



Mental Health Training by Mental Health Professionals
www.getmentalhealth.co.uk

Conference Presentation Notes June 2021

Post Covid – Our Mental Health & Personal Resilience

Covid19 has changed our lives

Change and transition points are always a potential risk to mental health and certain changes will affect some of us more than others

The Covid 19 pandemic has created some specific related risks to mental health & wellbeing

- lack of control
- threat, feeling unsafe
- feeling trapped/confined
- strained relationships
- isolation
- job insecurity
- bereavement
- lack of social contact & support

This is not an exhaustive list but the overall effect for many people has been to challenge our sense of wellbeing and our personal resilience. Many studies are showing significant results in terms of the increase in experiences of poor mental health.

Back to Normal & Back into Work

A study of 1,000 employees currently working from home found -
67% would feel uncomfortable about going back into their workplace full time.
56% feel significantly anxious at the thought of being back in the office

The main identified anxieties;

- Contamination, lack of cleanliness
- Commuting (51 per cent)
- Less flexible working (43 per cent)
- Social distancing not being taken seriously (42 per cent)

We have become sensitised to social contact and fearful of illness and contamination

When sensitised and increasingly anxious about any stimuli our natural reaction is to escape and avoid, however the more we do this the more fearful we become.

Anxiety is always reinforced and maintained by avoidance.

The key to our readjustment to being back at work and back in normal contact with others is how we manage our anxieties to enable us to gradually desensitise to the discomfort.

Our **personal resilience** defines how we cope

©All rights reserved. Get Mental Health Training

Disclaimer. The information provided in this pack is written as a resource and reference for those attending the training course. It is not intended and should not be used as a substitute for professional mental health advice

Resilience

There are many definitions of resilience and many models for examining and building up our personal ability to become more resilience, but they all share a common belief that resilience can be learned. It is a skill not an inherent characteristic. However, as resilience grows the key ability or characteristic which is developed is a sense of personal control particularly over how we respond.

“The central characteristic of a resilient person is the ability to maintain personal control (of one’s mind) in the face of challenging or adverse events.”

Prof Derek Mowbray

The key protective factors at times of stress are a degree of **control** and a degree of **hope**.

We all have the capacity to improve our resilience. The main challenge is that this always involves making changes. Every one of us has habitual patterns of behaviour and responses. At times of increased pressure, we often ‘revert to type’ dealing with things in ways that are not always helpful.

Challenging these existing habits, beliefs and patterns that currently limit our flexibility is the key factor in any model aimed at increasing resilience.

Resilience = personal control

Here we will focus on some central elements, key to increasing our sense of personal control. This personal control is what enables us to challenge avoidance and deal with the stressors (in this case, the anxiety related to post covid social contact) more effectively.

Influencing our stress levels and increasing resilience involves **4 key elements**

- Increasing self-awareness
- Care of our body
- Care of our mind
- Managing tasks and demands

Increasing self-awareness

Improving resilience starts with actively taking notice or self-monitoring. We need to identify our personal signs and reactions when stressed. Knowledge is power. If we do not take stock, we really do not have a starting point.

Ask yourself what your first signs of significant stress levels are and monitor these. Maybe keep a diary. We all respond differently but common signs may be;

- headaches or dizziness
- muscle tension or pain
- stomach problems
- chest pain or a faster heartbeat
- sexual problems
- difficulty concentrating
- struggling to make decisions
- feeling overwhelmed
- constantly worrying
- being forgetful

©All rights reserved. Get Mental Health Training

Disclaimer. The information provided in this pack is written as a resource and reference for those attending the training course. It is not intended and should not be used as a substitute for professional mental health advice

- being irritable and snappy
- sleeping too much or too little
- eating too much or too little
- avoiding certain places or people
- drinking or smoking more

Most adults exhibit several of these at any given time but if the signs are increasing in number or severity we need to notice and listen to what our body and mind are saying.

