

10 Point Plan – Surviving Lockdown

Point 2: Dealing with Confinement and Social Loneliness



The world is a different place it was 12 months ago. Many people have been in enforced quarantine often for undefined time periods either because they exhibit symptoms of a virus, have been in close proximity to other that have tested positive for the virus, are attempting to cross borders when travelling or have been identified as part of a high-risk population category. Whether you find yourself confined in your homes, hotels, cruise ships or special quarantine facilities, there are several factors that can mitigate the negative effects of these ordeals.

2.1 ADVERSITY – Mass social isolation and the accompanying psychological and social demands will result in many people experiencing more and more mental health difficulties. Please read our 10 Point Plan – Point 1: Looking after your Mental health, for more details.

2.2 ADAPTATION – You are going to experience emotional disturbance, depression, stress, difficulty sleeping, low mood, be irritable and angry, increased mental health difficulties, disruption to your normal routines and way of life. It can take from a few days up to ten days to adjust to the change of environments, both doing into lockdown and coming out of lockdown. Knowing and being aware of this fact because it can be helpful and more importantly you will understand why it make take time to improve as your conditions become more stabilised and normalised. The best way to quickly adapt is to develop and establish a routine, as this facilitates a sense of personal control and helps reduce uncertainty.

2.3 ANXIETY – Your levels of anxiety are going to shoot through the roof. The uncertainty and fear of not knowing what lies ahead in terms of threats, dangers and if you have been affected can be overwhelming. People who have experienced extreme confinement describe how they detach emotionally from the situation and focus on thinking rationally about the actual risks faced and what you can control and mitigate in terms of reducing those risks. It is pointless worrying about what you can't control, instead focus on the present, what is most important and achievable, the immediate tasks and what can be done now, in the next few hours, or this week. Don't think about the past, the next few months or years.

2.4 ANTARCTICA – Lessons learnt from Polar explorations are more valid than you would think. As isolation and quarantine measures continue, it is proven that monotony and boredom will set in, associated with repetition, lack of variety, sensory deprivation and limited access to outside spaces. Some of us are fortunate to live in a rich internet-enabled entertainment environment, where we can stream podcasts and other media, watch videos and run gaming platforms. This obviously provides a degree of escapism, fills time and provides new stimulations, however variety away from electronic screens is just as important. Think about listening to music, reading books or reading them aloud to each other, put on theatrical performances, engage in rambling theoretical arguments, play card games, cook new foods, engage on other creative pursuits and hobbies, and keep active. If external stimuli are limited, shift the focus to internal techniques such as yoga, self-talk, mindfulness, visualisation, breathing practices or meditation may well be helpful. It is all about activating the different parts of the brain, doing something novel or new, and experiencing the unexpected. This will counteract the feelings of monotony, boredom and reduce stressful feelings.

2.5 ABANDONED – When you are lonely you may well feel abandoned, stress, anxiety or depression. Try talking about your feelings to a friend, close family member, health professional, counsellor or Samaritans. Consider joining a group or class if that is possible, even if it is an on-line one where you first go and just watch if you're feeling nervous. Consider getting outside and visiting places, or getting peer support. How to be happier consists of managing your stress levels, enjoying yourself, taking opportunities to boost your self-esteem, having a healthy lifestyle (limiting alcohol, choosing a well-balanced diet, doing some exercise, getting enough sleep, talking and sharing, building up your resilience). Don't try to achieve everything at once; set small achievable targets and focus on the things you can change. Don't compare yourself to others, as we are all different and social media only shows what people are willing to share, not real life. Try not to tell yourself you're alone, as many people will feel lonely at some point in their life and support is available. Don't use alcohol, cigarettes, gambling or drugs to attempt to relieve loneliness; these can all contribute to further loneliness and poorer mental and physical health.

