

Chapter 12; Self-Care

The Public Inquiry into the Manchester Arena Attack has been ongoing since September 2020. In September 2021 the Inquest chapter of the Inquiry will take place. This is the time when the specific circumstances surrounding the death of each of the 22 people will be examined.

During the Inquiry there have been times when the content has been graphic and potentially distressing and it is likely that chapter 12 will include such information. If you are intending to watch the Public Inquiry during chapter 12 this guide is intended to help you think about the steps you could take during and after in order to manage the emotional impact that this could have.

Preparation and pacing

If you are making plans to watch Chapter 12 online, please give some thought as to the circumstances around this; where you will be, who you will be with, what you will do afterwards.

The Inquiry is streamed to Youtube so this gives you some control over when and where you watch it, how much you watch and when to take breaks. Remember you do not have to watch all of the Inquiry; be kind to yourself and have realistic expectations of the impact it might have on you and your family.

Please think about how to take care of yourself before, during and after watching any of the Inquiry. Some things to think about;

- Reduce demands on yourself on the days you are watching
- Take regular breaks
- Take time to stop and reflect on how you are feeling, and think about what you might need – do you need to stop watching for today?
- Where possible, do not watch the Inquiry in your bedroom
- Give yourself time to step away and wind down a few hours before bed
- Let someone you trust know what you are doing so they can check in with you
- Keep hydrated and eat well
- Think about how you will both physically and emotionally move away from the Inquiry at the end of the day e.g;
 - shutting your laptop/TV away
 - moving to a different room
 - cooking
 - reconnecting with important people
 - a shower or bath
 - some exercise or other activity

Please be aware that the emotional impact of watching any of Chapter 12 may last for several hours or some days. It is important to recognise this and take good care of yourself (see page 3 for further ideas). A lot of what you feel and experience will naturally settle again with time.



Below are some ideas about how you can look after yourself while you are watching the Inquiry but also in the hours and days afterwards.

Handling distress

Busy Hands: sometimes, when we are watching or listening to something distressing it can help if our hands are occupied. Having active or busy hands takes up some of our brain's capacity so it cannot be fully immersed in what is being watched or listened to; this can create some emotional distance from the material and may mean it doesn't 'stick' with us for as long. There are a number of ways you can occupy your hands but it is important to find what works for you. Some examples might include;

- handling a smooth pebble
- using hand cream
- playing with a piece of Blu-Tack or putty
- doodling on a piece of paper with a pencil
- squeezing a stress ball or passing it from hand to hand repeatedly
- using worry beads or rosary beads
- knitting or crocheting

Have a practice using any of the above strategies, or maybe come up with some of your own. It might be helpful to have different small objects with you on the day to help you regulate how you are feeling.

Coming back to 'now'

Listening and watching the Inquiry may result in you unexpectedly remembering or imagining the night of the attack in a very real way. Staying grounded and in the present moment can help you keep some distance from these memories so you do not get completely drawn into feeling like you are there or it is happening now.

Grounding techniques, as described below, can help you connect with your body and the environment and can reduce the impact of strong emotions, like anxiety or fear. If you are starting to feel like you are back at the Arena these techniques can help remind you that you are not, which will help you feel less frightened.

Below are some ideas of how to use your senses to ground yourself but it is important that you find the right ones for you.

Sight; you may wish to have to hand a calming image, such as a picture of a favourite place you know or have been to. You can periodically look at it to help keep you settled. This may be an actual photograph or an image you have saved onto your mobile phone. Alternatively, you may wish to have a small object with you that you associate with something settling or calming that you can look at from time to time.

Smell; using a perfume or scent that brings comfort can be a quick way to change how you feel and bring you back to 'now'. This could be a few drops of an essential oil, such as lavender, on a handkerchief, or putting on your favourite perfume/aftershave or wearing clothes that smell of your favourite fabric conditioner. It may be that smelling a particular food or drink helps.

Touch; as described previously, using your hands can help regulate your emotions by



creating some distance between you and the memories that might be triggered. The sense of touch can also be used to soothe you. Holding a soft piece of fabric or a smooth pebble in the palm of the hand can be comforting and also connects you to being present in the room.

Sound; when there are breaks you may wish for silence, while others may find it helpful to listen to a favourite song, or a podcast to take your mind off things for a short while. Sometimes repetitive sounds can bring comfort, for example, waves rolling in or rain on a window. You might find some clips on Youtube that you can listen to in breaks.

