

“Change doesn't happen overnight. There's no button that's pushed to magically alter everything.” (J.M. Darhower)

But what happens when it does change overnight. How do we make sense of the world when it is unrecognisable from a week ago and the Government is taking steps that haven't been enacted since the last World War.

And we don't have the answers. We are going to have to take it hour by hour, day by day and see what the world looks like.

We have put together some resources/thoughts/things that might be useful.

How do people cope with change?

It is hard to think of another event in anyone's life time when there was a global event that would/will impact on EVERYONE. Yes there have been wars, natural disasters, human disasters but not one I can think of that had such a significant global impact. The world as we know it is never going to be the same again. And maybe that is a good thing. But how do we cope with this uncertainty and how to we look after ourselves and each other?

Studies have described the way we cope with change in 4 stages:

1. Shock and disorientation
2. Anger and emotional responses
3. Coming to terms with the new situation
4. Acceptance and moving forward

Sounds very similar to the way that grief is described: there are different stages and people will move through them (sometimes forward, sometimes back) at different times.

We experience change/grief in physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual ways. Most people will have thought they had a plan or an idea of what the next few days or weeks or months looked like. We assumed we had an idea about what tomorrow looks like and it turns out we had no idea. Some people will cope with that better than others.

Coping with uncertainty

The brain often responds to uncertainty with fear and fear can inhibit decision making. People who can spot this fear are often able to contain it before it gets out of control. This allows them then to focus on the information they do have more rationally.

- Challenge the negative thoughts

When stress and uncertainty increase, the negative thoughts can be harder to ignore and it can be harder to focus on the positives. Finding one positive thing that has happened is possible and it doesn't matter how small it is, starting to turn the tide on only seeing the negative is a start.

- Focus on what you can control

We all like to think we are in control but situations like this show us we can have decisions made for us. The only process we can really control is how we respond and how we make decisions. What really matters to you right now? Don't focus on what you cannot do, think of what you are able to achieve.

- Don't dwell on the problems

When you fixate on the problems that you are facing, you create and prolong negative emotions and stress. Instead focus on what you can do, despite uncertainty, to better your situation.

- Take a moment to breathe

The practice of being in the moment with your breathing trains your brain to focus solely on the task at hand and quietens distracting thoughts. Think about how it feels to breathe in and out. You may be surprised about how calm you feel afterwards.

Ways to increase your resilience

1. Commit to the process of building resilience and self-care
2. Respect boundaries: separate your identity as an individual from temporary suffering (e.g. not taking on this suffering as your personal identity)
3. What contributes to your sense of well being
4. Practice accepting your emotions with a belief that they will shift and change
5. Practice silent reflection (meditation/mindfulness)
6. Understand and accept that you don't have all the answers. In time more answers may arrive
7. Expand your repertoire of self-care habits
8. Enlist your "people" supporters, even if that just means knowing they are alongside you
9. Consider other possibilities – that there are other ways of looking at things, that there might be other solutions
10. Get out of your head and take a break from focusing on the negative

References:

World Federation of Occupational Therapists (2019). *Guide for occupational therapy first responders to disasters and trauma*. Accessed online 19 March 2020:

<https://www.wfot.org/resources/wfot-guide-for-occupational-therapy-first-responders-to-disasters-and-trauma>