



MAINTAINING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING DURING TIMES OF CHANGE AND UNCERTAINTY

Narinder Gill
PCC mBIT Certified Coach
ngill@inspiring-generations
[linkedin.com/in/narindergill](https://www.linkedin.com/in/narindergill)



Inspiring Generations
Mindsets for Growth

INTRODUCTION

We are in the midst of an emotionally challenging time, and on a daily level, are processing the uncertainty alongside our emotions through this global pandemic.

Over the last month, clear themes have been emerging through my conversations with yourselves and various NHS and health care workers.

- Feelings of being overwhelmed and anxious
- Feel like everything is out of control
- Social isolation, daily life being disrupted has left some feeling sad and depressed
- Feelings of gratitude and hope
- Thankful for good health, family and friends

As a coach, I have been in a privileged position listening to your experiences and stories and gaining an insight into the reality of what you are experiencing, feeling and thinking.

This document provides some key strategies to support you that I have used or that have been recommended by my coaching colleagues. You may have seen this shared already but I thought it was apt to start with this:

Working remotely – Covid 19 principles

1. You are not “working from home”, you are “at your home, during a crisis, trying to work”
2. Your personal, physical, mental and emotional health is far more important than anything else right now
3. You should not try to compensate for lost productivity by working longer hours
4. You will be kind to yourself and not judge how you are coping, based on how you see others coping
5. You will be kind to others and not judge how they are coping, based on how you are coping
6. Your team’s success will not be measured the same way it was when things were normal

‘...human beings at our best are so creative and inventive, and we can create, develop and implement systems of change that are beneficial to all sentient beings and the environment.’

Joaquin Phoenix 2020

MANAGING YOUR WORRY AND ANXIETY

What does worry feel like? (Dr Matthew Whalley & Dr Hardeep Kaur, at Psychology Tools)

When we worry it can feel like a chain of thoughts and images, which can progress in increasingly catastrophic and unlikely directions. Some people experience worry as un-controllable – it seems to take on a life of its own. It is natural that many of us may have recently noticed ourselves thinking about worst-case scenarios.

The example below illustrates how worries can escalate quickly even from something relatively minor. Have you noticed any thoughts like this?



Worry isn't just in our heads. When it becomes excessive, we feel it as anxiety in our bodies, too. Physical symptoms of worry and anxiety include:

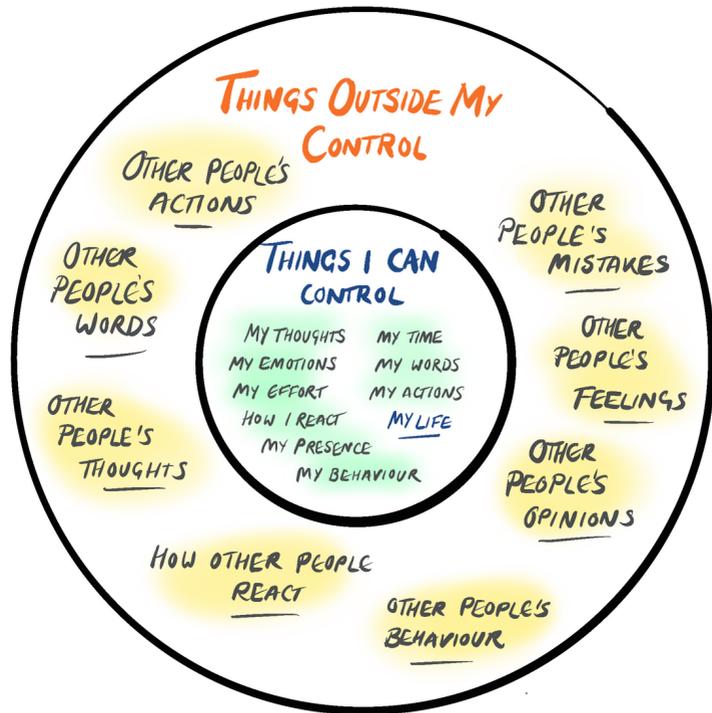
- Muscle tension or aches and pains.
- Restlessness and an inability to relax.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Difficulty sleeping.
- Feeling easily fatigued

When does worry become a problem?

