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Bereavement – Our Own and Others

This is something that we all unfortunately have to deal with at some point in our lives.

It is probably best described as a time to adjust to the loss of a friend or family member.

Contrary to popular belief, there is no standard timeframe - it can be anything from three months to many years. It is a natural process and important for remembering the connection with the person.

There is no right or wrong way to feel. Some of us will appear outwardly emotional and cry easily while others will grieve internally and not cry at all. Not judging people helps with the journey that they are on.

We each deal with emotions differently and everyone has to cope with it in their own way. These emotions can manifest themselves in a range of unexpected circumstances. Sometimes we are shocked and upset by our changing and powerful emotions. Understanding that these feelings are normal can go some way to help.

Looking at it practically our lives change dramatically. For some, it may mean having less money; for some, having to eat, sleep, and function alone for the first time, and for others, having to deal with household tasks that have never been attempted before.

Bereavement can also stir up memories of other losses that we may have thought we had dealt with before to the surface. It can highlight the fact of how deeply affected we were at the time. These memories can be of unhappy times and can be deeply distressing. Sometimes we need to deal with these feelings as well and it makes our lives seem even more in turmoil.

It is recognised that there are five stages of grief that we experience. We may not all experience them in a set order. Understanding the stages and using them as a guide helps us to evaluate where we are and why we feel these things.

Denial and isolation. Our first reaction when hearing of a death is usually to deny the reality. It is our defence mechanism that buffers the shock. It can help us block out the words and hide the facts. It is generally a temporary response that carries us through the first wave of shock and pain that seems to engulf us.

Anger. As this temporary denial block begins to wear thin the reality and pain pushes through. The intense emotion is difficult to deal with and one of the ways we deal with it to express it as anger. This can be aimed in all directions from objects, strangers, family, and, in some cases, the deceased person. Rationally we all know that the person or the object, stranger or family member cannot be blamed, but emotionally we may resent them for causing us pain and that in turn makes us feel even angrier.

Bargaining. This is a normal reaction to helplessness and brings the feeling of the need to gain control. It generally manifests itself with the 'if only....' questions.

Depression. This is the reaction to the practical implications: Sadness and regret; worry about the cost implications of the funeral; that we may not have spent enough time with others that may depend on us to be *strong*. It is also the quiet preparation that we have to do to bid the person goodbye.

Acceptance. Simply when we are able to make our own peace, often shown by a withdrawal and calmness.

Helping ourselves at these times is important.

Friends can get uncomfortable around grief and one of two things can happen. They may visit and try to make us feel better, or they may stay away. They are not staying away because they don't want to help but it's just that they don't know what to say. This can be said for anyone, the thought of not knowing what to say is worse than actually saying something.

- Making sure that we look after ourselves is paramount. Make sure we eat something, go out for a walk, go to the cinema, go out for a coffee.

- Try and see the things that are around us. Visit a favourite place, taste our favourite food.
- Being altruistic can help us to move on; volunteering for something, joining a club taking up a sport or hobby. This may seem harsh but it can be a way of healing.

Helping others at this time is equally important.

Instead of: "Don't shy away from people who are grieving."

How about: People who are grieving need their friends and family to show they care. It is a comfort to know other people are around, and it provides Gestalt in their lives after the loss of a close individual.

1. Make the time and have the courage to visit the bereaved person. You don't need to say anything special, a hug says a lot and conveys huge amounts of feelings. Remember, the bereaved person feels worse than you do.
2. It is okay to cry or ask them about the person. Talking is sometimes the best form of therapy.
3. You can talk about the good times and the fun times and you can show them pictures. Just because the person is dead doesn't mean that they are forgotten. They will always be there in our thoughts and memories.
4. As well as visiting, take time to ring, or send them a card to show them that you care and are thinking of them. Sometimes it is easier to handwrite our genuine feelings. Cards are also mementoes which can help the healing process.
5. Remember that a bereaved person doesn't just get over the person's loss after the funeral. When the phone calls have stopped after a few months this may be the time your support is most appreciated. So take time to visit, make the phone call, or suggest going out for a coffee to chat.
6. Whether you are a friend of the deceased or the bereaved person, perhaps a rule of thumb should be make time to allow yourself to feel the memories. Let the tears roll down, it will help the tension and irritability melt away and the empathy and compassion to shine through.

Dementia

Unfortunately, the chances are that you or someone you know, will suffer from dementia. It alters the lives of everyone who is in contact with them. There are perhaps four statements that we should take into account that will assist in the transition and help make it a little easier:-

- 1 The only difference between the person with Dementia today and the person you knew before is a single disability. This is because they can no longer store new information efficiently.
- 2 It's okay to make mistakes – no-one gets it right all the time. There is no such thing as the 'standard' person. Don't be too hard on yourself, the rush of feelings you will experience are natural, and trying to find where these feelings come from will enable you to move forward. Realising that you are not alone in experiencing these feelings will help you to develop a more positive attitude and will allow you to be more forgiving of yourself.
- 3 Dementia is nothing to be ashamed of it is no-one's fault.
- 4 Every individual will react to the experiences of dementia in their own way as it means different things to different people.