Another important area to note is our perceptions of the world around us. At times of strain, we often experience changes in our thinking and perceptions, **cognitive distortions** such as;

- Catastrophising - Assuming the worst
- Compare and despair - Seeing positives in others and the negatives in ourselves
- Emotional Reasoning - I feel bad so it must be bad!
- Judgements - Jumping to conclusions with little evidence
- Mind-Reading - Assuming we know what others think

Again here, we need to recognise our individual patterns.

Recognising them allows us to check and challenge our negative assumptions which, when examined are often not based in reality.

Control the care of your body

Eat well

Stress causes an increase in blood sugar followed by a drop. Eating well can counteract this

- Avoid refined foods and sugar
- Never skip meals.
- Prioritise protein

Start the day with breakfast

Exercise - Elevates mood

Boosts self esteem, concentration, sleep and mental health

Avoid Self-Medicating

Self-medicating increases at times of stress

- **Alcohol** – a depressant, lowers mood, increases impulsivity, is highly addictive
- **Caffeine** – a stimulant, mimics the effects of adrenalin, increasing the sensations of anxiety
-

Prioritise your sleep & rest

Sleep disturbance is common and undermines physical and mental health

Prioritise your rest actively:

- Wind down time 30 mins, no screens!
- Check your sleep space, restful, quiet, temperature etc.
- Avoid caffeine, heavy meals, exercise for at least 2 hours before bed
- Empty your mind – lists for tomorrow
- Try mindfulness, relaxation, meditation

©All rights reserved. Get Mental Health Training

Disclaimer. The information provided in this pack is written as a resource and reference for those attending the training course. It is not intended and should not be used as a substitute for professional mental health advice

Control the Care of your mind

- Monitor your stress levels
- Seek support/ask for help
- Connect, make time for friends and family
- Limit exposure to negative/overwhelming news
- Make time for hobbies and things you enjoy
- Learn something new
- Care for others
- Be mindful

Control the management of tasks and demands

It is extremely easy, when we are stressed, to lose sight of our own priorities for our day. Time has a way of slipping away as our thinking and performance are affected by the demands we experience. So, it becomes really important to find effective ways that work for you, to stay on track and to manage the time you have available.

One useful element is to top and tail each day. Take a few moments at the start of the day to consciously think about what that day may contain and what your priorities are. All best laid plans however can go awry so it is equally important to take a little time at the end of the day to think about what went well, what remains to be added to tomorrow's tasks and to put your day to bed, clearing your mind for rest and sleep.

A few other useful areas to consider are:

- Organisation and list making
- Begin the day with one significant task
- Prioritise & make active choices
- Manage your time (Learn to say no)
- Get to know your own de-railers
- Keep sight of the tasks or goals
- Communicate and understand expectations
- Avoid unnecessary conflict
- Take breaks (you will be more productive)
-

A last Word on Hope

Increasing our sense of hope is an important factor for our personal sense of resilience. When we feel stuck or overwhelmed it is helpful to remind ourselves that everything changes and moves on. What we are experiencing now will not last forever.

Our memories, hopes and dreams help to project us out of the current situation. They are protective but easy to lose sight of so, we need to nurture them at times of stress and strain.

Try spending a little time thinking actively about your hopes for the future. What are your goals and dreams? Whether they are realistic or likely to come true is not the main focus. Just having them and thinking about them is what is protective to our mental health.

©All rights reserved. Get Mental Health Training

Disclaimer. The information provided in this pack is written as a resource and reference for those attending the training course. It is not intended and should not be used as a substitute for professional mental health advice

Also, actively remembering the good times can be really helpful. Try separating out the photos on your phone which make you smile. Pop them into a separate folder of special moments. This can be any moment at all, big or small but what matters is that it brings back a sense of perspective and a smile!

Increasing our own sense of personal resilience is an active process. Like improving any skill, it takes time and practice. Take stock, decide, make a start step by step and remember....

'if we change nothing, nothing will change!'

For further information, resources and details of all training and consultancy please visit www.getmentalhealth.co.uk



Mental Health Training by mental Health Professionals
www.getmentalhealth.co.uk

©All rights reserved. Get Mental Health Training

Disclaimer. The information provided in this pack is written as a resource and reference for those attending the training course. It is not intended and should not be used as a substitute for professional mental health advice