

CIS'ters IS NOT a therapy group: it is an organisation run by survivors, for survivors:
“we might be victim/survivors, but this is not all that we are, or can be”

2020 = Keep Safe

Where possible, distribution of future newsletter will be via email and also uploaded to our website

CIS'ters is still operational, though temporarily we have ceased physical group meetings due to covid-19. We are maintaining contact with existing members and also responding to new survivors who are reaching out to us.

LET US KNOW HOW YOU ARE ?

Thanks to Jo, one of our office volunteers, who spotted this short video:



Encourage you to watch this short video as it really helps explain the need to pace ourselves and create safe spaces around different life functions

To view video >> <https://youtu.be/snAhsXyO3Ck>

CIS'ters CONTACT DETAILS:

HELPLINE 023 80 338080 (which is an answerphone). Please leave clear contact details. Messages are monitored regularly during normal office hours and we will seek to call back as quickly as we can, and will take care when returning calls. Please note that our number is shown as 'withheld' when we are returning calls. **Alternatively, you might prefer to Email:** helpme@cisters.org.uk

www.cisters.org.uk Twitter: [CISters_Standup](https://twitter.com/CISters_Standup)

Note: we are in the process of migrating charity registration from 1123125 to 1184857

Support and Suggestions During the Covid 19 Crisis

(created from various other documents circulating at the moment)

As survivors of sexual abuse by a close family member our sense of safety in the world was threatened at a very early age. It is important to remember that anxiety about the coronavirus may consciously or unconsciously remind us of that threat to our safety and bring back feelings such as fear, helplessness or isolation that can make us particularly vulnerable at this time.

There are many ways to help keep yourself safe, a few of which are listed below. We would encourage you to try them and to add some creative ideas of your own which we would love to hear about.

Reducing the isolation

Contact those you would normally see by using Zoom, Skype or WhatsApp video call, or the good old phone call - make it as much of a social occasion as you can with biscuits, a hot drink, soft cushions and other creature comforts around you.

Express how you feel

It can be really useful to take a few minutes in the day to think about how you feel. Expressing feelings, even a little, can be much more helpful than pushing them down or ignoring them. As survivors, most of us recognise the cost of denial and of feelings that we were not able to express at the time which can later overwhelm us. Writing in a journal or a notebook can help us to identify what we are feeling and what might be helpful for us. Focus on the inner strength that has brought you through so much and use that to write to yourself in a way that will encourage you and help your inner child to feel safe

Breathe

The way we breathe can make us more anxious or calm us down. Short outward breaths stimulate our sympathetic nervous system which produces activation in the muscles and glands ready for fight or flight. Longer outward breaths stimulate our parasympathetic nervous system which deactivates muscles and glands and restores a state of calm and relaxation to the body.

Experiment with making your 'out' breaths longer than your 'in' breaths.

Ground yourself

Mindfulness exercises take our attention from external events to what is happening internally and from what has happened or might happen to the now. This helps us to detach from racing thoughts and emotional activation by focusing on the minute details of present moment experience.

An example exercise could be:

- Sitting down, press your feet into the floor and notice how it feels to have the ground support you.
- Press them hard into the ground and feel it resist your pressure.
- Slowly move your focus along your heels and up into your calves and thighs.
- Take time to feel the support of the chair underneath your thighs and bottom.
- Leaning back against the chair, notice how it holds you straight, allowing you to open your shoulders and lift your head.
- Imagine being lifted by a hook from the top of your head while feeling the pull of gravity on the tail of your spine.

Don't listen to everything and everyone

Give yourself permission to avoid endless news coverage and try to listen only to people who seem trustworthy and calm, such as designated experts. Anxiety can be contagious - avoid people on social media, television or even those you know who are likely to spread rumours and catastrophize.

- breathe in slowly through your nose to the count of four
- hold your breath while you count to seven
- let your breath out through your mouth slowly as you count to eight.

(more on next page)

Be Creative – try new things

This could be a good time to let your inner child play. Not being a candidate for MasterChef doesn't mean you can't make some cakes or biscuits, maybe using cut out shapes and decorating them! Painting, colouring, jigsaws, even finding ways to reorganise your music or magazines can help you to stay in the present moment while being productive and positive.