As we grow and learn our brain stores experiences which can be likened to sets of photographs and videos, containing both fact (that they have actually happened), and feelings, (that we remember being associated with them). We have held these clips for a long period of time and they have become established in our long term memory. This could be a certain smell that will trigger memories and feelings of when we first smelt it.

When Dementia begins and the brain starts to deteriorate, it finds that as we experience happenings in our current life, (our short term memory), it cannot store the factual content (it refuses to register it) hence it is only left with the feeling. These *fact free* happenings are blank. As they increase, the person finds themselves with more and more blanks as crucial facts are missing. The facts have not been forgotten; the brain

simply cannot retrieve something (the facts) it has not stored in the first place. There can be no process of remembering if the information has not been stored in the first place. However, memories of a long time ago remain largely undamaged and intact and stay with us the longest.

Therefore, to summarise, Dementia affects the person's thinking, reasoning, behaviour and memory but their feelings remain intact. They may remember the distant past more clearly than recent events and they are generally happy to talk about these memories.

Dementia can also have a big impact on a person's behaviour. Each person will handle things in their own way but there are many things that we can do to help the person, and ourselves, which will help ease the trauma of the illness.

When a person with Dementia finds that their mental abilities are declining they often feel vulnerable and in need of support. They need to feel respected and valued for who they are now, as well as who they were in the past.

As many sufferers have a fragile sense of self-worth, it is important to continue to treat them with courtesy, however advanced the Dementia may be:-

- People with Dementia can find choice confusing so keep it simple. Don't ask complicated questions, try to ask so they only have to say "Yes" or "No."
- Always agree with everything they say, try not to interrupt them.
- Try to be flexible and tolerant.
- Make time to listen and have regular chats and enjoy being with the person.
- Find things to do with the person, like creating a life history book. This can be particularly helpful as the Dementia becomes more advanced; it can become a focal point for them and for you. Photos of family, friends past and present, their home in years gone by and as it is now. Anything that can ground them to a particular point.

- Be aware of how you address the person because their sense of who we are is closely connected to their name.
- Be kind and reassuring.
- Try not to talk down to them. Never talk over their heads as if they are not there, and if you're talking about them try to include them in the conversation.
- Never scold or criticise them.
- Try to understand how the person feels.
- Don't brush their worries aside however painful or insignificant they might be.
- When helping someone try to explain what you are doing and why.
- Give plenty of encouragement - let them do things at their own pace.
- Accept what they are saying, the accuracy of the information is really not as important as to what they are trying to express.

In addition to helping the person, we must also look after ourselves and understand the changes that we will go through. When we are prepared for these milestones we are better able to handle them.

They are more likely to behave in ways that we and others may find irritating, upsetting or embarrassing. This is usually due to the nature of the dementia and is not deliberate.

They may become suspicious of others, and believe that people are spying on them. They may believe that people, whom they knew a long time ago, are now around or even living with them. As the Dementia increases there will be stages when they don't know or remember who you are.

They will possibly keep repeating questions or carrying out an activity.

They may continually walk or pace up and down. This could be because they are bored or uncomfortable sitting at home or they may be confused about what they should be doing or where they should be.

The scary part of Dementia can be the aggression, shouting and screaming. This can be particularly upsetting; especially as it is generally

out of character with the person you know. Seeing a loved one's personality change is distressing and the effect can be a far more upsetting part of Dementia than the memory loss itself. In these cases it may be worthwhile keeping a note of the things that trigger the aggression. If you can identify the triggers you may be able to avoid or minimise them.

During an episode try not to make the situation worse by arguing or adopting an aggressive pose. When the individual has calmed down try to act normally with them. The likelihood is that they may have forgotten the incident or feel awkward. Remember, if the aggression seems personal it isn't - it's because of the illness.

People with Dementia often pick up on the mood and feelings of the people around them so they may react to your feelings even if you think you are keeping them hidden.

Remember, it is important for you to make time for yourself. It is a very stressful situation and may affect your feelings, moods and health. Don't be afraid to ask for help from family or friends. Even an hour's break will raise your spirits.

Eventually, the time may arise when the person needs to go into a care home for their own and your well being. This may well feel like it is a huge betrayal and that you are letting the person down. This is not so. It doesn't mean that you give up caring completely or that you won't see them again. Your involvement is as crucial as ever.

There are many support groups who are more than happy to help with information, respite care or just to talk to. It is not a sign of weakness to contact them or to talk to someone who is or has gone through what you are currently experiencing.

There are also many helpful leaflets, books and other types of literature that are readily available. An extremely helpful and informative book is *Contented Dementia* by Oliver James.

Preparing for an Interview

The four most important words that encompass the preparation for interview are:-

PREPARE, PREPARE AND PREPARE

There is no guarantee of anyone getting a job in today's industrial climate. However you can give yourself the very best start to ensure that you maximise your potential.

