

*It's been three weeks since formal lockdown was announced, and I've had all kinds of reactions. I'm worried about everything, I can't stop thinking about the pandemic, then I forget and worry I'll hug someone by mistake. I feel grateful for the beautiful sunshine, and then guilty I'm at home: I feel like I should be DOING SOMETHING USEFUL, but I can't concentrate, don't quite know what to do, so sign up for everything, then feel overwhelmed. None of this is enabling me to settle down, calm down, feel connected.*

*This is a common experience; we are all human beings having shared experiences.*

*Denial, fear, panic is normal*

*Finally, I stop panicking and start reaching out. What are my family and friends experiencing? What do others on the internet have to say about this? After all, if our global connections have contributed to this virus spreading so rapidly then perhaps our global connections can help us manage too.*

*So here are the key things I have heard that make sense of my experience and reconnect me to my fellow humans*

✓ **Start with physical and psychological security**

It is perfectly normal and appropriate to feel bad and lost during the first few weeks of a global pandemic! No sane person feels good during a global disaster. This is the time to focus as much as you can on food, family, friends, and maybe fitness. At work, it is also the time to focus on these things for your team and the recipients of your service: food, community, support, and physical health!

You will all experience lots of pressure to be productive – to DO DO DO. This is an inevitable panic response but is not helpful in the long term. Let go of all of the profoundly daft ideas you have about what you *should* be doing right now. Instead, focus intensely on your physical and psychological security and feeling safe. This may include getting essentials for your kitchen, cleaning your environment, and making a coordinated plan with those around you, both at work and at home. Is there enough food, is the place clean, are we all safe? This may be a challenge if you live or work somewhere where people are mixing with others. This is the time to agree some basic rules to make sure everyone stays safe – more about boundaries next week. For now, do what you can.

Focus on safety and attachment. These are scary and unpredictable times for everyone; focus on strengthening your connections through time spent listening, creating novel ways of entertaining each other together, and offering plenty of verbal reassurances to others that you are there for them in this time. Calm is contagious, too!

*You are home now, for everyone. You are a community. What each of you does, affects everyone*

*Focus on physical distancing not social distancing - Together apart. We need each other*

✓ **Connect (reach out)**

Once you have established a safe base with everyone in your environment, really focus on connecting with people. This can be hard when everyone is socially isolating or physically distancing, which is why it is more important than ever.

We know human beings are social creatures, we need other people, and especially when we feel under threat. A global pandemic is a threat! We need reassurance and connection with our fellow humans more than ever now.

*In New Zealand their motto includes 'be kind'. Everyone's struggling in their own way*

**Reaching out to others** at this time is really important. If we look at what has happened spontaneously around the world we see Italians singing together on their balconies, virtual choirs springing up, neighbours taking their morning cuppa in the front garden and talking to each other, people hanging out of windows clapping together for the NHS. We need to really connect with people at least once daily for thirty minutes. Make sure you spend time every day talking to people, in your household, in your workplace. If you can use the tools, try FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, house party, phone calls, texting—connect with other people to seek and provide support. Everyone needs this. Help other staff and residents do this too. They miss their family and friends as well.

**Helping others can really help.** By being at work and keeping everyone safe you are already doing a lot. A multitude of helping organisations have sprung up during this crisis, charities report more donations, the NHS has a huge response to their request for volunteers. Helping others at time of crisis makes us feel useful. Recording or writing messages of support for each other, making cards and gifts for family and friends, sharing belongings with others, anything that helps us reach out and show we care; helping others gives us a sense of agency when things seem out of control.

*Good relationships and a good team will pay dividends now*

**Reach out for help—your team is there for you.** If you have a psychologist as part of your team, try to connect with them, even at a distance. Ensure you and everyone around you keeps up with regular medication and support, and if you are having difficulty coping, seek out help for the first time; - there are no prizes for suffering in silence. There are mental health services at the ready to help you through this crisis. There is help and support out there, any time of the day. As well as work support, and personal help during this crisis, think about how else you usually get help when things are hard, and take time to get that support now.

**Some people may need extra time.** Some people may find it difficult to communicate how they are feeling but may make a bid for attention and communication through acting out. There may be more helpful ways they can express themselves. Laughter and games can be cathartic and a helpful way for people to process their world and problem solve – more about this in week 3 Communication

*Remember that those with experience of trauma may be having a harder time.*

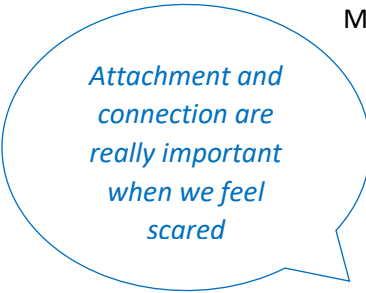
✓ **Hold things lightly**

**Give everyone the benefit of the doubt**, and a wide berth. A lot of cooped up time can bring out the worst in everyone. Each person will have moments when they will not be at their best. It is important to move with grace through blow-ups, to not hold grudges and continue disagreements. Everyone is doing the best they can to make it through this.

**Expect acting out and respond gently.** We are all struggling with disruption in routine, some rely especially on routines constructed by others to make them feel safe and to know what comes next. Expect increased anxiety, worries and fears, nightmares, difficulty being alone or sleeping, testing limits, and meltdowns. Do not focus on punishment at this time, try to hold steady and focus on emotional connection.

**Find lightness and humour in each day.** There is a lot to be worried about, and with good reason. Counterbalance this heaviness with something funny each day: cat videos on YouTube, send round a funny cartoon, watch a comedy show on Netflix together, a funny film—we all need a little comedic relief in our day, every day. This is so important it is almost a qualification for aid worker job

**Notice the good** in the world, the helpers. There is a lot of scary, negative, and overwhelming information to take in regarding this pandemic. There are also loads of stories of people sacrificing, donating, and supporting one another in miraculous ways. It is important to counterbalance the heavy information with the hopeful information.



*Attachment and connection are really important when we feel scared*

Message from the New Zealand prime minister: *Go home tonight and check on your neighbours, start a phone tree with your street, plan how you'll stay in touch with one another.*

*We will get through this together, but only if we stick together so please be strong and be kind.*

And the recent good news reports, more than half a million people globally have now recovered from Covid. In most countries, the number of new cases is falling. 120,000 people have died this year, but 36 million babies have been born. Most people with Covid show no symptoms. One 99-year-old man has raised £17 million by walking around his garden. The air we breathe is now cleaner than ever. musicians are playing concerts for neighbours in their front gardens. roads are converted to bike lanes in California.

(Adapted from Aisha S. Ahmad, writing for the *Chronicle*, In the US March 27, 2020, as well as a number of Psychologists, mental health nurses and aid workers used to dealing with crises)

April 2020