2.6 AUTONOMY – As confinement continues you will experience feelings of low mood and motivation will ebb and flow, so you will cycle between good days and bad days. Motivation is made up of three critical elements. The first is having or finding a sense of purpose and passion, whether this is to use this free time more productively either to get fitter, lose weight or complete a project, course or learn a new skill, all these methods help to keep spirits up during isolation. The second is having the power of autonomy to do what you want to do your way. This contributes to reinforcing self-efficacy where one is able to better cope with the changes and demands faced. Achieving little wins could be celebrated amongst your trusted social support network, have a celebratory meal, milestone or event to foster a sense of camaraderie and togetherness, and with modern technology this can easily be done via video links. The third element is associated with mastery. The ability to acknowledging progress and focusing on small achievements to help foster a sense of competence, getting better at a task over time and moving towards a goal-directed pursuit by dedicating focused time can help keep spirits up and provide a great sense of internal satisfaction of doing something of value and importance. It will be important to keep a journal, as this helps keep track of progress, provides a way of processing your thoughts, frustrations, worries and can

offer a cathartic route to express your feelings. It is an ideal way of creating a sense of order in what otherwise may feel like a chaotic time.

2.7 ACCEPT – Being in isolation for long periods of time can be very stressful, so it is important to be able to tolerate others and tolerate yourself during this difficult time. To reduce episodes of conflict and argument that are highly likely to occur in difficult times and are propagated by the smallest of events, you will need to practice self-restraint, identify an area of personal space that you can move to, having open and honest conversations about why situations are irritating and what can be done to resolve them before they escalate, and establishing ground rules so everyone know what they should be doing. Accept that not all contact with people will be beneficial and sometimes it can have negative impacts, so consider some type of expectation management and letting people know when they can expect contact and when it occurs and how it occurs. Conversation content can have adverse impacts so agree in advance what can be discussed and what you would not like to discuss. Using technology there is now a mute option that allows you to be in more control in terms of what is seen and heard.

2.8 ADVANCED – Not everything is immediately solvable and there may require either creative or specialist help needed to address issues such as occupying children, dealing with financial hardship or issues associated with domestic abuse. Don't sit on these issues, because they only get bigger, so seek independent advice and help as soon as you are struggling or are affected.

2.9 APPROACH – Experience for people who have been to prison has recorded that some prisoners deliberately take a different approach to dealing with challenging emotional situations by going on 'virtual walks'. They sit down in a quiet place, close their eyes and relive routes, locations, events and experiences that re-recreate positive memories and feelings. The approach of engaging in 'virtual walks' to a happier past or future is directly applicable to people today who are struggling with their own temporary coronavirus confinement. Also, remember that to help battle the mundane, it is vital to get up early, do some focused work that you can control such as read a book or write, not only to help keep focused and motivated, but also so that you are tired by the evening and can get a good night's sleep. Getting a good night's sleep should not be underestimated, as it can set up in the right mood for the next day.

2.10 ASLEEP – Follow a regular sleep schedule if you can and avoid napping if the late afternoon or evening if you can. Hopefully you will have done some exercise to make your body tired ideally outside and also done some focused mental activities to make your mind tired during the day. Develop a bedtime routine, to start telling your mind that you are preparing to go to sleep. Don't eat too late, avoid drinking alcohol or caffeine as you approach your sleep schedule, because they can still be active in your body and you could find it difficult to get to sleep. De-stress, relax and clear your mind, avoid looking at the TV or electronic devices (Blue Light) before you start going into your sleep schedule. Make sure your bed, mattress and pillow are comfortable, the room is at the right temperature, and if necessary take a relaxing bath or shower. Get a bed topper to make it more comfortable, and have a summer and winter bed set, to deal with the different environment temperatures. Although hydration is vital to your health, avoid drinking any liquids between one and two hours before

your go to bed, otherwise you may suffer excessive urination during the night that will affect your sleep quality and daytime energy. Sleep has the ability to calm you down, de-stress you, it is an opportunity to flush your brain of all those used hormones and replace them with new hormones ready for the next day. Try to wake up at consistent times, so your body's circadian rhythm functions on a set loop, that is also aligned with sunrise and sunset. Sleep plays a critical role in your overall health.

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