These hints are to assist you once the process has started.

Whether the interview is the start of the journey to achieve your life goal, the start of your new career, or your first step in the job market, the preparation is the same.

Preparation of your CV will give you an immediate head start.

You should ensure it includes all the relevant information. Any prospective employer not only needs to know about your educational achievements, they also need to know about you. The first page must stand out so that the employer wants to turn over and read the rest. Research has shown that many employers make an initial decision on whom they will invite to an interview from the first page. It is the first time they have heard about you and therefore you need to stand out so that they remember your application.

You need to consider carefully your choice of individuals you name as referees.

When filling out the application, either on paper or on line, you will be asked, somewhere towards the end, for people who are known to you personally and that you can name as referees. Make sure that they are comfortable about you naming them and that they may be called prior to the interview. There may also be a request that one of them must be your current or last employer. In these cases there will be an option that states that they will not be contacted until the position is offered to you. There is

no need to worry that your current employer will find out that you are job hunting.

Whether you have applied for the position from an advert, been recommended from an agency, or considering applying, your first priority is to research the company's profile.

As a first point, search the company on the internet to assess their mission and profile. See if their work ethic is proactive, look at their markets, who are their customers, and what, if anything, do they supply to the general public.

Now consider the owners, where you would most likely fit in, which department you would be in, where that department fits in with the overall build of the company.

Another course of action is to ask friends or neighbours. What is the overall opinion of the company? You can phone them and ask for their publicity brochures. You can explain that you are coming for an interview and would like some background information.

Knowing about the company you are hoping to join is paramount.

It will also show the interviewer that you are interested in joining them and have taken a keen interest in the company. It will also give you a possible step up on the other candidates who may not have thought about researching or don't think that it was worth the time and effort.

Be well prepared for your interview!

Make sure that the date is firmly marked on your calendar together with the time. At this point it is also worth you writing some affirmations for yourself. These can be in the form of notes that you place in strategic places such as the fridge, shaving mirror, make-up mirror, coffee pot, computer or even on your phone. Anywhere and everywhere you will see them. Short statements that affirm yourself and that you can get the job. They will stick in your mind and help with your self confidence.

Make sure you know the company's address and how long it will take you to get there.

If you are relying on public transport, double check the journey time. You need to arrive at least 15 minutes before your appointment. Whether you use public transport or your own, be aware of possible traffic holdups. It is far better to be an hour early than five minutes late.

You need to keep in focus that you are not doing the company a favour by turning up late - you are hoping that they will employ you and pay you a wage. By turning up late you are saying to them that your time is more important than theirs.

If for whatever reason you should have to cancel, you need to inform the company at the earliest opportunity and explain why. Getting up late, not realising the date or having a hangover is not a viable reason and again tells the company that you are not either reliable or interested in the position or them.

It may be possible to reschedule but a lot will depend on your reason for cancellation, the company in question and the strength of your CV.

Diffusing Conflict with Effective Communication (Dealing with Difficult Neighbours and Teachers)

Conflict is a normal part of any healthy relationship; after all we can't be expected to agree with everyone all the time. Learning how to deal with it, rather than avoiding it (which is what most of us do) is crucial. When conflict is mismanaged it can cause great harm, but when handled in a positive way it can strengthen any relationship.

Conflict is more than just a disagreement and can fester when ignored. We all respond to conflict based on our perception of the situation. This is not always an objective view of the facts as our perceptions are influenced by our own life experiences. Our perceptions trigger strong emotions that sometimes aren't comfortable for us to manage.

Fearing and avoiding conflict is possibly the result of an earlier mismanaged encounter which has left us feeling humiliated or threatened. If we also view it as dangerous the whole cycle can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Entering a conflict situation can also makes us feel threatened and is stressful to deal with meaning we tend to shut down or blow up in anger. However, when handled correctly, it can be an opportunity for our confidence to grow knowing that we can handle disagreements.

Communication when dealing with conflict is not just the actual words used *but* also what we don't say, what we see and what the other person sees in our body language. When in the middle of a conflict situation, paying attention to the non verbal signals may help us to understand what the other person is really saying or what we are saying about them. It will allow us to respond in a way that can ease the situation. A calm voice or concerned facial expression can help to partly

diffuse the situation. If we go into a situation shouting or trying to match the other person's volume intending to make ourselves heard, it will soon spiral out of control. If we can remain calm and talk normally and resist trying to compete, eventually the other party will calm down too.

Listen to what is being said as well as what is being felt. Make the resolution of the conflict the main priority rather than just winning the argument. Focus on the present. Stay in today, don't suddenly rake up situations that may have happened months or years ago, stick to the point. Don't suddenly make a 'U-turn' and pick another argument as the thought comes into your mind.

Pick your battles as conflict can be draining so it's really important to consider if the situation is worth your time and energy. Don't attempt any sort of conflict if you have had a stressful day – relax, take a breath and think logically.

