

## Isolation and Mental Health

For the past week, I have been trying to make myself sit down and write something about what's been going on, about social distancing, isolation and as of the other night 'lockdown'. At the moment in the UK we have fallen behind other European countries and as relieved as I was to hear the Government finally imposing social restrictions, I, like many across the nation felt a pit in my stomach. I don't know what to say, no one does. No one knows what's going on, the government doesn't know what's going to happen and we have been propelled into the unknown. The situation is changing daily and today I found myself questioning how many laps of my garden is 10,000 steps; something that sounds absurd but with everything could soon be a reality. Right now I am feeling ok, the nation seems to be banding together, with daily group chats on the houseparty app, Netflix streaming parties and live streams. I have a better social life now than I have had over the past few months. This is a good thing and it needs to continue, but I fear that the longer we find ourselves in this situation, the more disgruntled people will become. I've already had a friend tell me that they're learning how to make bulletproof vests and planning their doomsday bag and another who suggested that if the apocalypse does erupt, I am welcome to join his clan. Jokes aside, the cracks are appearing and people are if they weren't already becoming increasingly concerned and scared. If what the experts say is true, this is the calm before the storm and I hope we can keep morale high. I don't want to play down what's going on, but I don't know enough to make a rational, calculated statement on it. For rational, calculated opinions I always look to my Dad and right now even he is at a loss so I am going to talk about something I do know about.

I, like much of the population, suffer with my mental health, only fighting my way out of a depressive episode at the beginning of this month with two new jobs and a planned trip to Canada, all of which I now no longer have. To dwell on personal losses in the face of a global pandemic seems trivial considering, but I won't be the only one in this position and I don't think the effect these losses will have on people's mental health should go by unnoted. This is a triggering and anxiety inducing time and the last thing that's going to help would be me sitting here and telling you all the things you could/should be doing right now to deal with this. At the moment we are all grieving, we have lost the life we know and are uncertain as to when or whether things will ever go back to 'normal', well normal for the majority of us in the western world. I don't know about you but over the past week, I have felt patronised by many of the militant like 'quarantine routine's' emerging on social media. Each to their own, but if all you feel like doing right now is watching Netflix, do it. If all you want to do is lie in bed, do it. At the moment we are all struggling and the best way to deal with it is in the healthiest way for you, emphasis on the HEALTHIEST and bare in mind a daily glass of wine is recommended by the doctors. The healthiest thing to do right now is to not compare your coping strategies to others, it's about creating a balanced life that suits you and to remember that people find comfort and happiness in different things. Like my mum who will be rearranging the furniture in our house for the foreseeable future and myself who is going to take this time to decorate my room into the witches den I have always dreamed of.

One thing I learnt whilst being unemployed, much to my dismay, is that people need routine and order. They need to feel as though they have a purpose to get up and out of bed, whether it's work, to meet friends or to go somewhere. Lockdown for those who are unable to work from home, who have been made redundant, who are unwell or unemployed is incredibly daunting. As we face the longevity of this way of life we have to work to find

distractions, listen to podcasts, watch tv, make art, explore new music, do anything, keep our hands and minds moving. For some this time will come as the respite they have so desperately been craving, for others the lack of routine will send them through the existential ringer but for most, I think this time will be full of uncertainty and anxiety. Which is why now is a time to check in, check in on those who you know suffer and will be struggling in the next few weeks/months. Catch up with people you have lost contact with, call your loved ones, family and teach your Grandma how to use facetime. If you are in a position to do so donate to food banks, charity, check in with your elderly neighbours and volunteer for the NHS/at local hospitals. It is more important than it has ever been to reach out and if you are struggling know that you are definitely not alone, none of us are alone in this. Humans are social and adaptable creatures and if we connect and take it day by day we will get through this.