



ASK AMANDA JAYNE

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Stepping away

In a specially extended mental health column this month, west Norfolk based psychotherapist and counsellor **Amanda Jane** offers her insight into the anxieties many people are feeling at present and her advice for dealing with them.

We are all being asked to step away from each other for the foreseeable future. The main implication being social isolation. We are social creatures and we need human interaction. So this is going to be hard.

When I was thinking about what to write this month, I considered that we have been saturated with news and social media outrage on the impact of the coronavirus.

So I wanted to just step back a bit and think about how this makes us react. One of the ways I have been able to get different perspective is to observe how I react.

You know when you look at a great masterpiece in a gallery? If you stand too close to it you can see a splodge of red there, a flick of green there, but it isn't until you stand right back and look from the other side of the room that the big picture emerges.

To be frank, I have been shocked at the range of emotions I have experienced and witnessed in others, as we scared human beings are placed under great and sudden pressure the likes of which we have never experienced before.

So, I have been scared: scared of dying, and scared of losing someone I love; scared of being out of control of my future; feeling helpless and at the mercy of the seemingly heartless, vile, relentless virus which is racing through the world threatening to destroy us all. I have been scared of losing my business, my house, and our way of life.

I've been angry. Furious at the

people who have been wandering around dismissing it as media scaremongering and acting as if they are on holiday and there is nothing to worry about. I have heard myself ranting like a mad person about the selfishness of the panic buyers and day trippers invading my seaside town and potentially spreading germs. I have experienced the prejudice of immigration on a smaller scale – I wanted them to go home and get out of my town so I could feel safer.

I have been frustrated. Frustrated by the government, by them not knowing how it will end or what will happen, and of a lack of clear direction as they themselves try to establish risks and gather facts. Frustrated by cancelled holidays and trips with my son, concerts with my friends, contact with my friends and family.

Frustrated with not being able to provide any real authentic reassurance to my clients. Frustrated by the way people over 70 have been treated like they are stupid or incapable, albeit for all good, caring reasons. They have been around on this Earth for a long time, so they are wiser than most of the people dishing out the 'caring' advice. And I'm not sure how you deliver that without sounding utterly patronising, especially to some people who have been through a World War.

I have felt panic. So many times I have almost run to the supermarket to shove someone out of the way while I get as much food as I can for me and my son in ►



order to survive. I have felt the urge to do it and I have fought it (but not before buying some powdered milk, and lots of tins of beans and soup ... just in case).

Panic, if somebody coughs nearby or sneezes or sniffs. I have wanted to shout at them: "Go home! Are you stupid? Are you trying to kill us all?"

“It is so important for us all to try to stay calm; don’t feed the monster.”

I have felt the strong maternal pull of wanting my grown-up son home where I can keep him safe, and felt panic that he may not fully understand the risks and inadvertently be putting himself and others in danger.

I have felt sadness, upset and despair at the tragedy unfolding for some families as they lose someone they love; at the whole world going through this and life as we know it changing. Back around full circle to being scared again.

I’ve rationalised that the survival instinct is real and strong and unstoppable. If I had a big family and I was worried that I couldn’t feed them, I would not let a single person get in my way of protecting them. Whether I was having to move country to do it or needing to shove someone out of the way to get the last bit of food in my local Tesco.

It is how we are and when we look at the big picture, we can look at why sometimes people are behaving in a selfish, irrational way. We get scared. Our fight or flight instinct kicks in and often there isn’t a single thing we can do about it. Emotions aren’t rational.

Change. It’s a sure thing, it is also something we are good at, however unwelcome. It is the inevitable circle of life.

So we have to endure. We are going to have to go through it. Just like we have all gone through those emotions. We are allowed to and we must.

We had two World Wars. People who went through those times often talk fondly about how it was to live through. They often laugh and say what a great time it was, which seems difficult to understand given the horrific amount of death and destruction it caused.



However, it is because even in the darkest times, all together humanity wins. I have noticed people being friendly and helpful to each other, more so than usual. Local shopkeepers being helpful and reassuring, and neighbours who would never normally talk chatter over the garden fence about the “terrible worry” of it all.

Random acts of kindness are happening everywhere.

In my town, Hunstanton in west Norfolk, there are groups of people shopping for the housebound. There is a group who go out into town in the evening and clean it, the local businesses providing cleaning products to help.

On the local area Facebook group there are countless offers of help to vulnerable people. My friends and I are video-calling instead of our usual night out. The online community is growing and becoming our social outlet. DJs are streaming live and free Saturday nights in. We are shopping and working and talking online more and more.



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Outside the flowers are blooming, nature is carrying on regardless and, as everything does, this too shall pass.

“Even in the darkest times, all together humanity wins.”

I had a thought about after this all is over and when we can once again see family; hug each other; enjoy concerts and theatre and cinema and holidays; go to parties and have barbecues in the sun; chat; look at nature, walk in it together once again.

When that happens we will be so sick of staring at a phone or computer screen, so starved of human contact in a restricted and frugal way, that stuff will cease to be so important, and social media

will be something we are well and truly sick of.

We will long to be together.

Then we will be open and able and fully appreciative of the simple pleasures in life, like kissing a loved one; spending time with friends and family; laughing; hugging; having fun. And that we might just be cleansed and rid of what was increasingly becoming an online social media insular, fake and unhealthy way of living through computers and phones.

Ultimately that we will kill the on screen virus that has been growing surreptitiously and greedily over the past decade, infecting our young and impressionable and blinding them to the real beauty of the world.

Stress and anxiety can be the result of all of the above emotions that I have experienced. This is impacted on even a cellular level. Therefore it is so important for us all to try to stay calm; don't feed the monster; reduce your news consumption; step into the garden and look at the flowers; be kind.

Let the emotions in, experience them, let them go and get yourself back into the now.

Dr Wayne Dyer talks about imagining the outcome you want, as if you already have it. He says that if you do that, the universe will provide. If there is a collective consciousness, maybe we can all imagine we are already through and out the other side of this and enjoying great times and simple pleasures with the family once again in a way that we had forgotten how to do.

Maybe together, we can make it happen. **LT**



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