Forgiveness is a part of conflict; someone may have done or said something to us that we feel is just too much to forgive. Spending our lives consumed with this feeling is exhausting and is it really worth it? Know when to let go and remember it takes two people to keep an argument going. If an argument is going nowhere agreeing to disagree is perhaps the best outcome.

Ask questions. Someone didn't say what they meant to say or misread what was intended – before it blows out of proportion you need to ask questions. It won't cause loss of face and could resolve the situation quickly.

Recognise differing perspectives. The situation could be because individuals have a different perspective from us. We cannot assume that we all see things the same way and then wonder when it all goes wrong.

Identify mistakes. Honest and unintended mistakes can result in conflict, so before the situation escalates out of control we need to stand back and do a reality check of the situation.

Commit to working the situation out and, perhaps the most important of all, stay calm.

Difficult neighbours

Our home is our sanctuary. It is where we spend time with family, friends and a large proportion of our own personal time. Difficult neighbours can ruin this safe haven that we have built and if not handled can take the joy out of our home.

In the first instance when you have decided to talk to them, consider taking a peace offering. It needs to only be a compliment about them or their house but it can break the ice and enable the conversation to start.

Explain politely the actual problem. Different people have different lifestyles and their own way of doing things. In some cases they or we may not realise that our behaviour is a bother or causing distress to anyone else.

Compromise if at all possible. In life it is rare that we always get our own way. Unless the problem is affecting 'life and limb', logic will tell us there seems little point turning every disagreeable thing into an argument, determining who is right and who is wrong.

Make an appeal for understanding by blaming yourself. For example, if they play music or they are making excess noise at night-time, start by blaming yourself, such as, "*I have to get up early for work*" or "*I'm really sorry but it's waking up the children, otherwise I wouldn't mention it.*"

Avoid gossip with others as spreading gossip escalates an already bad situation worse.

It's a normal reaction to persuade others to be on your side or to support you, but gossiping is not the way to solve conflict as in the long run it will only aggravate it.

Once the issues are resolved make the effort to be friendly. Getting to know one another builds friendships or at least respect for one another, it will also help if any future situations arise.

Unfortunately, sometimes the problem is more difficult. If you feel you have exhausted all areas, and confronting them further will only make the situation worse, the only option is to seek professional help - either with the landlord if you are in rented property or the police. In these cases you need to ensure that you have kept a diary which details the history of the problem detailing both how you have tried to resolve it and the escalation of the problem with dates and times.

Dealing with teachers

There are many different types of problems with teachers which again can come from our perception of what is right or wrong or what we believe they should be doing or not doing. We need to determine what the problem is and just how serious it is, before we rush headlong into something that may blow up in our faces.

If the problem is concerning something of a serious nature, either possible assault, bullying from the teacher, or lack of progress with regard to the child, and you don't feel confident dealing directly with the teacher the first port of call should be an appointment with the Head teacher, initially on your own.

Make sure of the facts. Try not to let emotions run away with you.

Think and allow time for the anger to subside, and then make a list of the complaints you have. When you see the Head, remember, they aren't the

cause of the problem, but they will help you to come to a mutually agreed solution so that together you can set a timetable to execute any actions needed and achieve the expected results.

When dealing with a problem as seen by your own child it becomes slightly different.

Firstly you need to understand that initially it is your child who has the problem. The teacher in question may be difficult but that isn't causing them a problem. Therefore you cannot fix the teacher, you can only fix the problem your child has with the teacher. This mind set will bring you to a solution far quicker.

There are difficult people in this world and we have to learn how to deal with them. Be totally aware of the problem and make sure that your facts are correct. The child's perception of the situation may be to believe that it is unfair but it may be the rules, which are there for their safety and protection.

Our children should be able to come to us with their frustrations over some 'injustice'. We can agree with them and then steer them into finding a solution to the problem for next time and then move on. Encouraging them to let it go and finding something more positive to talk about or do will help teach them resilience through example.

Sometimes our children get caught up in what is fair and what is not. You can agree that the way the teacher is dealing with them may not be fair but unfortunately life isn't always fair.

Look at their goals and plan how they can achieve them without letting what the teacher wants get in the way. If they get caught in the teacher's issues and do something wrong, such as being disrespectful they must face the consequences even though life isn't fair - we all have to follow the rules.

Making A Decision

By definition, making a decision is the act of choosing between two or more courses of action.

We all have to make decisions, every day of our lives. For most of us it is comparatively easy, for others it can be a matter of life or death. Some people meet, fall in love, get married, and have kids in a very short space of time and are happy. Some spend agonising hours in the aisle of the supermarket wondering what type of milk to buy. Those who find it hard to make a decision can spend endless hours of time looking for more information or getting others to offer their recommendations. Others, to the disbelief of those that do worry, vote or toss a coin! Who has the most stress and worry? The big difference is in the end result.