Keep your body moving

There are some great online keep fit sessions, but turning music on and dancing wildly or slowly is also great and liberating. Make up your own mindfulness exercises that don't involve sitting down but experiment with, for example, how it feels to tiptoe round the room or to stomp - put words or music to your movements!

Remember.....

.....although it doesn't feel as if it will ever end, remind yourself that this is a temporary situation so focus on things you might want to do when the restrictions have been lifted. If you are a member of CIS'ters, you might like to photograph some of the unique ways you create to keep yourself safe and well during this time. We look forward to seeing some of those in future newsletters.

Louise (615) has used the time to reconnect with art. Here is an example.

An illustration of some tree bark found before the lockdown.



Feeling very overwhelmed ?

The current situation is creating increased levels of anxiety within the general population – and amongst survivors that is further heightened as it creates links to our earlier life experiences of trauma. Researchers and scientists are still learning about the relationship between trauma and triggers and emotional well-being. Thank you to Julie (856) for sending us this link to an article which explains more about why we have an exacerbation of trauma symptoms and pre-existing health conditions.

<https://blogs.psychcentral.com/recovering-narcissist/2020/03/3-ways-the-coronavirus-pandemic-is-affecting-trauma-survivors-and-victims-of-narcissists-and-how-you-can-cope/?fbclid=IwAR17ZAbm9kfWROqGRFUjV4sHXZL3F4h9SRNImDTsXyjHOxLi907X5RXXbNg>

Need another distraction – try something different ?



Hi CIS'ters, I have just made up a couple of Haiku's for you to use if you want. They are Japanese verses, 5 syllables, 7 syllables, and 5 syllables. From Nicola (1125)

People breathe on me
Who is going to catch germs?
Two weeks to find out

Locked down but don't care
Makes no difference to me
With ptsd

If you want to have a go, this is what a google search says about haiku:

A three-line, beautifully descriptive, form of poetry, intended to be read in one breath. If read in Japanese, most traditional haiku would have five syllables, or sounds, in the first line, seven in the second, and five in the last. The Academy of American Poets asserts, "As the form evolved, many of these rules - including the 5-7-5 practice - have routinely been broken. However, the philosophy of haiku has been preserved: the focus on a brief moment in time; a use of provocative, colorful images; an ability to be read in one breath; and a sense of sudden enlightenment and illumination."

While some forms of poetry have free rein with regard to their subject or number of lines and syllables, the haiku was established in Japan as far back as the 9th century with a specific structure, style, and philosophy. Many poets still write in the original 5-7-5 syllable pattern and follow the traditional rules for writing haiku.

PERHAPS GETTY CAN HELP ?

The Getty Museum (USA) has challenged the public and it is creating some amazing interpretations of art. Below is the challenge they sent out in March

Getty 
@GettyMuseum

We challenge you to recreate a work of art with objects (and people) in your home.

- 1 Choose your favorite artwork
- 2 Find three things lying around your house
- 3 Recreate the artwork with those items

And share with us.

This image is just one of the 1000s of responses The Getty Museum have received to their challenge. The similarity to the original is amazing !



More information can be found at:

<http://blogs.getty.edu/iris/getty-artworks-recreated-with-household-items-by-creative-geniuses-the-world-over/>

Another challenge has been to recreate famous paintings and this is one that recently inspired Louise (615) to pick up her paintbrush again. The original (below) is called 'The Gleaners' painted by Jean-Francoise Millet.



See next page for Louise picture !

Louise interpretation (below) has the individuals wearing Personal Protection Equipment and social distancing !



Our members come in all shapes and sizes and ages and backgrounds.

We want to give our thanks to our many members who are undertaking essential work within areas such as NHS, schools, care homes, banks, supermarkets, corner stores, royal mail/post offices, charities etc. and not forgetting those who might be shielding and/or remaining at home to keep us all safe

Re our annual weekend workshop

The Bad News ? Due to the level of uncertainty at the moment plus the level of financial risk that accompanies this event our Trustees have made the difficult decision to postpone the Annual Weekend Workshop that was due to be held in October 2020. Tough decision and we know many of you will be disappointed.

