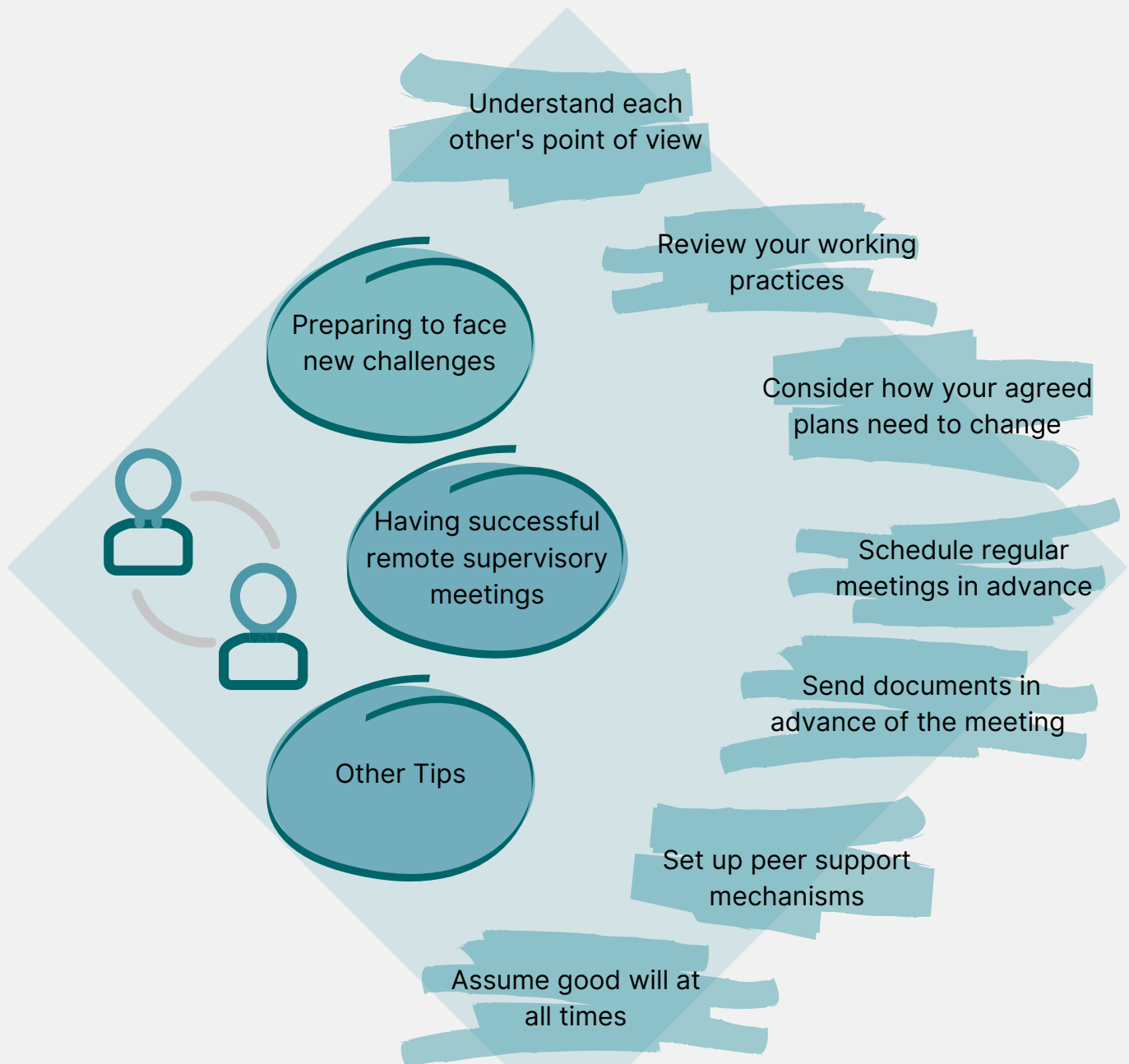


Feeling you're not writing enough or are dealing with anxiety or negative beliefs?