Everyone worries to some degree, and some thinking ahead can help us to plan and cope. There is no 'right' amount of worry. We say that worry becomes a problem when it stops you from living the life you want to live, or if it leaves you feeling demoralized and exhausted.

REFOCUS AND TAKE CONTROL

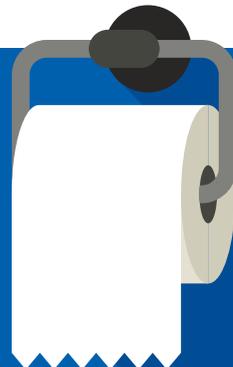
In challenging times it's really helpful to focus our energy on the things we can do something about (inner circle stuff), as opposed to the things where we have little or no control.



doodled by Gemma Honour

I realized very quickly I could not control:

- How much toilet roll we had in the house
- When it would run out
- Other people's behaviour when they are not socially distancing
- There is no flour to bake (as everyone was baking)



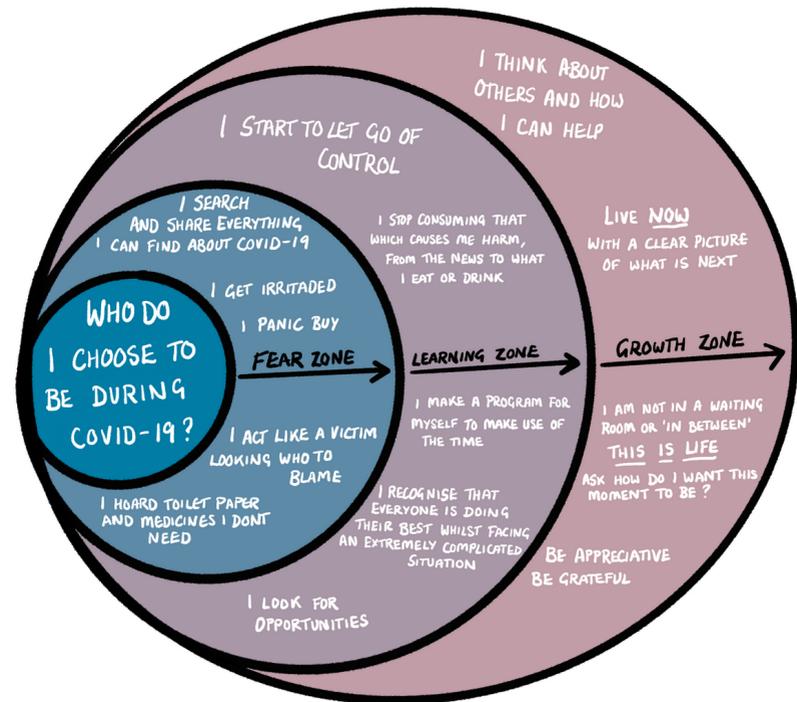
But I could control:

Turning off the news, staying safe by following advice, how I behave and digging deep into my values to guide me (being kind, honest and genuine) keeping in touch remotely (love house party), staying positive, how much I shopped (and stopping the urge to stockpile), enjoying the time to catch up with my family and friends.

What will your circle of control during Covid 19 look like?

Once you have carried out this exercise, it is worth looking at the image below and thinking about "Who do I chose to be".

Please note there are no right/wrong answers here – so be honest with yourself.



doodled by Gemma Honour

DEVELOPING YOUR RESILIENCE



'Resilience is often described as the ability to recover from difficulties, but it can also be the capacity to cope with and adapt to challenging circumstances.'

(Matthew Syed, April 2020)



I see resilience as being motivated to do something even when it is challenging or circumstances are challenging. As you attempt to combine working from home with home schooling, entertaining your children and managing your dog barking (along with other distractions), spend a moment to acknowledge that 'things are different' and getting through lockdown is not a competitive sport.

Personally, I think I went into overdrive in the beginning, as my work hard driver kicked in - thinking I had lots more time so needed to be doing a lot more things (from on line training, to starting creative projects, learning to play the piano to re-decorating house to binge listen to every podcast) and was exhausted by the end of week one! I realised very quickly that I was short on energy and my goal was too big to tackle.

