



When things just get too much

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I think we are hitting a major mental wellness crisis worldwide. And if we have not reached there yet, we soon will. The pandemic, with the consequent loss of life, the economic downturn, loss of jobs and businesses, and decrease in income, is just becoming too much for a lot of people. In many places, and South Africa was one of them, things were not great before the pandemic hit. The economy had not been good for some time and retrenchments and business closures had been occurring on a regular basis. State capture, crime, and fraud and theft were at alarming levels. Our investment ratings were getting lower and lower. The increase in VAT to 15% hurt a lot of people and meant they were not able to save a cent and needed credit to come out each month. A lot of people, and I was one of them, were hoping that from 2019 onwards things would start getting better. And then the pandemic hit. Together with the concern over health and lives, it brought in a worsening of the jobs and business crisis. Now there are less jobs and even less businesses operating. And if people thought they had very little money to spend last year, this year is even worse. For many people, this is a terrible time. It is one challenge on top of a whole series of challenges from the past years, and sometimes, it is just too much to be able to take in.

So what can you do when it all feels like just too much to bear?

1. Don't focus on the long term. Yes, you don't just want to be a person focused on the short term because no one has a successful life, business, career, relationship, etc, if you only think short term. However, when you are battling, think short term. It makes things more manageable. Remind yourself that you only have to get through today. Don't even think about tomorrow or next year. And then tomorrow, just remind yourself that you only have to get through that day. If you start thinking about what is going to happen long term, you will start panicking and can start imagining lots of horrible scenarios for yourself. In general, when you are not in a good space don't think long term and don't make binding long term decisions. When you are not

in a good mental space, keep things to the short term. When you are in a bad space, it is hard to picture how you are ever going to get out of it.

2. Move. Yes, find some way in which to move. It could be exercise. It could be cleaning your windows. It could be doing some laundry. Just move. It really does help.
3. Try and have a routine. Put some structure in your life. Structure helps us deal with chaos. When we are overwhelmed, we often automatically try and create structure. People who are overwhelmed at work will often rearrange their desk over and over, just to try and calm themselves a bit.
4. Control what you listen to and who you listen to. Remove the things that just create more panic and uncertainty. Bear in mind that all news and information is biased. It always is about one particular viewpoint. You are not getting the whole picture.
5. Tidy up your environment. Start with a corner of one room. Then when that is finished do some more.
6. Get outside. You can walk, read, or do some gardening.
7. Get support. Talk to people. This doesn't have to be a professional, although there is nothing wrong with doing that. Just don't isolate yourself too much. That is one of the problems with the pandemic – we are physically isolating – and that can make it too easy to socially isolate, which is really not good when you are in a bad way. Actually, its not good ever.
8. Stop comparing yourself to others. Often people will look at the lives of others and feel they are not matching up. They don't feel as good or as competent as other people. They may wonder what is wrong with them. Everyone has different circumstances, so don't compare your situation, or your journey to others. All comparison usually does is make us unhappy. Or else, if things are going really well for you, it can make you arrogant.
9. Do something nice for others. It only has to be one person. Helping someone else has been proven over and over again to make you feel better. You might not feel like being kind when it seems like your life is falling apart, but it really does help. A lot.
10. Try and get your mind around accepting the situation. I know this is very difficult. However the situation is not going to change right now. It is what it is. It is unfair. In fact lots of things in life are unfair. We wish it wasn't the case, but it is. Covid-19 is not your fault. However you are being majorly impacted by it. As hard as it is, as much as we want to get angry and blame others, it just is. Once we start accepting a situation as it is, we can avoid more suffering than is necessary.
11. Remind yourself that every moment of suffering is an opportunity to give yourself love and compassion. You can initiate self-compassion with kind words, a caring tone of voice, and soothing gestures. If you have never been good at showing self-care, then now is a good time to learn to do it. And keep doing it, even when the pandemic is over.

You might feel like you have reached breaking point, but you are going to get through this. You will get through today and you will get through tomorrow. You have survived everything up to now and you are likely to survive this. And things will change. Nothing ever stays the same. This won't last forever.