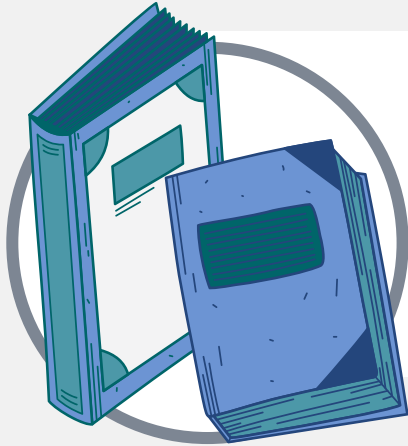
The [first](#) of these two podcasts provide a general discussion of coping with anxiety during the pandemic the [second](#) podcast focuses specifically on PhD students.

Supervision

During your time as a postgraduate researcher, the supervisory relationship might well be one of the most impactful working relationships you will experience. Navigating this relationship virtually may present its own challenges and the following resources will provide some guidance on how to adapt to working with your supervisor in what could be a very different context. The following image summarises some tips taken from the University of Southampton's [Tips for Continuing a Supervisory Relationship at a Distance](#).



The Viva



For those of you who are now facing the prospect of defending your thesis remotely, this section provides links to resources that might help support you.

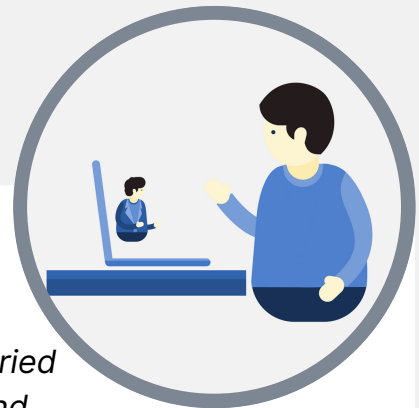
Keele University has issued guidance regarding online PhD examinations which can be found [here](#) and Keele's **Viva Survivor** online workshop can be found on [Keele People](#).

When planning for questions you might get asked during your viva this [PhD Viva Guide](#) and [Practice Viva Questions](#) guide are a good place to start.



Practical tips on how to successfully defend your thesis remotely can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

Student Experiences of remote vivas can be found [here](#) and [here](#).



"I was definitely a little apprehensive [...] I was worried that all the effort I had put into making my slides and presentation might be lost in the ether of streaming it." - [Alex Kekauoha, Stanford](#)

"Hope that everything works, but expect something to go wrong. Even with the best-laid plans, your Internet connection might drop out, or a committee member might get disconnected." - [Alyssa Frederick, Nature](#)

"This wasn't what I had imagine during all my years as a PhD student [...] But, in times of crisis, we have to act fast and creatively." - [Unu-Merit](#)



Parenting During the Pandemic and Financial and Career Concerns

Parenting during the Pandemic

If lockdown has left you juggling parenting, teaching, working, and studying in a home that is now serving as, among other things, an office and a classroom, the following resources from the [APA](#) and the [NSPCC](#) may be of use. The NSPCC site also provides links resources for home learning and websites and organisations to support families and children living with autism, anxiety, or deafness.

In addition to this, [BBC Bitesize Daily Lessons](#) has daily lessons for kids aged 5 - 15 and [Twinkl](#) contains an array of teaching and learning resources for kids up to age 11.

If you are facing financial hardship as a result of the pandemic support can be found on Keele's [Advice for PGR Students](#) and [PGR Support](#) pages which outline a number of support options for those who are [self-funded](#) or [who are struggling financially](#), and provides guidance for [Doctoral Loan](#) and [UKRI funded students and students with stipends](#).

[Keele's Doctoral Academy](#), and [Student Services](#) are also on hand to provide support and guidance during this time.

Financial Concerns?

Career Concerns?

If you have career concerns during this time, [Keele's Career and Employability Service](#) remains open to provide you with support.