Some choices are never easy and can be very stressful, often causing anxiety, lack of sleep, mood swings and can also be detrimental to our diet. Some consider all choices as 'big life-changing' decisions. For example, getting married, divorced, moving house, emigrating, quitting your job are all likely to be real life changing decisions. However, deciding which movie to watch, which bread to buy or which paper to read probably aren't life changing decisions at all! However, these decisions can seem insurmountable to some people and they view them as 'life threatening'. We make the choice and then we have the self-deprecation about how silly or useless we are that we can't even make a simple choice, and in the worse scenario we go into meltdown.

We are generally ruled by our emotions. The choices we make are actioned in our short term memory and it's here that the emotion gets in the way. It tends to cloud our judgement making it difficult to see things logically. It's hard to break the hold that the emotions have on us, but it can be helpful to understand how it affects your choice.

Our brain presents us with all the relevant information which floods our senses and before we know it, we are at a crossroads. So great is this dilemma that in some people's cases, rather than make a decision, they don't do anything and the opportunity is missed.

That's when we view it emotionally. Looking at it logically: what is the very worst that could happen if we were to make a decision and it turns out to be a disaster or 'wrong'?

We move house and it is not what we wanted, so we move back or go somewhere else. We see the movie and it's awful. We either sit through to the bitter end or we walk out, we have lost nothing more than our time. We buy brown bread rather than white, we eat it or we feed the birds. We quit our job for another and it doesn't work out as we hoped, so we look for something else.

It is only 'wrong' if that's the way we view it. If we review it as an experience we can embrace it and then reach for the next challenge.

Deciding on the value the choice for you seems important. But what is really important is accepting that we can't have it all.

There are some helpful solutions that can aid you:

Identify your goal. If it's moving job, is it because you want a different career or do you want a different boss? If it is moving home, do you want a bigger house or have you fallen out with the neighbours? Don't make decisions on the wrong problem.

Eliminate the choices that we are presented with. If you want a new computer for use at home, make a list of the features that you really need and you will make it easier to purchase the best one for you. It is very easy to be swayed by the sales people who will explain how necessary it is to have this feature or that feature, you buy it and two years later you still haven't found a use for it or found out how to use it. This can then cause thoughts of self-doubt:- "*I shouldn't have let him talk me into it*" or "*What*

a waste of money." You don't need to have the best - just the one that is right for you. How satisfied you feel about your decision is more importance than the actual objective.

When at the point of having to make a decision, it can help to pretend that you are advising a friend who has asked for your opinion. Look at the scenarios they could be facing. You're thinking of moving house and you're tied up with the choice of which removal firm to use, which when we view it, doesn't make sense, whereas advice on where to move to does. Picture the questions you would ask that friend when advising them, i.e. look closely at the pros and cons what are the risks, if any, and why are they doing it?

Likewise you can ask a friend for their advice. Be aware that you're not just seeking confirmation of the decision you have already privately made. Making a decision that is right for you then asking as many friends as you can find until one agrees with your decision, isn't helpful.

Consciously filter the amount of information you take in to make your decision. Our brains are like huge computers that revel in obtaining lots of information. We should make ourselves aware that too much information is not good when making a decision.

When we have too much information, gaps start to appear where we don't have the correct answer. So we start to fill in these gaps and add weight to the information we already have. Generally, this is information that doesn't matter and is irrelevant to our initial concern. In these cases, talk to two or three really trusted friends only, not lots of people. But throughout the whole decision process, we must always remember however big or small the choices are, they are always reversible.

When viewing small day to day choices, put a time limit on choice.

Two minutes maximum is plenty of time to make the choice. It gets them out of the way so we can move on. Most decisions we make don't really matter as much as we think they do. Recognising this fact helps keep the amount of information you take in to a minimum.

Some people love lists, so make a list of all the pros and cons.

Perhaps it is better to leave out the assumptions as that is exactly what they are. If lists are too formal try mind mapping the whole scenario.

Be aware of bias when faced with a decision. Every day we are all bombarded with bias; when we open the daily newspaper or turn on the news, it nearly always leads with the most depressing story. This tends to give us a negative view of life. We always remember the air crashes, not the safety record of air travel. We find 'cash discount' more appealing than 'no credit card surcharge'.

Try not to rush when considering big choices. A bad mood or stressful feelings nearly always result in poor choices. It is more positive to go for a walk, go out for a drink or a coffee, go to sleep - give your unconscious mind time to do its job and present you with viable actions.

"Don't Sweat the Small Stuff", written by Richard Carlson, is a brilliant book well worth the money - eliminate the unnecessary. You will get up, get dressed and generally it won't matter what colour socks you put on. You will need to food shop and do the laundry. These things are everyday occurrences, don't dwell on them. Save your real thought for things that matter.

After you have made a big decision, ask yourself how you feel about your choice, how it worked out and use these experiences for the future.

Don't look back over the years and keep bringing up past perceived failures. You cannot change them and if you were to analyse them, you would pointlessly question whether you were worse off for making that decision all those years ago. This will only undermine your current confidence.

Remember it's only wrong if that's how we view it. There are no bad decisions and there are very few decisions which cannot be reversed.