But here is the Good News !

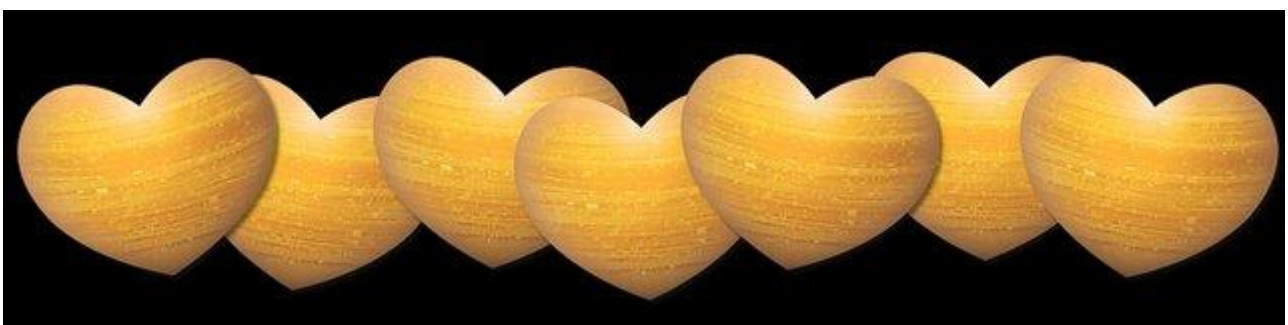
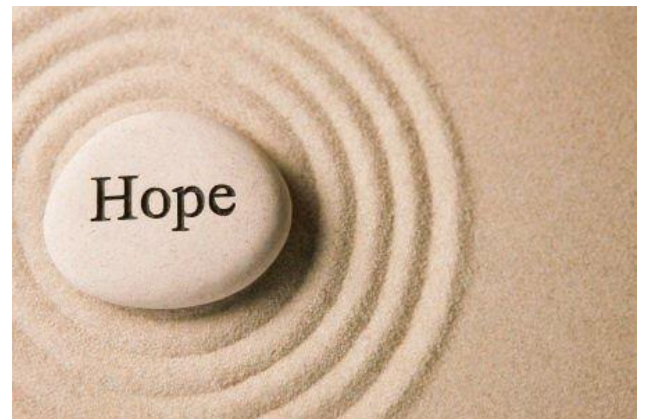
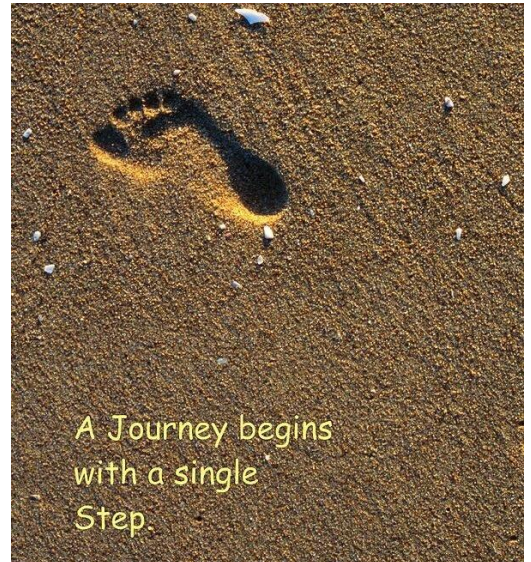
The next Annual Weekend will now be 29-30 May 2021 (*this event always used to be held during May until a few years ago so it is good to get back to a time period where evenings will be lighter and hopefully weather will be warmer.* The extra time between now and May 2021 gives members who want to come as delegates more time to apply.