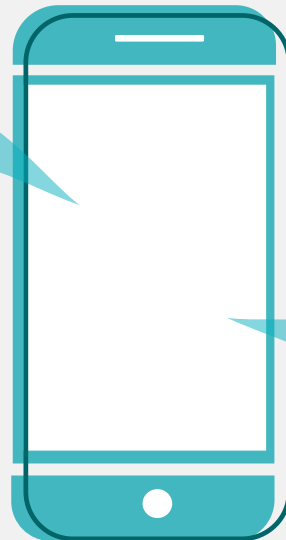
In addition to this, the following [blog post](#) contains a collection of career development and support resources which may be of use. Not everything will be applicable, so take what you need.

Mental Health and Wellbeing: Self Help

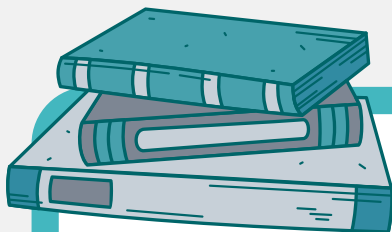
Self-Help Apps

Both [Keele](#) and the [NHS](#) websites have links to apps to help you manage your mental health and wellbeing.

Examples include apps that focus on mindfulness, meditation and to help with relaxing and sleeping.



There are also apps based on the principles of cognitive behavioural therapy or dialectical behaviour therapy designed to help people manage feelings of such as anxiety, depression, panic attacks or to help people to manage the urge to self-harm.



Self-Help Resources and Guides

The NHS

The [NHS Website](#) also contains a series of detailed self-help leaflets covering a wealth of different topics including alcohol, bereavement, domestic abuse, eating disorders, obsessions and compulsions as well as a guide for [those supporting a partner with depression and low mood](#).

Togetherall

[Togetherall](#) is a freely accessible anonymous service available 24/7 that can provide online peer and professional support, with trained counsellors. It provides a space to learn how to improve and self-manage your mental health and wellbeing.

CBT

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy resources and provide some helpful evidenced-based therapeutic tips on how to navigate challenges which might affect your wellbeing while working from home, including '[How to Cope with Uncertainty](#)' and '[Coping in the time of Coronavirus](#)'. Further worksheets, resources and techniques can be found [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

Mental Health and Wellbeing: Where to go for Support

Support from Keele

Keele University's Counselling and Mental Health Support Team are continuing to provide support during this time, and you can get in touch with them by email and by phone.

If you need to talk to someone when the Counselling and Mental Health Support Service is closed, you can find the contact details on Keele University's out of hours support page.



Other external support services

Staffordshire Mental Health Helpline

- Call on: 0808 800 2234 (Free)
- Text: 07860 022821 (FREE)
- Email: Staffordshire.helpline@brighter-futures.org.uk
- Instant Messaging service (online chat) can be found here, you just need to click on the Instant Messaging Service button

HopelineUK: run by Papyrus this service provides support for those 35 and under who are at risk of suicide. Get in touch by phone, text or email and find out more here.

- Call: 0800 068 41 41
- Text: 07860 039967
- Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org

Changes: provides 1-2-1 telephone/video support, on-line peer-support groups and wellbeing training, click here for more information.

- Call: 07983 437747
- Email: wellbeing.here4u@changes.org.uk

SANEline: is a service to provide emotional support. You can get in touch by phone or email and the service also provides textcare as well as peer-support through their online forums. Find more information here.

Shout: This is the UK's first free 24/7 text service for anyone in crisis anytime, anywhere. Click here for more information.

- To get support, text SHOUT to 85258

Mental Health and Wellbeing: The 5 Ways to Wellbeing

The 5 Ways to Wellbeing: this was researched and developed by the [New Economics Foundation](#) who have provided a [guide](#) on how to adapt the 5 principles during the lockdown.