Midlife Crisis

Crisis in the context of a person's life often means "*any stressful event or traumatic change in lifestyle.*" Midlife can be any age - it doesn't hit everyone and those it does, can be of a wide variety of ages.

So what would you describe a midlife crisis?

Can anyone say for sure that they are approaching or experiencing a midlife crisis?

Is it a particular feeling, emotion or event that triggers this point?

What is for sure is that it is a natural biological, and sometimes psychological, event that can happen as you mature.

We all evolve within our life as we get older. Probably the most difficult part to come to terms with is the fact that sometimes you can feel separated, misunderstood and alone. Everyday occurrences can signal the start of what you perceive as a crisis. Not recognising yourself in the mirror, unexplained depression, changing your habits, wanting to run away from everything, becoming irritable or angry, erratic sleep patterns, feeling trapped or tied down and wondering what you are doing with your life, can be amongst the most common.

These feeling can be triggered by experiencing something stressful such as a change in your working lives or conditions, a major illness to you or to someone close to you and the death of someone close. You suddenly become aware of your own mortality, the inevitable question of "*What am I doing with my life?*" or in some cases the opposite "*What's the point?*" These events, when they happen, can make you sit up, take notice and re-evaluate your life.

Unfortunately it isn't something that can be helped by going to see your doctor. There are no pills or quick tonics that you can take to make it all go away. You need to consider this as a time when you can kick start and re-examine your life goals, both long and short term. Relearning how to

handle and embrace the changes, or perhaps an easier explanation is, taking a step backward in order to move forward.

In times like this, when you feel adrift in the world, it could well be that you haven't spent enough time thinking about what you want from your life. It can feel as if you have set off on a journey and lost your way, you are hopelessly lost with no satnav or road map to navigate by. The direction you need is redefining your goal setting giving you purpose, long term vision, short term motivation and focuses your time and recourse so that you can make the very best of your life.

In this time of *crisis* the question is inevitably, "*What do I want from my life?*" If you have never set a goal or you are in a position when you believe that it is time to re-evaluate your goals then now is the time to take control and do it.

A goal should be something that excites you. Words and phrases like "*No*" or "*I can't*" or "*that's impossible*" don't feature. It's all about taking charge of your life and running with it. Age doesn't matter. People of 90 years plus are taking degrees, climbing Kilimanjaro and going on every rollercoaster in the country. The only thing that can possibly stop you is really bad health, although there is a belief that having a strong enough goal can help you through an illness. Stephen Sutton was a prime example of obtaining goals through adversity.

When in the middle of a crisis, getting started can seem monumental but it is, in fact, comparatively easy. Whether this is the first time or if you are re-evaluating your original goals all that is needed is a blank sheet of paper and some coloured pens!

Firstly create a big picture to identify the large scale goals that you want to achieve. This can be done over a couple of days. Using one colour, write down some ideas, think about them and keep coming back to them. Think outside the box: a starting point could be listing all the things that you have always wanted to do and never got round to.

Put an end time limit of say 10 years for your goal ideas. This will help you focus on the end date. With another colour, break these ideas down into 'bite size' chunks. These are what you need to do to achieve the goals and again put a date on completion eg six months, one year, five years. Finally, using a different colour again, start working toward them. It should be a colourful exercise and one that excites you. It will ease the burden that the crisis appears to be putting on you and help you focus.

Remember that your crisis will affect those around you, especially family, close friends and work colleagues. There are many stories of men and women suddenly jetting off around the world on an overdue gap year. This may well be your goal, and a good one, but it doesn't include the family who are left to hold everything together. There will still be a crisis, but of a different nature, when you return. So when setting these goals it's a good idea to encourage your family to join in. They will be aware of the change in you and will be glad to help in anything that is going to make life better for you and them. The end result can be as exciting for them as it is for you and will give you all fresh vigour and, most importantly, a purpose again.

Visualise the end point of the goal – your achievement. What does it feel like, and what do you see? On your journey sit and think of the end result. You will have rough patches when everything seems to be falling apart and there doesn't seem anyway around a problem. There is a saying: *"If the way over the mountain is blocked perhaps you are meant to go around it instead."* The times when you sit and visualise the end result will highlight these options and very often will give you renewed vigour and purpose. Having the family involved can help in that they may see a different approach that will get you the same result.

Be aware of your self talk - we think in words, pictures and emotions. Our thoughts paint mental pictures both negative and positive. It's impossible to paint a mental picture of something you don't want therefore focus on what you do want. It builds your beliefs, behaviours and performance. When in a crisis your behaviour seems irrational

therefore you should use your self talk to build different beliefs. Using past experiences is good. You will have experienced some success sometime in your life and you should tap into and utilise that feeling.

There are three important elements that help your self talk:-

1. The goal – the end result;
2. The desire – you want it no matter what the cost; and
3. The belief – the firm belief that you can achieve the goal.

When you achieve something it is because you are focussed on the end goal and because you believed you could do it.

Be aware of the environment around you as it can drag you down.

