

It's Normal to Feel Like This...



COVID-19 - A Guide for Young People

*There is so much information out there about how we should cope with what's going on in the world right now. But there's not as much about how we might be **feeling** right now. Yet it's hard to know what we should do to cope if we don't really understand how we're feeling.*

So how do we make sense of it ...?

First things first...

We are living through a **global pandemic** which up until a short time ago, was not something we had really ever thought about.

And this global pandemic is a big threat to all of us...

Every day the stories and stats on the news are hard to take in...

At the same time, we are stuck at home – without being able to see friends and spend time with people who might make us feel better:-

Plans that we had for the summer and the year ahead, like exams, and leavers' parties and proms, and holidays – all the things we might have been working towards - have all vanished.... just like that...

And we don't know when things will get back to normal.. Or what the new normal will be like...

So we're in a weird state of limbo - with a lot of uncertainty - and human beings don't like uncertainty.



Yet at the same time, people seem to be acting like it is no big deal – that staying in our house isn't a big ask

But it is a **big ask** – and a – a global pandemic is a big threat.

It can be easy to think '*I shouldn't be upset because others are worse off than me*', but this doesn't always make us feel better.



It's important to remember that our feelings are **valid** and that all the changes we are having to make are a **big deal**.

So even if we aren't directly affected by it – it's still having a **big impact** on how we feel.

So how does our brain react?

When we experience threats or a crisis, our brain is pre-programmed to act in a certain way. When cavemen saw a mammoth when they were out hunting, their brain would flip into survival mode. And this still happens to our brains today.

The front part of our brain – the part where we do all our thinking and planning and organising – kind of shuts down:-

And it's the bit of the brain further back that goes off like a red alarm.



It goes into survival mode. It was programmed like that, to help us survive...

And when we go into survival mode, the thinking part of our brain doesn't work properly – which means it's difficult to think rationally or plan things or organise our thoughts as well as we usually do.

Stress hormones are released into our blood that make our body ready to react. These changes help us to **FIGHT** or **FREEZE**, or **RUN AWAY**. Just like you see on wildlife programmes when animals are being chased by a lion; some fight back; some freeze and act dead; and some try to run away.

And like animals, we all respond differently to threats depending upon the size of the threat, or who is there to help us to deal with the threat.



So how does this affect how we feel?

We might feel calm one minute, and then overwhelmed the next.

We might just feel numb and want to retreat

We might feel more stressed and alert – ‘hypervigilant’ – like a meerkat in a zoo standing up and looking out to check what’s going to happen next



We might feel a bit sick

We might feel angry and small things may make us want to just lose it

It might bring back lots of other feelings that remind us of other stressful times and times when we experienced loss or difficult change

And it might make the stress we were feeling even harder to manage

And we might feel all of these things in any one day

It can be a real a rollercoaster ride.



So how does this affect how we act?

We might talk faster or find it hard to sit down

We might get into arguments more easily -especially when we are stuck at home with our family all day

We might just want to sleep more and avoid talking to people

We might try and lose ourselves in the internet

And like our feelings, how we behave can change from one day to another - from one hour to the next - like a wave - coming and going



If you are feeling or acting like this, you are a completely **normal**, fully functioning human being. Our brains and bodies were programmed to react in this way. Its part of what makes us human.

So how we are feeling and how we are acting is all NORMAL.

The first step is recognising this and being aware of how we are feeling and what is making us feel like this.

Once we make sense of how we are feeling and understanding that it is normal, it can be easier to work out what and who can makes us feel better and help

This can make things a little be more manageable.

But remember, we are **all** feeling and acting out of sorts too. Take comfort in this fact.



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