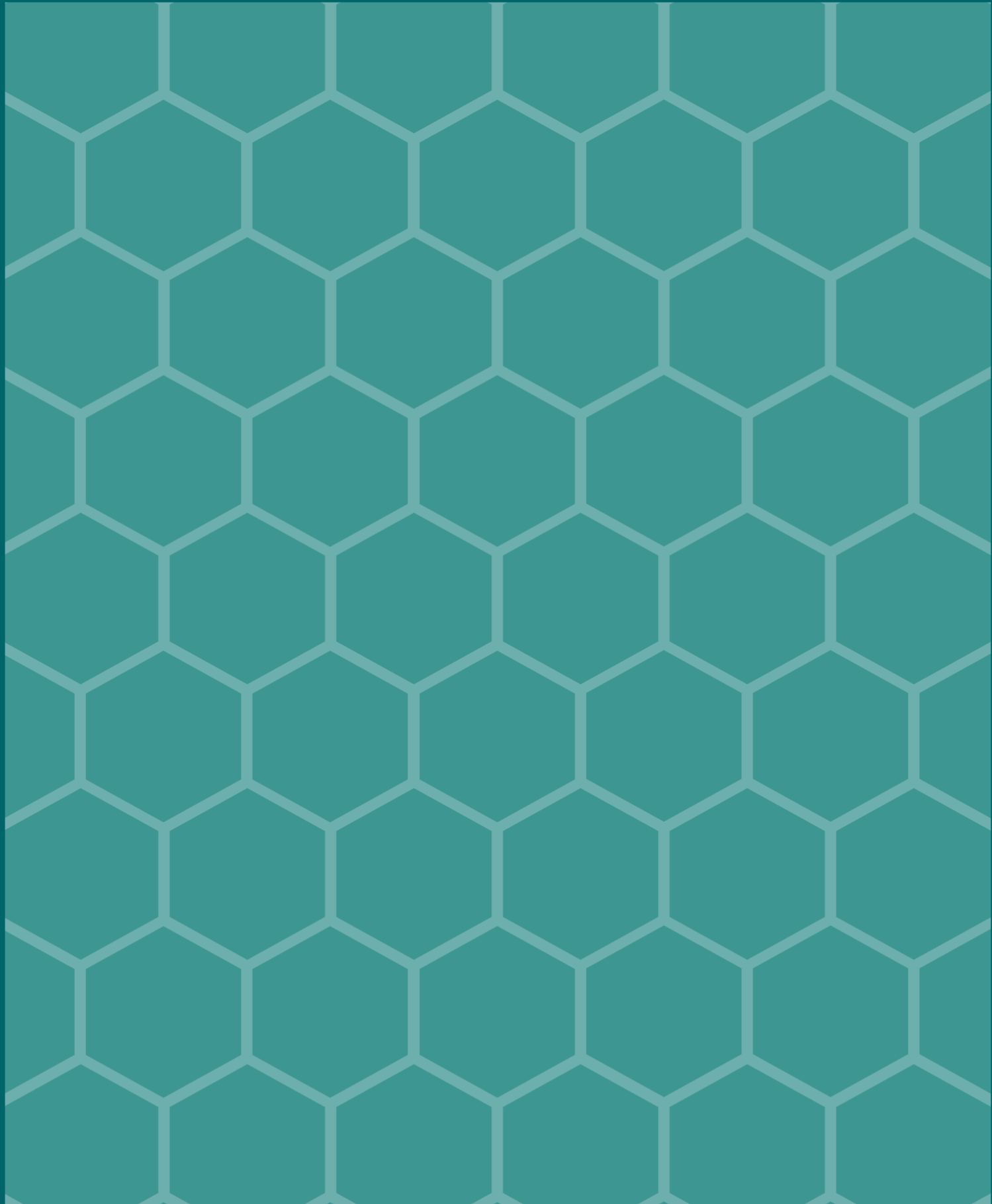


You can also find further ideas:

- If you want to **connect**, the [KPA](#) are continuing to host their weekly coffee mornings as well as watch parties and afternoon tea events and more.
- In the [50 Things To Do Whilst Social Distancing](#) document available on the Keele Website.
- Keele's [health and wellbeing pages](#) also provide ideas on how to get active, take a mindful walk and take notice.
- The University of Manchester have created a resource looking at the [ways to wellbeing when working from home](#).

Though it isn't mentioned in the 5 ways, **sleep** is an incredibly important part of wellbeing. If you are struggling with sleep during this time, the sleep foundation has created a [resource](#) that may be of use.





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