



Avoid Pessimistic Thinking

14 April 2020

The lockdown period has been extended. And that is going to mean different things for different people. If you were adamant that the lockdown was going to be extended, then the confirmation of this probably didn't shock you too much. At the other extreme, if you really believed it would end on 16 April, and if you really wanted it to end then because you needed your life to go back to normal, the announcement of the extension was most likely horrible. In fact, as per the emotional change cycle I discussed a few newsletters ago, you may have gone all the way back into shock, possibly denial, and all the emotional processes (anxiety, anger, sadness) of having to deal with another change. Just when you thought you were coming through the change process, you were thrown back into another one. The consequences of this can be considerable. One of the worst outcomes could be that depression is triggered. As human beings we can handle differing levels of loss and disappointment. For most of us, there is also a limit to how much we can handle. And when that limit is reached, when we have just experienced way too many losses and disappointments, we start feeling hopeless and helpless. We start to think this is never going to end. We start to feel we will never be happy. We will never feel safe again. Things will never be okay. And that is when depression can start to kick in. If you are experiencing severe depression, then even people telling you the crisis will end, may not work. If you are depressed, then please get help. The extension of lockdown is another loss. A loss, that needs to be grieved.

The Covid-19 crisis has brought many challenges to us. One of them is to learn to manage our mindset. Being able to manage your mindset applies to all of us. And you can manage your mindset. Your mindset is made up of the thoughts you think. And you, not anyone else, gets to decide what you want to think. Now if you have severe depression you may not be able to manage your mindset. You need professional help. Sadness is an emotion, depression is an illness that needs to be treated. But if you are not severely depressed or

psychotic you can learn to manage your thoughts. Which in turn will generate a specific mindset. You absolutely can decide what you are going to think.

Having said this you don't want to be ridiculous about what you are thinking. Don't get naïve or manic and think life is going to be a bed of roses. It won't be. Life is hard. But you are not powerless, you can decide what to do about whatever happens. And there are always more choices available to us than we realise. So don't think that this lockdown will never end, because it will. If you are worried you may be retrenched or if you are retrenched don't think that you will never get another job, because lots of people do get other jobs. Don't think I will never be able to get my business back up again, because if you want to, you can get it running again. The lockdown will end. No lockdown has gone on forever. In every time there have been job vacancies and there are likely to be going forward. And yes, you can get your business back on track. Millions of people have had their businesses go through a bad patch – usually many bad patches - and then grown to success again.

Pessimistic Thinking – The 3 P's

There are three specific ways of thinking that particularly lead to people feeling very pessimistic when recovering from loss or grief. These are known as the 3 P's. Personalisation, Pervasiveness and Permanence.

Personalisation means that you link the event to something about you – who you are or what you did. Somehow, you reason, you are responsible for what happened in some way. Check that you are not doing this. Most probably very few if any people believe they are to blame for the coronavirus. If you do blame yourself or feel yourself responsible for a loss, it will make it harder for you to get through it.

Pervasiveness means your whole life will be irretrievably and irrevocably altered for the worst. A lot of people may be feeling this about the coronavirus. However beware of generalisations, they often trigger anxiety and depression. Your whole life is not likely to be affected. Your whole life means your family, your career, your finances, your health, your recreation, your social life etc. Every single aspect of your life. It is not likely that every single aspect of your life has been changed. And in many instances it is not irrevocably altered, many things will go back to the way they were.

Permanence means that the aftermath of the event will last forever. What you are experiencing right now because of the coronavirus is not going to be permanent. There is no way that people will never be allowed to visit family and friends forever and ever. There is no way that restaurants and clothing stores will never be allowed to operate. Tourism cannot be shut down for ever. So the times right now are not permanent. They will change.

You may very well be thinking in terms of pervasiveness and permanence. If you are not feeling okay, then notice which way you are thinking and challenge your thoughts. Your thoughts can lie to you. Your mind can play tricks on you and get you to believe doom and gloom that, when you question your thinking, you can see is not factual. So be aware of how you are thinking and challenge and change those thoughts that lead to feeling extremely pessimistic.

Have Fun

One of the most important things you can do for your mental wellbeing is have fun. Not only do you feel good, but it helps you be more creative after your fun activity as well which makes you better at finding solutions to problems. Write down a list of about 5-10 things that are fun for you. This could be singing, reading a favourite book, charades via Zoom, trying a new recipe, jumping on the couch, having a pillow fight, etc. etc. Then each day commit to doing one of these things.