MENTAL HEALTH THERMOMETER

Questions. Questions. And More Questions. Who Has the Answers?

I have them. And you have them too! Questions. Many questions without answers. Will the COVID cases keep going up? Am I likely to be infected? When will the office reopen? When will kids go back to school? For how long are we going to be in this lockdown? Is my job secure? When will life go back to ‘normal’?

We have been living in a world where strategic thinking and planning has been highly valued. The mantra has been ‘let’s not just read the future, let’s create the future!’ Enter COVID-19 and all plans were put in disarray. The pandemic has brought a lot of uncertainty, vagueness and ambiguity.

Uncertainty is seen as having incomplete information or knowledge about a situation or lack of prediction of how things will work out. Some people have high levels of intolerance for ambiguity, but all of us want some degree of predictability and control. To the mind, sometimes uncertainty is equated to risk or danger. When this happens, anxiety creeps in and this could trigger a wide variety of feelings endangering our mental wellness and capacity to cope with the circumstances.

When not managed, uncertainty feeds our worry, fear, and anxiety. Moreover, uncertainty in some circumstances may trigger acute stress. For instance, for someone living away from home, with limited inter-country travels, the uncertainty of when the borders will reopen so as to allow them reconnect physically with their family members, can lead to acute stress. Or, local restrictions of movements from one county to another in a situation where families are separated, the uncertainty of when the ban will be lifted, may make them more prone to low mood, negative or down feelings and anxiety. The news we hear every day does not help either – massive layoffs, salary cuts, businesses making losses or closing all together, conflicting information on how to deal with Covid-19, and economic meltdown in some countries. Uncertainty constitutes a stressful condition that arouses a stress response, and ultimately it may contribute to ill health.

Without proper intervention, unhealthy ways of coping with uncertainty can easily be embraced.

Reflection: Are you finding yourself in deep thoughts looking for answers of things you are not in control of? Are you finding yourself having a lot of anger due to the current uncertainty? Might you be inadvertently using alcohol more or relying on drug-induced ‘highs’? Perhaps you realize you are tending to lash out at others more; or your sleep pattern has been affected lately? How are your eating habits? What has changed in your ‘normal’ routines in life? These could be indicators of underlying stress. Check yourself against the following telltale signs:

How do you know that uncertainty stress could be taking toll on you?

- Anxiety
- High consumption of media
- Obsessive thoughts about the “worst happening”
- High consumption of alcohol and substance abuse
How do I deal with uncertainty?

- Prepare for different possibilities or scenarios
- Identify your feelings, validate, and work on them— for example, identify and accept that you are worried; and then find out what is triggering the ‘worry’. What can you do differently about the thing that is causing the worry?
- Identify what you are in control of and what is beyond your control. Focus on what you can ‘fix’ and free your mind from the obsession of things you are not in control of; even as you remain hopeful that things will change.
- Incorporate stress reduction techniques like exercises, meditation, relaxation, and support system, amongst others.

We are here to support you. No matter how small the matter may feel at the moment, you can keep it from escalating by having a supportive conversation. Call 0793-484-333/ 0728 961 939

“Your perspective is the most powerful thing you can control in a situation that is beyond your control. Yes, these disruptions are scary, but fear, panic, and worry are not preparation. They add insult to injury—another layer of stress that can compromise the immune system and paradoxically make us even more vulnerable to the virus,” Bryan Robinson (Forbes.com 2020)