

10 Point Plan – Surviving Lockdown

Point 1: Looking after your Mental Health



It is so important in the current climate to take care of yourself so you can both look after others around you and also get the most out of your life. By making small but deliberate considered changes to your life, that don't need to take lots of your time or cost a fortune, you can start moving in the right direction. There are a number of tips that can help you stay in good mental health and deal with stressful issues.

1.1 ACCEPTANCE – Understanding and accepting that you need assistance with your mental health. Taking about your mental health and accepting something needs to be done is the first step towards improvement. It isn't a sign of weakness to challenge the status quo, but a sign of strength and the first coping strategy that you have been carrying this problem around in your head. Just opening up and accepting it, then talking about it, you will feel supported and less alone, and perhaps encourage others to do the same. It can be very difficult to describe your feelings, to put them into words, to make sense of what is happening in your head, whilst dealing with all the other emotions that also come along such as feeling awkward, embarrassed or shameful. However, given time and a little practice, you will start your journey towards the light and a better future.

1.2 ACTIVITY – There is a significant connection between the mind and the body. When we exercise, natural chemicals are released that make you feel good and more confident. It can also increase your self-esteem, improve your concentration and sleep. All these factors combine to make you generally feel better. Experts agree that taking 30 minutes' exercise at least 5 days a week can start to make a significant difference, whether this is walking, gardening, going to the gym or doing a home workout guided by Joe Wicks for example. There is power in developing and maintaining a routine that involves activity. All movement is good.

1.3 APPETITE – There is also a strong connection between what we eat, how we feel and how our body perform. Certain foods and drinks can have an immediate and direct metabolic and mental effect such as caffeine, sugar and alcohol, whilst others have longer term metabolic consequences such as glucose and starchy foods, long shelf life foods with many preservatives

incorporated within them or fatty foods. Try maintaining a balanced diet that includes different types of fruits and vegetables, wholegrain foods, nuts and seeds, oily fish, whilst drinking plenty of water. Too often our minds tell us that we are hungry when in fact what we really need is water. Keep a record of not just the types of foods but the weight or portion sizes, just to keep track of what you are actually consuming, so you can consider adjustments.

1.4 ALCOHOL – This has the ability to change our mood, but it is not a good way of managing difficult feelings or coping with stressful situations. Try not to drink alone, to attempt to deal with fear, loneliness or to attempt to solve problems. Alcohol is a short-term or temporary effect, and when it wears off, you can often feel far worse and have withdrawal symptoms. Occasional light drinking is perfectly healthy and enjoyable for most people, but stay within the limits. Excessive alcohol consumption doesn't solve problems; it creates even bigger ones.

1.5 AFFILIATIONS – Strong caring family ties and supporting friends are a real plus when dealing with the natural cycles of stresses that are just part of life. Talking to people who can make you feel included, valued and who care for you, can provide different perspectives on life and situations that can be totally different from what is happening in your head. Help keep yourself grounded in reality by catching up with someone either face-to-face, drop them a note or email, or chat via many of the online tools now available. Always keep your lines of communications open, because you should never underestimate the power of laughter, self-depreciation in a kind way or seeing how silly certain situations really are. It is highly recommended that you work at relationships that make you feel loved, valued or important, whilst staying away, take a break or distancing yourself from those relationships that make you feel fearful, unworthy or bad. Don't feel bad about ending toxic relationships. Recognise that it can also be very hard to cope with loss, when someone close to you dies or you lose them in other ways. Counselling for bereavement, feeling guilty or loss can help you explore these feelings, and work strategies to help you deal with them.

1.6 ASK – Never be afraid to ask for help. Again, this is one strength and not a weakness, because nobody is superhuman, nobody can do everything and nobody has infinite strength, willpower or motivation. Life comes in cycles, just like day and night. Everyone will get tired or overwhelmed by how they feel or when things go wrong, it is just a natural reaction. It is how we respond that is important, and asking family or friends for practical help or a listening ear, or a GP or local services for more in-depth assistance can prove very useful. A problem shared is a problem halved. Don't let feeling stop your life, have an adverse effect on those people around you either at home or work, and don't let your emotions rule you and allow your moods to affect you for several weeks. You are more than your emotions. Take the good emotions and reinforce them so you can repeat them, but acknowledge the bad emotions but don't let them control you. Always remember that asking for help is always a sign of strength.

1.7 ADJOURNMENT – Nobody can run a race forever. The race for life is run at different paces taking in different changes of scene along the way. There are times to run, then there are times to rest, pause, reflect and recuperate. Taking a five-minute pause, a ten-minute yoga, meditation or deep breathing exercise, a half hour lunch, another afternoon nap, a good night sleep or a relaxing weekend off doing something you love, is what can de-stress you because

you are giving yourself some 'me time'. You should never feel guilty about giving back to yourself and listening to your body, because without rest and sleep, our mental health suffers, our concentration evaporates and our performance consequentially suffers accordingly. Sometimes the world just needs to wait a little time longer for you to recharge your batteries. Very few things in life are really that urgent, and it is often the little caring and considerate things we do when we let our thoughts flow in a relaxed state that make so much difference, not running around at a million miles an hour.

1.8 ABILITY – Always allocate some time to do the things you're good at. Find out what you love doing, where you can lose yourself within them and get into true creative flow, and where any worries just melt away. Enjoying yourself is a great way to beat stress. It allows you to take your mind off other things, boosts your self-esteem, changes your mood, create something you're interested in, and in some cases, meet new people or be more active as well. Never underestimate the power of fun, hobbies, doing something new or exciting.

1.9 ASSORTED – I love assorted sweets and biscuits because if I don't like a specific variety then there are lots of others to choose instead. If we were all the same life would be ever so boring. Recognise and accept who you really are, don't pretend to be someone else or copy someone else. You are enough. You may share your life, lifestyle, dreams and fears with those closest to you, but we are all different at the end of the day, that is what makes life so interesting. You are a unique being. Be happy with who you are and enjoy living in the moment, because that all there is and ever will be. Be proud of your achievements, understand that you can be good at anything just not everything, then focus on what do you do well at and what you enjoy, and you will have learnt one of the basic secrets of life. If you are not happy, work out what you want to change then start doing something about making it happen, making it real and taking the first steps along that path. Be realistic, yet be ambitious, because you are more powerful than you can ever imagine. Never forget the power of multiple small steps and the accumulated effect they have over time. Work towards change in small determined steps.

1.10 ACTION – So now you know some of the most valuable tips to help looking after your own mental health, it is time to take the first step. Caring for others is an important part of keeping up and maintaining health relationships with people close to you, and can even bring you close together, so why not start helping each other whenever we can. Unity is a two-way street for what you give, you shall receive the same many times over and supporting others can really help uplift you. It can help you see the world from another angle, with a beginner's mind and put our own problems into perspective. Some people find caring for a pet can improve their wellbeing, as the bond created can be as strong as that between people. Having a structure or routine in your life can bring stability and can act as a link to other people as well. Remember everything starts with a thought or idea, but nothing is achieved without converting that thought or idea into a plan, and then executing it. Action is the key to moving forward to the next stage. What action are you going to take right now?