Reflecting further, with the help of my coach, I realised that the most important thing for the present moment for me was to feel settled and successful and that in order for this to happen I needed to establish a routine that was not overwhelming, and not setting unnecessary expectations. My coach reminded me of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, starting with the need to feel safe. My focus shifted to ensuring all around me were staying safe and healthy.

Research has shown that those with higher levels of resilience have less depression, less anxiety, a more positive outlook and more life satisfaction.

This section applies resilience research, and other psychological approaches, to managing the challenges facing us as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Important to note that these are not tools for everyone as 'resilience is not one size fits all'.

Set a clear plan for the day

We all need some level of routine and structure. Routines are particularly helpful for feeling more settled and being productive. Consider what works best for you. Maintain a regular time for waking up and going to bed, eating at regular times, and getting ready and dressed each morning.

Adopt good self-care habits

Research into resilience found the fundamental factor that all participants had was taking responsibility for looking after themselves. Now is the time to think about what you need and start putting those ideas into regular practice. Notice when you are not ok. Spot and manage your emotions to help your brain function better – you may be getting signals from your body – stomach knotting/clenched fists, shoulders braced. Listen to the signals from your body. Recognise that it is ok to feel my feelings but I need to be aware how my thoughts are making me feel and if they are helpful/unhelpful.

Create a good sleep routine

Limit social media exposure before going to bed, practise breathing exercises with positive thoughts as you go to bed.



DEVELOPING YOUR RESILIENCE

Stay mentally and physically active

Plan for activities that keep both your mind and body active. For example, you could try learning something new with an online course, or challenge yourself to learn a new language. It's also important to keep physically active. For example, doing rigorous housework for 30 minutes or Joe Wicks every morning.

Eat healthily and hydrate

Minimise sugar, caffeine and alcohol to regulate your mood and energy level.

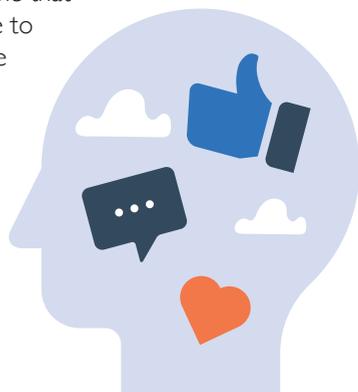
What am I grateful for today?

At times of uncertainty, developing a gratitude practice can help you to connect with moments of joy, aliveness, and pleasure. At the end of each day, take time to reflect on what you are thankful for today. Try and be specific and notice new things each day, for example 'I am grateful that it was sunny at lunchtime so I could sit in the garden'. You could start a gratitude journal, or keep notes in a gratitude jar. Encourage other people in your home to get involved too.

Research has found that completing a gratitude diary everyday resulted in a 20% long term improvement in wellbeing and better sleep. Try writing down 3 things that happened today that went well / made you feel good / gave you a sense of achievement. There is also extensive research that helping others is good for everyone's mental health. Making others feel bad doesn't help us feel better, it makes everyone feel worse. Acts of kindness give everyone a boost of neurochemicals which make us feel happy! **What could you do that would help your friends / family / neighbors / community / others who may be struggling?**

Reframe/perspective

As the health situation develops it can feel like we need to constantly follow the news or check social media for updates. However, you might notice this also triggers your worry and anxiety. Try to notice what triggers your worry. For example, is it watching the news for more than 30 minutes? Checking social media every hour? Try to limit the time that you are exposed to worry triggers each day. You might choose to listen to the news at a set time each day, or you could limit the amount of time you spend on social media for news checking. Rely on reputable news sources. It can also help to be mindful of where you are obtaining news and information. Be careful to choose reputable sources.



Perspective and positive mindset (Dr Kate Castle CBT expert)

Some people are more pessimistic and tend to focus on the worst-case scenario. This can be useful to prepare for the worst, particularly for lawyers! However, some find this escalates into worrying that can feel uncontrollable and anxiety provoking. Fortunately, we can all learn to change our thinking and be more optimistic. Positive thinking does not mean ignoring the negatives and assuming everything is always going to be brilliant.