When in crisis mode your natural instinct is to shut down. Listening to negative people or those who genuinely believe that their experiences are the only ones that can help you will have an effect on you. Listening to the news which always appears to dwell on, or start with, the negative, will cloud your vision of the future. Terrible things happen all the time, but is it really necessary for you to know about them all? You need to build positive thought patterns that will overcome these negative ones.

Setting goals is an important part of helping you to feel great, have an amazing self image and boost your confidence levels.

Most importantly, this “*event*” doesn’t need to become a crisis. It can be the time when you embrace change and become someone stronger and better.

The crisis that you perceive as happening feels as if it is life changing in a bad way. You can change this into being life changing for you (and for those around you) in a brilliant way. Once they see your positive attitude it will become infectious and will help them, especially if they are experiencing their own midlife crisis or having a bad day at work or school. They will realise that they too can achieve great things in their lives.

Facing Redundancy

Redundancy is something that can happen to any employee no matter what position they hold in the company. Sometimes it's a shock and totally unexpected and in other situations there is forewarning. No matter how it happens, we react in the same way.

Redundancy can be likened to bereavement and in some ways it is very similar. You will generally experience four different emotions but not necessarily in this order:

Denial - *This can't possibly have happened to me. I'm one of the company's best and most loyal employees. It's a mistake! Someone is going to tell me my job is safe in a minute.*

Anger - *How can they have done this to me? How dare they? Don't they understand what they have done? They didn't give me a chance to say goodbye to any of my colleagues. How dare they!!!!*

Depression - *What am I going to do? No one will want me. What will my family do? They will think that I'm useless.*

Acceptance - *Ok, so this has happened, let's make the most of it and see it as an opportunity and move on.*

In today's economic climate there is no stigma attached to being made redundant; whereas 30 years ago it was viewed differently, today it is almost common place. There is a well known saying that fits this scenario really well:

"You aren't the first and you certainly won't be the last."

If it happens to you, your self-talk should be *"Come on lets go for it."*

The concept and initial reaction from being made redundant is going to be really tough on you, (the denial stage). It will all be negative, you will feel demoralised, make you doubt yourself, and your self-confidence will be rock bottom. It will make you feel worthless, as you believe your employer did not value you.

Fighting against these thoughts will help you to get over the negativity that prevails in this situation.

In the days following your redundancy, try not to get too angry with the people who may be able to help you. Your natural instinct will be to lash out, verbally not physically, so you could end up burning your bridges. Fighting against this urge will help you mentally and enable you to build bridges with people.

Stay sharp and keep on top of your game. Don't sit around in the interim period, do some volunteer work. There are many organisations that will welcome your help, even if it is on a short term part time basis.

If you are aware that redundancy is likely to happen start making plans for your future straight away, Sometimes being "*forewarned is being forearmed*" and even a matter of days or weeks can make a big difference when dealing with the employment market.

When redundancy hits it is advisable to check two important areas:

- Firstly make sure that your rights are being upheld with regard to termination and future work including recommendations and the availability of references.
- Secondly check your finances. Make sure that you receive all remunerations that you are due to you. There are solicitors that specialise in assessing this so if you are unsure perhaps a visit to one of them will be beneficial. Ensure that you are receiving all the benefits that you are due. The Citizens Advice Bureau will help here

in advising what you are entitled to and when and how you can claim it.

Make sure you sign on at your local employment agency. They will give help and advice in your search for new employment. It is also a good idea to make full use of any relevant agencies. Get on their books for either full or part time employment.

Keep in touch with old work colleagues. They can help to keep you up to date with possible work situations in other companies, who may be hiring or who isn't, and what new projects are scheduled. Some people end up going back to work for the same company and that's great if it's what you really want but try not to visualise getting your old job back.

You must tell your family. Their support is paramount and in this interim period they will feel the effects of your redundancy. Share your problems with them and share the dreams of what you want for yourself and them.

Work out a plan to find your next job. Once you have been made redundant you should consider that your current job is finding your next job. Approach this in the same that you would if you were at work. Consider all the angles, the prospects and opportunities. Be aware of the pitfalls and the drawbacks. Although it is really tempting, try not to jump at the first offer you get, unless of course it is your ideal job. It may ease any financial problems you have but long term might create more problems than it solves.

It's surprising how positive you will feel if you have a goal to aim for and a plan in place. To help, plan logically, make sure you have more than one. Start with plan A then plan B then plan C and so on.

Use this opportunity to reassess your career. Look at where you are and where you would like to be. Perhaps you want a change of career, a move to another part of the country or even abroad. You may want to try a different industry or even start your own company. There are many courses and training opportunities on offer at local colleges or



Government funded institutes. Perhaps now is the time to try something different.

Part of your plan should include time to update your CV. Ensure that you are making the most of yourself and portraying yourself as a viable candidate. Remember the first thing any future employer will see is your CV and it is from that they will make the choice which will enable you to get in front of them. Make sure your CV portrays that.

