



STORIES FROM THE THERAPY ROOM

Covid times - Facing our mortality and the impermanence of life whilst finding hope and compassion for the future

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At the end of March, Covid-19 left us stranded in the 'The Great Pause'. Our homes became our desert islands: a delicate balance between comfort and loneliness (or chaos, depending on who you share your house with!).

This virus has challenged our sense of safety at a fundamental level. Our patience, humanity and tolerance for uncertainty tested. Weeks of lockdown has brought about stress in many areas of life whilst taking away our social buffer. The lives so many of us took for granted we now mourn, together but alone. Without our social support networks, we may be left feeling like we are driving down a never-ending bumpy road without suspension. The two-dimensional social world we have unwillingly entered may feel emotionally depriving and physically exhausting.

The loss to human lives and livelihoods is tragic. As we cautiously move out of lockdown, the fog of confusion has left many of us feeling numb and exhausted. The reality that we are in it for the long haul is beginning to sink in. The foreseeable future will be one of compromise as the virus will demand an adjustment to a new kind of normal in the absence of effective treatments or vaccine.

We are in the thick of a collective unease: a direct factor of the scale of this threat and our perceived ability to cope.

As there appears to be a slow shift from government directive towards individual responsibility, many of us are left feeling paralysed in our ability to navigate ordinary day-to-day decisions. Do we go back to work? Send our kids to school? Use public transport? The parameters are complex, and the answers far from clear-cut. Balancing competing needs is exhausting psychologically. The pandemic has challenged our previously 'taken for granted' assumptions about the world and our safety in it – now it can feel as though every simple decision has to be taken from scratch.

Where do we go from here? As with any major change or loss, we cycle through complex emotions as part of the process of adjustment. Can we find the courage to look inward and acknowledge what is staring us in the face, for this pandemic has merely lifted the veil of comfort that shielded us from our fragility? We are confronted with our mortality and the impermanence of all aspects of life. An uncomfortable truth perhaps. But as there is no comfort in pain and there is also no growth in comfort. Having our social lives suspended has given us a once in a lifetime opportunity to step back from the relentless eat, sleep, work, repeat treadmill that has left us depleted. To see and own our vulnerability is humbling. It connects us to a common humanity and can pave the way for greater self-compassion and psychological growth. It has made space for review and choice.

Please go to our website www.pocketfamilypsychologist.com for additional family resources.

As with any transformation we can choose to accept the gifts they present. Pain and suffering can leave fertile ground from which to grow more compassionate versions of ourselves. In the words of someone who knew great suffering and compassion:

“Our human compassion binds us the one to the other - not in pity or patronizingly, but as human beings who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future.”

- Nelson Mandela

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