Taste; as well as the importance of eating and drinking for the benefit of staying hydrated and energised, you can also use the sense of taste to help centre yourself in the here and now. This can be achieved by mindfully eating and savouring a tasty snack or it could be as simple as sucking on a mint or chewing gum. Whilst chewing we have saliva in our mouths, which indicates to our brain that we are comfortable and safe enough to digest food. This makes it difficult to remain too stressed for too long as the brain, sensing saliva, assumes we are safe so tells the body to relax.

If you feel as if you're 'zoning out' or you are not staying in the present, citrus or tangy tastes can help you stay in the 'here and now'.

Other activities that might help settle and ground you in the here and now include;

- Changing your posture – if you are sitting, stand up, if you are standing still then walk about
- Stepping outside or looking out of the window; notice what you can see & hear?
- Playing a short game on your phone
- Doing an activity with your full attention, notice what you are doing, what you can feel, see, smell, taste, hear
- If you have a pet spend some time interacting with it
- Take 3 slow breaths, breathing out for longer than you breath in
- Send a message to someone that is important to you

The above are just a few examples and you may already have helpful strategies you know will help to ground you and help you feel safe in the here and now. The important thing is try out different strategies and see what helps.

At the end of the day

It would be entirely expected that you will feel physically and emotionally drained after listening to any part of Chapter 12. You may also feel mentally over stimulated. This could result in you feeling exhausted yet still have a racing mind.

It is important to plan ahead as to how you will move away from the Inquiry at the end of the day, both emotionally and mentally. Be kind to yourself and expect the unexpected; what you think you need at the beginning of the day may feel different by the end. You may feel tired but agitated, so can't rest. It might help to make a list of things that you could try depending on how you feel;

- a walk or stretch
- reconnecting with important people
- a shower or bath
- some exercise or other activity



- a sleep
- cooking

It's important to figure out if you need to relax and calm yourself or if you need to use up excess energy and adrenaline with something more vigorous, like a workout or run.

If you find your mind is overactive you could listen to music, follow a mindful meditation exercise (there are lots to be found on the internet), or completely switch mental tasks by doing something like a crossword, sketching a picture, completing a jigsaw, or playing an absorbing game on your phone or console.

It might be important to spend some time reflecting on what you have just heard or seen. But do try to limit the amount of time you spend doing this, and try to close this reflection down long before bed, as this could impact on your sleep.

Recharge

If you are intending to watch a lot of Chapter 12, it is really important you give yourself a break to recharge. That might mean planning ahead to build in some rest and recuperation but also noticing how much of your time is spent thinking and talking about the Inquiry. While staying informed can feel important, it is also important to give yourself permission to step away from the Inquiry, this might include;

- taking a couple of days break from watching the Inquiry
- choosing to read about the Inquiry rather than watching it
- reducing how much news/social media you consume in one day
- limiting your time on social media
- taking a complete break from the news/social media for a few days

You can always return to watch the recordings on YouTube in later days, if you feel that's the right thing to do.

Monitor the use of unhelpful strategies

Sometimes it easy to engage in strategies that seem to help in the short term but can become more of a problem in the long term. Obvious ones might be increasing your use of alcohol, drugs, over-the-counter or prescribed medications. Other strategies might include avoidance and withdrawal where you stop communicating and spending time with others. Or maybe you notice you have started distracting yourself in unhelpful ways such as overworking, gambling, or engaging in other risk taking behaviours. If you think this is likely to happen please monitor it and seek support.

When to seek professional help

- If you are experiencing high levels of distress.
- If you haven't been able to focus at work, home, or are unable to perform daily activities.
- If you have significantly increased your use of alcohol and/or substances.
- If those around you are very worried about you.
- If you are worried about your ability to keep yourself safe.



Contact the Hub

The Hub is available to support anyone who has been impacted by the Manchester Arena Attack. If you would like to speak to somebody about your or your families' wellbeing over the telephone or by email please contact the NHS Greater Manchester Resilience Hub. We can also speak directly to your family members. You or they can contact staff at the hub using the details below.

Telephone **03330 095 071** (Mon-Thurs 9am-5pm with a late opening on a Wednesday til 7pm Fri 9am-3pm) Email GM.help@nhs.net

Website: www.penninecare.nhs.uk/your-services/manchester-resilience-hub.