Finally, a member recently mentioned during a phone call that they had previously not been able to sign up for 2020 event due to other competing issues, but that the change of date to May 2021 means they probably can. **Contact us if you want more information or would like to book for the May 2021 event.**

Avril (43) who found this on the net and sent in to help us all manage yet another day

If the mountain seems too big today

*If the mountain seems too big today
Then climb a hill instead
If the morning brings you sadness
It's ok to stay in bed
If the day ahead weighs heavy
And your plans feel like a curse
There's no shame in rearranging
Don't make yourself feel worse
If a shower stings like needles
And a bath feels like you'll drown
If you haven't washed your hair for days
Don't throw away your crown
A day is not a lifetime
A rest is not defeat
Don't think of it as failure
Just a quiet, kind retreat
It's ok to take a moment
From an anxious, fractured mind
The world will not stop turning
While you get realigned
The mountain will still be there
When you want to try again
You can climb it in your own time
Just love yourself til then*



Knit (and a Bit of Crochet if You Like) Your Own Coronavirus – sent in by Sally (863)



I believe that it is hard to fear something too much if you can knit it! I hope it can also give some sense of mastery and control over something that feels scary and beyond our control. The finished product may also prove useful in explaining coronavirus to children in a non-threatening way and as a soft play item that does not harm the home too much.

I am not good at writing patterns, so I hope this makes sense. It is not critical what weight, type or colours of yarns you use, just what you have to hand. If you don't have a stock of yarn, see if you have any knitwear you don't use any more as you can unravel it! There is NO 'perfect' result, just what you make, so have fun and play with it.

There are two parts to the finished item which I will call, using technical terms, the 'ball' and the 'sticky out bits'.

You will need:

- Enough of two different coloured yarns, one thicker than the other. The thinner yarn needs to be about half as thick as the other. If you like, use a third colour of thin yarn to put the tops on the sticky out bits.
- Needles of the right thickness for your yarns. If in doubt, use thinner rather than thicker needles so the knit is tight. If doing the crochet bit, a crochet hook to fit your thin yarn.
- Stuffing. If you don't have any, the filling from old pillows or cushions would do, as will cut up tights.

Key:

For the knitting: **ss** - stocking stitch **k** - knit **p** - pearl **Sts** - stitches

inc: - knit into the front then the back of the stitch, making an extra stitch

Pattern on next page >>

To make the ball:

Using the thicker yarn, cast on 50 stitches, leaving about 4 inches of yarn at the beginning. Ss enough rows so the length is half the width – I find the best way to measure this is to knit 25 sts and fold the corner up so it meets this point, but you probably have your own method. Cut the yarn leaving about 6 inches of yarn and thread this through the sts, remove the needle and gather the sts tightly together. Fold right sides together across the long way and use this yarn to stitch up the row ends together. Turn out. Run the beginning length of yarn around the cast on edge. Stuff well then pull the yarn to close the end. Finish off.

To make the sticky out bits:

These come in two parts – the main body and the top bits. I'm not sure how many sticky out bits you will need – it depends on the relationship of your two yarns, so I suggest that you make a few, sew them on and keep doing this so you have enough. I used 30.

It doesn't matter if you put the top bit on first before sewing the sticky out bit on, or afterwards – whatever works for you.

Sticky out bit body:

Using the thinner yarn and thinner needles, cast on 8 sts, leaving about 4" of yarn hanging. Ss 6 rows.

Next row: (Inc 1, k 1) x 4 (12 sts)

P 1 row

Repeat these two rows (18 sts)

Cast off, leaving about 4" of yarn. Fold right sides together and sew up along row edges, using this end of yarn, leaving the ends open. Turn out.

Sticky out bit top: This is best done by crochet, as it makes better circles. However, if crochet is not for you, they can be done by knitting.

Crochet: Make a loop, ch 3, ss to loop, making a circle. Dc 6 into the circle, ss to first dc, 1 ch. (2 dc into stitch, dc into next stitch) round twice. Ss into next stitch, cut off leaving 5" of yarn and pull through to end.

Knit: Cast on 3 sts. Inc x 3 (6 sts). P 1 row.

(inc 1, k1) x 3 (9 sts). Ss 3 rows.

(k2 tog, k1) x 3 (6 sts). P 1 row

(k2 tog) x 3 (3 sts)

P3 tog. (1 stitch)

Cut off yarn leaving about 5" and pull through to end.

