Coping with Anxiety

And Covid-19

Due to the state of affairs a great deal of the population are feeling anxious and experiencing depressive symptoms, however we need to be mindful that those already suffering with any anxiety disorders are likely to have increased symptoms, and those with depression may isolate even more and feelings of despair/hopelessness may increase. This can apply to others that have any mental health conditions.

Some coping strategies are listed below

Focus on things that you are able to control, like your thoughts and behaviours, try and make a daily plan/routine (please note that this should be achievable, and you should not feel disheartened if you cannot stick to it, the task here is in the actual planning of the day).

If you find yourself thinking about the current situation negatively, attempt to stop yourself

by distraction – it may be an abrupt noise such as a clap, pinging an elastic band on your wrist and then divert your attention with an activity (can be as simple as music, tv, speaking to someone, making a drink etc). The more you do this the easier it will be to take control of NATS (negative automatic thoughts).

Stay in contact with others, if you are self- isolating you could do this digitally. Where possible try and use video calling – the logic behind this: it will contribute to lessening feelings of loneliness, if the call is positive and there are smiles/laughter we will usually replicate this, which can make us feel happier and closer.

Try and limit and be aware of the amount of time you spend checking the news/media sources. It may be worth limiting yourself to checking government guidelines online, rather than the

watching the news etc. Viewing/listening to negative information that we are unable to

do anything about, usually has no real value or benefit to us, and can illicit worry and anxieties.

Focus on the bigger picture, humanity can survive this – infection rates across the world have stabilised and scientists and researchers are being extremely proactive in reducing this further in the way of preventions, interventions and treatments. There are preventative actions that we can take.

Don’t let the fear of others (panic buying, catastrophising) make you fearful, their individual actions do not represent factual information.

If you start feeling overwhelmed – take 5 minutes away from the situation and take a break, if

it is possible and safe to do so go outside and take a walk or stand taking some deep breaths – 5 – 15 minutes of being in nature has been proven to provide a positive emotional mood

boost.

Try and keep research on the subject to factual information rather than ‘opinions’ and hearsay on social media.

Follow relevant guidelines which apply to you and keep safe, if you are unsure there will be someone that you can ask/speak to.

If possible, allocate some time in your day to do something that you enjoy, this could be 30 minutes of reading, playing a game, speaking to someone, listening to music, having a walk (within safe proximities), a hobby (or try something new).

If you find there are times where you are unable to concentrate or sleep because of ‘worries’ or intrusive thoughts, write them down on a piece of paper e.g. “I am worried about my family”, “I am not sure when college will re-open” and so on, then screw the paper up and throw it in the bin. Whilst your worries are valid, worrying about them rarely provides a solution. The opposite can happen where your focus become fixated and negative, this exercise helps to acknowledge (identifying the worry), attend to it (writing it down),

dealing with it (screwing it up), control (throwing it in the bin) – this is because you are unable to do anything about it (esp. at bedtime) and also helps ‘dilute’ the intensity of the worry in

in your brain.

A brief explanation of anxiety symptoms

There are a variety of anxiety symptoms, below are some common ones with a brief explanation to why a physiological response occurs. Some people find it helpful to understand why their brain and body react in a certain manner, this can help alleviate further symptoms and implement coping strategies/mechanisms.

First of all, anxiety stems from a part of the brain that comes from the primitive system when we required this sensitive response to keep us alive (think cave men).

When we are faced with a situation that makes us anxious, we might have trouble sleeping, eating or going to the toilet more often, shortness/quickness of breath, increased heart rate. This is because our brain is on high alert and it keeps us in a state of being ready if we need to act (fight, flight or freeze).

So, when we have trouble sleeping it is because we need to be awake so that we can see any danger (think, cave man and a wild animal).

We may have trouble eating because if we have to run, extra food will make us heavier and easier to catch.

We may go to the toilet more often and, again, this can be attributed to ‘freeing/lightening us up’. This process is due to the release of adrenalin and noradrenaline without the need for it. Because the body doesn’t need these, it effects our physiological system resulting in needing the toilet.

Shortness/quickness in breath is due to oxygen being distributed to the relevant organs/muscles at a quicker rate, enhancing our performance in fight or flight mode. However, when this becomes too overwhelming as we don’t utilise it or need it, then we may faint – this works in resetting our physiological system, as we come round our breathing and heart rate are regulated and functioning as normal.

Increase in heart rate is also due to the release of adrenaline and noradrenaline, as the heart needs to pump blood around the body at a faster pace, in order to meet demand to keep us efficient in either fight or flight response. This is no different to your heart beating faster as you exercise, apart from the fact that the blood pumping fast around your body is actually needed – when it is not needed, you can become extremely aware of it and it may feel uncomfortable.

The freeze response doesn’t usually apply to ongoing anxiety inducing situations, this response is triggered when we are taken by surprise.

Please note that this is a very simple explanation - Take Care and stay safe xx