Positive psychology suggests actively looking for the positives, to balance out the negatives and develop a more realistic, helpful perspective that avoids catastrophising events or leading to negative thought patterns. This way we can objectively start to reframe the meaning of the thought/event by exercising selfcontrol of thoughts and behaviours related to the situation.

Notice when you are focusing on the worst possibilities and ask yourself:

- What would be so bad about that? How realistic is that outcome?
- What alternative outcomes might there be?
- What is the most likely outcome?
- What would I say to a friend?
- What could I do / say to myself which would help?

We are in strange times and it is so important that we adapt how we think and behave. Being adaptable is our ability to see things from different perspectives. While we cannot control everything, we can take a mental step back and regain a sense of control. I think the key question for us to consider is "how do I want to respond?"

Who am I connecting or checking in with today?

It is important to stay in touch with friends / family / colleagues / communities. When we are not able to go out, or need to keep a physical distance, consider how else you could stay in contact e.g. by phone, messaging, social media, video calls, group calls, writing letters, notes through neighbours' doors, homemade presents / food delivered to friends doorsteps... You could arrange a time to have coffee / tea / a meal and video call. Be mindful of the instinct to withdraw and to not let that go on for too long - balance it out by making a conscious effort to connect with others.

Micro moments of success

Each day look for and notice those times when you have experienced a moment of joy/success, from completing a report, to tidying a cupboard, to persevering with some exercise—tell somebody and celebrate these.



THE POWER OF MINDFULNESS

Thank you to Steph Rowley for sharing her expertise and creativity.

We are all experiencing a time when it is totally normal to sometimes feel anxious, fearful or somewhat overwhelmed at times with the ongoing and ever changing situation. Some of you will have already come across mindfulness / meditation.

Research has shown that anxiety, depression and irritability all decrease with regular sessions of meditation. Meditation also bolsters the immune system, which could help fight off viruses. You need only do it for a few minutes a day for it to make a big difference – a bit like cleaning your teeth so with that in mind, try the mindfulness session **that only takes a minute;**

- The Power Of Mindfulness Sit up with your back slightly away from the rear of the chair – feet flat on the floor. Lower your gaze or close your eyes.
- Focus your attention on your breath as it flows in and out of your body
- If your mind wanders (which it is likely to) gently bring your attention back to your breath. Don't be hard on yourself about any intrusive thoughts – the fact that you have noticed your mind wandering and brought your attention back to the breath without criticising yourself is exactly what mindfulness is about.
- Whatever happens, allow it to be as it is. You may feel calm and still, you may feel frustrated, you may not feel much at all. Accept what is. Don't push your thoughts and feelings away. They are normal. They are fine. You need not give them any attention at this moment. Back to the breath...

After a minute open your eyes and take in the room. Notice how you feel. Try and take any sense of calmness into the rest of your day.

Reference for some of the above is from – “Mindfulness – a practical guide to finding peace in a frantic world” by Mark Williams and Danny Penman 2011 – Publ. Piaktus



An app that I regularly use and find helpful is called Headspace and they are offering some free sessions at the moment called “weathering the storm”.

Calm is also offering some free material. Both of these offer you the chance to be talked through some helpful exercises that you can pick and choose from according to your preference. Find the apps and get some free ideas – it's worth a try for nothing.

Another mindfulness exercise to try

Next time you are washing your hands, rather than sing happy birthday twice, just take your attention to the water; to the sensation, to what you can hear, smell, feel and touch. Try to bring your awareness into that activity alone and let your other thoughts pass you by as much as you can. For that small amount of time try to be in the moment and give your mind a different focus... a mini break for the mind. Enjoy! If you liked it, try it with different activities throughout the day.

A final mindfulness exercise

A little walking meditation when you next venture out. Make sure it is when you are not walking to “do” something, rather when it is for the fresh air and exercise with no destination other than home again and not to the shop. Some people find meditating/mindfulness movement is easier for them than sitting down to do it, so if that describes you, this is well worth a try. You don't have to maintain it for the full walk, which would be a challenge even for a monk. A few minutes can make a difference to your peace of mind.

