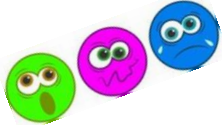


Managing your mood during the COVID – 19 Pandemic

Infectious disease outbreaks, like the current Coronavirus (Covid -19), can be scary and can affect our mood and our mental health. It is normal to feel worried, frightened, stressed, angry and sad when dealing with a situation like this. There is a lot of uncertainty and things that are out of our control. This is incredibly unsettling and distressing for us all. There is a lot of information out there about different ways to try and stay well during this time, physically and mentally. That can also be overwhelming. Information varies in quality and it is easy to get confused and overloaded. Shell (SWMS clinical psychologist) has made a summary of the key information. Shell says:

It's OK to feel what you are feeling – what ever that is



There is no right or wrong way to feel during this time. It is normal for us to experience strong emotions that can change quickly in difficult times including worry, stress, fear, anxiety, anger and sadness.



We might also feel some 'positive' emotions – for example if something we were worried about has been put on hold. That's OK too. How we are feeling will depend on what is going on for us in any particular moment. As humans, we can often experience more distress by feeling bad about what we are feeling. For example, we may feel sad about a holiday being cancelled, but then feel guilty about feeling sad because others are very unwell. Being critical of ourselves and what we are feeling doesn't help and can make us feel worse. Now we feel sad and guilty. It's important to acknowledge and validate those feelings as both things are true. It is still sad that things we were looking forward to have changed. It is also sad that people are unwell. We don't need to feel bad about what we are feeling whatever that might be. Sometimes it can help to imagine what we would say to a friend who was feeling this way. Dr Russ Harris explains more about this in the following youtube video if you would like to know more <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCp1I16GCXI>

Things that may be helpful

Help your body to help your mood

When we are worried or anxious, we go into 'threat mode' and get more adrenaline in our body. This causes physical changes in our body including tension, faster breathing, increased heart rate and higher blood pressure. Making a change to these physical effects of our threat response can improve our mood. Breathing and relaxation techniques can help with that. We can use breathing techniques to slow our breathing down. When we are anxious we tend to take faster, shallower breaths. Slowing our breathing down can make us feel calmer. You can find some breathing exercises here: <https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/relax.htm> This link also includes some muscle relaxation techniques, that can help relieve tension in the body by tensing, holding and then relaxing muscles in turn.

Be present

A lot of distress, fear, anxiety and worry is about what might happen in the future. In this situation we have no reliable information about what to expect. Taking a few moments to be in the present moment can really help to reduce our anxiety. One way to do this is to try and notice what we are experiencing in our bodies. This is a way we can 'anchor' to the present moment. Other ways can be to try and notice what is going on around us in a moment e.g. noticing what we can see, hear, smell, touch etc. There is more information available here <https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/mindfulness.htm>. There is a collection of shorter mindfulness exercises for everyday life available here: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLFbeQITqQPGTLAmNgKs0srX9Vau7mctFf>

Stay Connected

This situation is hard for everyone, which is something we have in common. Whilst we can't physically meet up, we can find other ways to stay connected to others that are important to us.



Do things that help you feel good

It will take time to get used to the current situation, but finding ways to do things that are meaningful to us can help with staying psychologically healthy. When we are feeling very stressed or worried, it can be hard to do things we enjoy. However, at times like these it is extra important to take care of ourselves in what ever way we can. This can include making time to do things we enjoy such as watching TV, reading, having a bath, being creative etc. There are lots of things being made available over the internet such as online learning, concerts, virtual tours, live feeds of zoos etc. There are a lot of posts on social media at the moment around 'enjoying' or 'making the most of this time' for people at home, suggestions for social distancing routines or doing lots of live activities etc. This can help sometimes, but feeling pressured to do these things can also make us feel worse. I think the key message is to do what helps you as an individual in your situation, whatever that may be.

Doing things we enjoy can help reduce stress levels, help us refocus our attention, feel calmer and more in control. There are also some distraction techniques that can help when we are especially worried, anxious or fearful. Sometimes, thoughts can fly at us thick and fast. Distraction techniques can be a way to create a bit of space. There are lots of ideas for distraction here <https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/distract.htm> .

What to do if you are struggling with how your feeling

It can help to remember that this will pass, and to focus on just getting through each day or hour at a time. It can also help to try and notice any good things, however small. It can help to talk if you are feeling overwhelmed. Sometimes it can be tricky to talk to friends or family for all sorts of reasons. There are other options available to talk to someone if needed.

Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM) have a helpline or web chat if you need to talk <https://www.thecalmzone.net/> . You can also contact the Samaritans at <https://www.samaritans.org/> or on 116 123. Also, Wigan family Welfare are currently offering telephone counselling to support people through this difficult time. They can be contacted on 01942 867888. You can also still talk to your GP about mental health concerns, following your practices current procedures.

If you are seriously worried about your mental health (e.g. worried you could cause yourself or someone else harm) you can contact the Wigan urgent response mental health team on 01942 636 395.

More information

There are a lot of good resources available for coping psychologically in this difficult time at this website <https://www.talkliverpool.nhs.uk/maintaining-your-psychological-wellbeing-during-the-corona-virus-outbreak/> The FACE COVID resource by Russ Harris is a good guide to managing difficult emotions at this time – a video version is available here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmvNCdpHUYM&app=desktop>

Overall, the bottom line message is that life is difficult for us all at the moment, so take care of yourself in the ways that are possible and be kind to yourself. Just take one day at a time and do what you can.

“This too shall pass.”