



Coronavirus – Emotional Reactions

What's a "Normal" Response?

A world-wide pandemic of this scale and magnitude is not something most of us will have experienced or encountered in the past. We have no shared narrative of what it's like, what it will be like and how it's likely to impact on our lives in the future.

It wasn't very long ago that our lives were going on as normal, with bars and restaurants open, our children going to school every day. Even when we became aware that coronavirus had affected other countries, it is normal that we assumed it would not affect us in this way.

Why do I feel so anxious?

Faced with this degree of change and uncertainty, it is normal to feel anxious, shocked and confused.

Most of us have no idea how long this will go on and what the future will hold. And when we feel anxious already, it's so easy to catastrophise; to imagine the worst-case scenarios.

The news is full of incredibly distressing images and accounts of people unwell and dying, people losing their loved ones, images of empty streets and people in masks. Some of it feels otherworldly, unreal and frightening, it can be traumatic and can result in a '*Fight, flight, freeze*' response resulting in feelings of extreme anxiety and panic.

Why do I feel so sad?

Everything has changed so suddenly and so dramatically that we are experiencing a huge sense of loss. For some of us, loss of our jobs, our businesses, our leisure activities, contact with our friends and family, our freedom to travel, to go out and do as we please, loss of our daily routines and our children's last weeks and months at school.

Loss of this magnitude and all at once takes a long time to adjust to. In the meantime, it's normal to experience a number of different emotions, which can change rapidly throughout the day. Even if we haven't been directly affected by the virus, haven't lost loved ones, it is normal to be experiencing a grief response. Some people think that grief can be modelled. For example, the Kubler-Ross Grief Cycle (see page 2), though our reaction is unlikely to be linear and predictable, our mood and emotions will go up and down depending on what we experience, and how we react to our experiences:



Kübler-Ross Grief Cycle



Why do I feel so angry?

Anger is a common response to threat and loss. Sometimes, often without realising it, it's easier for us to be angry than to feel sad and vulnerable. We can lash out at those around us and defend against our feelings of anxiety and vulnerability. We often get angry when we feel we cannot control the things occurring around us. Anger can push people away and make relationships more difficult, commonly resulting in feelings of loneliness and isolation.

What Might Help?

- Identifying how you are feeling and talking about it as much as possible or, if that's too difficult, writing it down.
- Knowing that how you are feeling now will pass. That even if the changes and the loss you are experiencing continue longer term, you will find new strategies to manage and adapt, you will develop new ways of feeling.
- Remembering that we can find strength and comfort in the kindness of others and, in times like this, it is common for people to reach out and help one another.
- Being kind to yourself and making sure that you stay mindful of what you have achieved each day in the simplest of ways.
- Remembering that we humans are incredibly resilient and even when faced with the greatest atrocities, we find ways to cope and develop a "new normal."

Useful Reading

Emotional Resilience Coronavirus Crisis:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/wellness/anxiety-coronavirus-mental-wellness-tips/2020/03/16/f187faf2-67b8-11ea-9923-57073adce27c_story.html