Making up:

Using the yarn at the finish of your sticky out bit top, sew it into the wider end of the sticky out bit body.

Using the bit of yarn you left when casting on the sticky out bit body, sew the narrow end of the sticky out bit body onto the ball, in a circle. You will need to work out the best spacing for the sticky out bits, spacing them reasonably evenly.

Hi – from Gillian (00)

I know that many of you are sad at the moment, missing loved ones, feeling incredibly isolated.

Loss appears to be a central theme as we battle with not only Covid but also the triggers that arise which are inevitably linked to our individual childhood histories.

So, today, I will not tell you to have a good day. Which is meaningless to so many.

Instead, I will perhaps mention that we aim for a 'good enough' day.

Stay alive, feed yourself (beans on toast recommended by many)

Drink sufficient fluids to maintain hydration

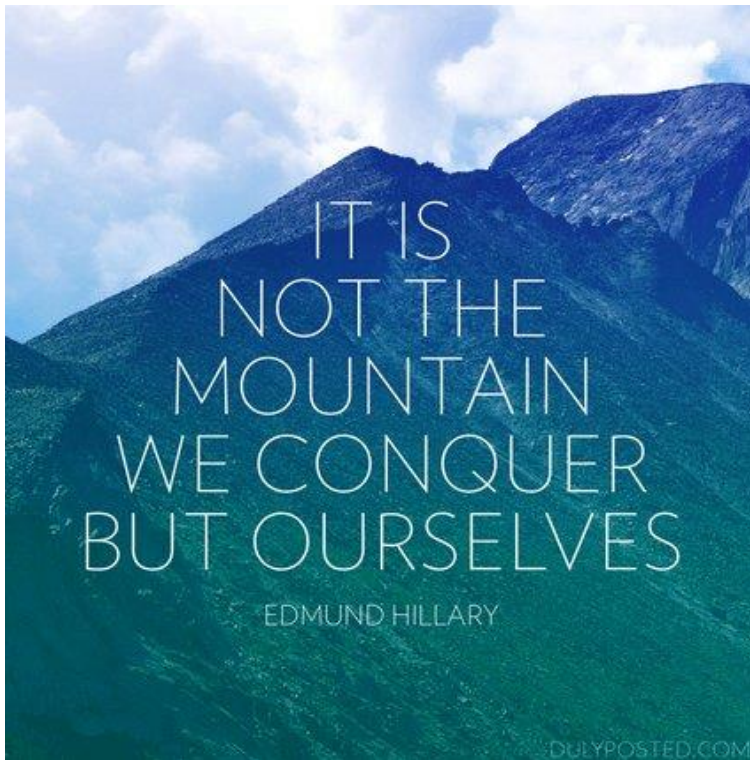
Wear comfortable clothes (I know I am spending a lot of time in my jammies)

Sleep as best you can - and a lesson I have learnt is to remember to comb my hair if I am using zoom to chat to friends or colleagues.

Above all keep yourself as safe as can be (emotionally as well as physically),

Try not to give up on yourself, on others, or on us.

It will get better, but it will take time - for us all.



A SELF PORTRAIT ?



I must admit that during the lockdown I have increased my use of an online app called 'Happy Color' on my tablet. *Colour by Numbers* as that is as far as my skills as an artist go. I completed the one above recently and think it very much looks like I have produced a self portrait (as anyone who knows me can see it is good likeness).

LET US KNOW HOW YOU ARE GETTING ON

If you have access to the internet – then please Email: helpme@cisters.org.uk

If not, then leave a clear message on our answermachine 02380 338080. We will take care when returning calls, asking if it is ok to speak at your end.

THERE ARE SO MANY WAYS THAT OUR MEMBERS ARE USING CRAFTS

These are some of the items produced by Avril (43)



Many members who otherwise have very busy lives have been reconnecting with the joy of cooking (assuming they have been able to fight the queue to purchase necessary ingredients).

This photo was sent in by another member of a long awaited ground rice pudding with stewed rhubarb. She said that although the picture didn't show it, the food was fab.



