

Hello,

I thought to reach out to you via email and let you know you are in my thoughts as we all are feeling the pressures of uncertainty.

Staying mentally healthy is about understanding the cause of mental distress: uncertainty.

We don't like the feeling of uncertainty and tolerating the resulting distress. Actually, when we think about it, uncertainty is at the centre of the COVID 19 pandemic. No one knows what's going to happen next. We don't know if we're going to catch it, whether we'll have a job tomorrow or what restrictions the next day will bring. Everything in our lives suddenly feels uncertain. This completely is at odds with the way our brains work to make us feel safe and secure.

The human brain constantly makes predictions about what will happen next so that it can guide our behaviour. And when we can't do that, the rational part of our brain shuts down and the emotional centre - the limbic system - takes over. This brings on fear, anxiety and erratic behaviour. For some people post-surgery this could mean, increased emotional eating, grazing loss of control eating or increased alcohol intake. Fear of uncertainty is also what drove the toilet paper buying situation and all the panic buying. People are focussing on something they feel is in their control.

Researchers at University College London conducted experiments that showed people are more stressed when they are told they *might* receive an electric shock than if they know they're definitely going to get one. So, it's completely normal to feel anxious, fearful and panicked at this this. We are all feeling uncertain.

I think it's important to acknowledge and make space for our feeling. The first step in protecting our mental health is to pause and name how you feel. Even if the answer is 'I don't know - I've never felt like this before', just pausing to ask the question and acknowledging our fear of uncertainty, starts to re-engage our forebrain - where rational thinking takes place - and we feel calmer.

The second thing is to remember that we're all in this together. There isn't a person on the planet who is unaffected by this in one way or another. You are not alone. Talk to other people about how you're feeling and the specific things that are worrying you. Ask others how they're coping with everything. Your family member, colleague, friend will respond in one of three ways:

1. They'll provide reassurance
2. They'll offer practical advice
3. Or they'll say the two most powerful words in the English language: Me too. And hearing the words 'me too' - or something to that effect - immediately dampens down our stress. Even if neither of you have any answers, you'll both feel better for sharing your concerns.

The third thing that will keep us mentally healthy during this crisis - counterintuitive though it sounds - is to actively look for ways we can help others. Focus on what you can do for others - in small ways or in big ways. Nothing improves our mental health more than feeling that we're making a positive contribution to someone else - whether it's a friend or a stranger. Notice when a colleague is looking distressed and ask them RU OK? Can I do something to help? If your neighbour is unable to buy toilet paper, leave a few of your rolls on their doorstep. This is the time for random acts of kindness. It will improve *your* mental health *and* the other person's. Maybe consider Volunteering in Queensland CARE Army.

Strategies

I encourage you to express how you feel and then to ask:

What am I in control of?

Some ideas.....

Sleep – getting good quality sleep is very important in reducing our stress levels

Regular exercise- 30 minutes a day is helpful to reduce stress levels

Food choices

Helpful ideas:

Create structure and routine in your day

Eat well- foods you love that loves you back

Plan your meals and eat regularly

Self-care- limit TV and news time to a specific time in the day

Manage stress levels- try listening to music, reading, walking, mindfulness, meditation, journaling, dancing etc

Our reactions at this time which include high stress, anxiety, grief and emotional reactivity are within the spectrum of what is expected in the current circumstances. If you find that you are so distressed, you cannot manage please reach out to us or to someone close to you.

Reduce or cut down on your caffeine and alcohol consumption, connect socially (while distancing) and let go of things that are weighing you down or don't serve you anymore. Sometimes the best self-care you can do is setting boundaries and limits on what you will and won't do and what you will let go of.

Gift of time – If I look back at this time in 5 years what would I like to have stood for?

What are my values at this time? Deep down in my heart what is really important to me?

Stay safe and I encourage you to please contact the rooms or email me directly to make an appointment if you feel you would benefit from a telecast appointment. Look out for my next update which will be focussed on emotional eating.

Warm Regards – Michele