- **Bring your awareness to the walking – slow it down a bit**
- **Centre yourself in your body and in the present moment**
- **Take each step as it comes and be fully present with it**
- **Be aware of how you are placing your feet and aware of your breath**
- **Pay attention to your surroundings, without judgement and without allowing your thoughts to take you off track** (an example of my friend – “aww, what a lovely dog, I want to stroke it, it looks friendly. Ah, the owner has moved away. Yep, needs to. Is that 2 metres? More like 4. Maybe I look ill. Chuffing virus, can't even stroke a dog. I miss contact, I might get my old teddy out the loft.” oops – I shared a bit much there)

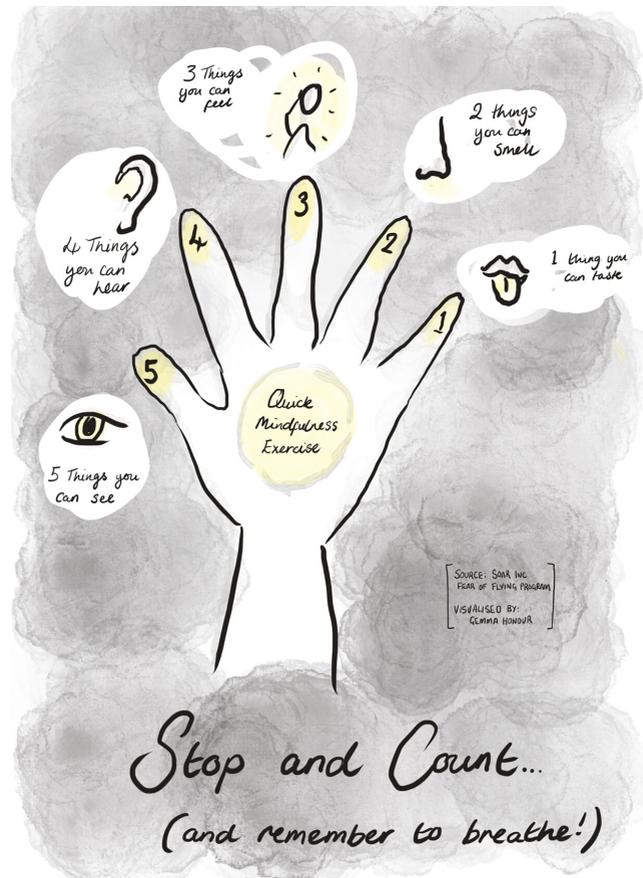
Things are bound to come up to try and pull your attention away from your awareness. When this happens, allow the thoughts/ feelings to pass by like clouds and bring your awareness back to your feet and to your breath. Some of this exercise is taken from “Wherever you go, there you are” by Jon Kabat-Zinn - 2004 Piaktus Books Ltd

5 SENSES EXERCISE

Thank you to Gemma Honour who has given permission for me to share her sketchnote of the 5 senses exercise for grounding into the present moment.

Start by noticing each individually before trying to be aware of them all at once. What that does is brings you into the present moment, moving you from the left side of your brain which is always processing to the right hemisphere which is connected to what is happening now.

Start with noticing where your attention goes, if you're present and it starts to go to the most frightening information you can find, remember to balance that with other information that shows you all the things within your control that you can do to stay safe.



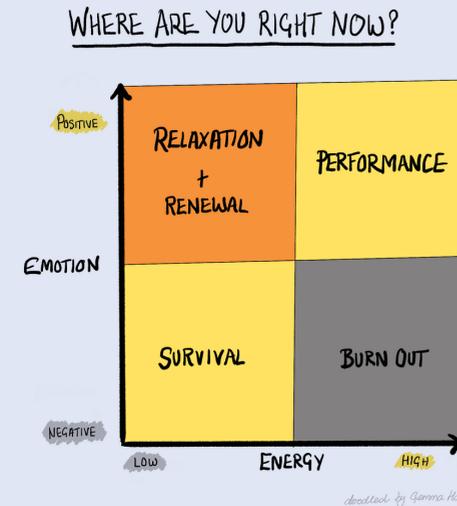
ENERGY EXERCISE

Everything is constantly changing, and therefore takes up more energy. At times like this we need to start with even more energy than normal to deal with change. Many of us aren't great at managing our energy and more than ever we now need to manage both our energies and emotions.