The impact of Covid thus far – Gillian (00)

I want to say that CIS'ters is still here. Yes, we have a reduced workforce – but are still able to respond to emails and phone calls from members. So – please, remember we are here. If things are not so good, let us know. We know that there will be members who have lost family members, friends, colleagues. But – we also know that many of our members are coping – that is important to hear too.

We are aware that many survivors of sexual abuse (experienced during childhood) and/or sexual trauma as adults are currently feeling that they are invisible again and/or forgotten. Some members have vented their anger at having to protect 'others' when no-one protected them as children or helped them as adults. It can definitely feel like that at the moment and it is a reality that the majority of child victims have been, and still are, invisible – particularly those who were victims (as we were) within a family environment. I know that I share many members anxiety about the number of children who are currently 'staying at home' and that within that number will be children who are now more accessible to abusers who are members of their immediate family. Feeling isolated now has an added dimension.

You might be one of those many survivors who are angry, who feel invisible, and who feel a growing depth of loss. It might be that nothing we can say will change that. But we do want to say that within CIS'ters we do care. That we have worked hard during the initial and current stages of the pandemic to safeguard our ability to reach out to survivors and respond to survivors. That although changes have necessarily been made (cease physical meetings/postpone the workshops) we have successfully managed to keep email and phone access open.

I, with others, have felt at times triggered by the restrictions we face. My sleep has been affected, I feel trapped at times, and thus far my most notable episode has been a massive emotional meltdown in a local supermarket (the staff were incredibly nice to me (including giving me a bunch of flowers to take home (unsold Mother's day stock ?)). With others I have felt each disappointment when something I was looking forward to was cancelled. *Unfortunately biscuits are being used to fill the emotional gap.*

HOWEVER I also know that within **CIS'ters** and amongst other friends and family, there are heroes. Individuals who continue to inspire me and maybe you too. Individuals who are working in the NHS frontline and support services, working within supermarkets, working for Royal Mail and the post office, helping keep some schools open for the vulnerable, delivery drivers – the list is endless *and includes the staff of a national company who responded so quickly to my plea for a new washing machine !*

I also know that there are other people who care deeply about the work that CIS'ters does.

Each year we apply to various organisations for funding (not always successfully), which is also supplemented by a number of members who also make personal donations. As the pandemic began to close in on us it became clear there would be an impact on funding. Organisations and also individuals face the loss of their personal income and for many others the loss of a business they have built and cherished. As a country we have a collective feeling of sadness. Within **CIS'ters** we have a corresponding worry for the community we serve that rely upon us and other organisations like us. Compared with what is happening around the world, and within the UK, a tiny charity like **CIS'ters** has felt dwarfed into insignificance. Felt invisible.

BUT – and again I can't begin to tell you how it felt – we have been **warmed** by the willingness of philanthropic organisations such as Esmée Fairbairn, Lloyds Bank Foundation and others who have reached out to us – and asked how we are managing and if they can help us – not always financially, but in other ways equally important. Just showing that they care has meant so much to us, to me, to our trustees, and hopefully to you as members. Another worry was that with the financial pressures on the police we would have an expected small grant reduced or worse still that it would be diverted to other priorities. A relief, therefore, when we heard recently from their grant manager that the expected sum would still be given to us. We are still applying for other grants (the latest being to the Government (Home Office) for a specific fund that has been allocated for 'national organisations supporting victims of csa'. We definitely meet that criteria but are also very aware that we are a small organisation competing with much larger organisations that have paid staff whose sole role is to apply for funding. *Wish us luck !*

Editorial Statement: We welcome letters from Survivors and from those who support them such as friends/allies/counsellors/social workers etc. While every effort will be made to keep contributions complete and unedited we reserve the right to make amendments when necessary, and will note it as 'edited'. Decisions about the inclusion & amendment of contributions are the responsibility of the Editorial Team, and are final. Contributions do not necessarily reflect the views & opinions of **CIS'ters**, members of the Trust Board, or the Editorial Team. Inclusion of any reference to an individual, book list, or organisation resource is not a recommendation.

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