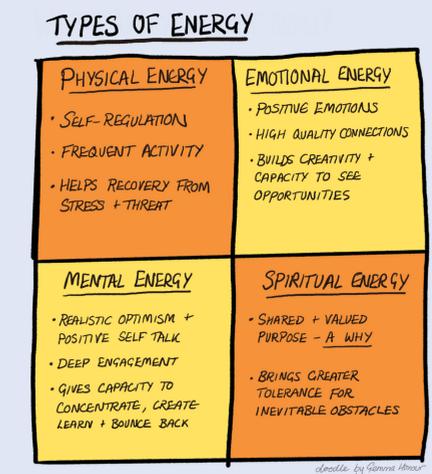
Thank you to Sandra Whiles for sharing this with us to use.

Many of us will be living our lives quite differently right now - work patterns, school patterns, exercise patterns. Our energy helps us do things and thrive. We have 4 types of energy - physical, emotional, spiritual and mental. Stress, worry and different life patterns can deplete energy, so it's worth thinking about how to manage your energy and emotions to look after yourself.

The grid below shows how emotions and energy can play out in terms of wellbeing.



Think about your different types of energy. Use the grid below to list some actions you can take to build each type of energy?



SELF CARE BATTERY

Jon McNestrie has created a visual exercise which you may find helpful when considering your levels of energy (mental, physical, emotional).

By thinking and drawing some of the things that are draining your battery – by recognising the circumstances (e.g., situations, tasks, relationships) that deplete you, you can begin to limit your exposure to them.

Start with the questions:

What could I do less of

What do I have some influence over?

SELF CARE BATTERY

100% CHARGE

0% TIME

USING YOUR BATTERY [Battery icon]

BATTERY SAVER MODE [Battery icon]

CHARGING YOUR BATTERY [Battery icon]

DRAW YOUR BATTERY LEVEL OVER THE PREVIOUS DAYS / WEEKS / MONTHS

FILL IN WHAT - DRAINS YOUR BATTERY - CHARGES YOUR BATTERY - REDUCES THE DRAIN

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO YOUR BATTERY NEXT? DRAW A DOTTED LINE -----

WHAT ACTIVITIES ARE THAT OF YOUR BATTERY SAVER MODE?

WHAT DRAINS YOUR BATTERY THE MOST?

WHAT WOULD TURNING ON BATTERY SAVER DO TO THE DOTTED LINE?

WHAT INFLUENCE DO YOU HAVE OVER THAT?

WHAT REFRESHES + RECHARGES YOU?

WHAT CHANGES DO YOU WANT TO MAKE?

*Exercise by Jon McNestrie
Doodled by Gemma Hanour*

FINAL THOUGHTS

I hope that you and your loved ones are keeping safe, well and as sane as is reasonably possible in these most surreal times. I found a poem that I thought was very apt. I don't know about other people, but I am sometimes finding it really hard to dig deep for motivation for very long, even when I know I have plenty to be doing. Then I feel guilty, as I know how fortunate I am at this present time. I also think that the days sometimes pass us by in the blink of an eye, yet other times it feels like time is slowing down. But it's fine. It is as it is.

I meant to do my work today

By Richard La Galliene (1866-1947)

I meant to do my work today.....

But a brown bird sang in the apple tree,

And a butterfly flitted across the field

And ll the leaves were calling me

And the wind went sighing over the land,

Tossing the grasses to and fro,

And a rainbow held out its shining hand.....

So what could I do but laugh and go?

So I guess, sometimes it is good to stop being hard on yourself, accept that things are not normal - we are still trying to get used to our "new normal". Have a walk in nature or some other escape to get some head space. You're doing the best you can which is fine. Press reset...

Take care everyone and thank you for taking the time to read this.

Narinder Gill April 2020

(With thanks to all my friends, professional colleagues for their support and collaboration in pulling together this shared resource).

@ngill@inspiring-generations

in linkedin.com/in/narindergill



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