You may not be successful with you first attempts. Don't get disheartened. Use your time fruitfully, do the school run with the kids, redecorate, do the gardening. Keep busy. Be Patient.

Returning To Work

Arriving at a new job can turn into a stressful and very nervy day. It can also be a very exciting day. The first day of your working career; returning to work after children; the first day of your dream job; or the first day on the way to achieving your ultimate dream goal, the effect is the same.

Most of us can remember our first day at a new job, some good memories and some not so good. With a bit of help, you can make yours memorable, and one that you will remember as being one of your highlights.

You've been through the process of searching for a job, sending in your application, sleepless nights preparing for the interview, had at least one, if not more, and then you actually land the job.

Now comes the difficult part - living up to their expectation of you.

Easy.

You'll probably start around 8am, (so you will have been awake since 5am), and by 5pm, you will be exhausted. Your head will be bombarded with names, places, projects, so much so that you probably won't even remember where the coffee machine is!

First impressions are important and a good first impression can do you the world of good. It is the impact that the first impression makes that can categorise you and for your employers will turn into their long term perceptions of you and your reputation in the work place.

Most employers realise that there is a learning curve and won't expect you to blow their minds on the first day, although if you do it will go down incredibly well. There is a period of settling in, so try not to worry unduly.

These points will help make this day seem a lot easier:-

Discover all you can about your new employer. You will have done some of this for the interview but you will learn so much more once you start to work there. As homework for the first week or so, glean all the information about them that you can. Read the employee handbook, any company brochures and sales literature you can find and visit the website.

Show up early, by at least 15 minutes. You will have been awake for what will seem to have been an eternity and your nerves will be pumped up. Don't blow it at the last minute by missing the bus or getting stuck in traffic. If possible, know your route and try it at the relevant times before your first day

Have a positive smile and a firm handshake. You don't need to wait for people to introduce themselves, take the initiative with just a "Hello" or an outstretched hand. A smile is seen as enthusiasm and that you're pleased to be there and meeting them.

Dress to blend in. Try not to make a fashion faux pas on your first day. If you're not sure of the dress code, make some discreet enquiries.

Be aware of your body language. It can make up a majority of your communication in the first days. People will be talking to you and watching how you respond. Your boss will want to see enthusiasm not boredom.

You will be bamboozled in those first days. So many names and places and numbers. The chances are you will be working in a team so it is imperative to learn your co-workers names quickly. If your memory lapses with names there are many brain trainer apps that can help.

Don't be shy - being a wallflower won't earn you points. It is a good idea to prepare a personal pitch about yourself, where you have been, what you have done. It doesn't have to be long, a minute at the most. You will be asked these questions numerous times over the first day, so being prepared is being forearmed.

If your boss or co-workers invite you out to lunch – go, don't turn it down. View it as an opportunity to learn more about your colleagues, it will also show that you are a team player.

Work full days. Unless you have an agreement in your employment contract, make sure that you work what you should and don't clock watch. Those that arrive bang on 8am and go dead on the stroke of 5pm will not be viewed favourably.

Keep personal business on company time to a minimum. Unless an absolute emergency arises, in which case tell your boss, keep your personal life what it is - personal.

Don't visit websites that are not work related. In today's high tech environment you will get found out, and it may be a dismissible offence.

Put your mobile phone on silent - especially on your first days. Your family will obviously want to know how you are getting on but it is discourteous to have your phone ringing or to be texting all the time. The company time is more important than your personal time while you are working there.

Get a good attendance record - it will show that you are reliable.

At all costs avoid the inevitable office politics and gossip. The work place will be full of rumours and there will always be someone there who wants to '*bring you up to date*'. Try to distance yourself from these people as they can have a negative influence on you and it is really easy to get dragged into the office gossip clique, and once there it is hard to get out. This will not give you the first impression that you want.

Many companies now will organise after hour activities. Don't avoid them - use them to your advantage. Take this opportunity to meet and network with as many key people in the organisation as you can. Networking is an important part of a working life and one that you can benefit from.

In the first few days listen more than talk. You don't want to come over as a 'know all' or seem to be the one that is always wanting the limelight.

Be careful what you promise. You may be tempted to oversell yourself and see it as putting yourself ahead. You may not be comfortable giving talks to lots of people or finding that there is a possibility that your position may entail giving presenting at a future date. Don't offer to do something that you can't achieve at this time just because you think it will make you look good or indispensable. There is always a tomorrow and you will get found out. Don't be afraid to admit what is difficult for you, and ask for help. A mentor is a good option and your employer will recognise that you are aware of some shortcomings but are willing to work through them.

To summarise, remember: relax, learn your team members' names, keep your mind open, do your job, prepare to do your best but don't get overwhelmed, there is always tomorrow. Don't panic, it is possible to make two first impressions. Above all be yourself - after all, that is how you got the job in the first place!

Moving House

Depending on what you read it seems that experts unanimously agree that most of us will move house every seven to ten years.

We do it for myriads of reasons.

Your current home is too small - your family are growing and you want more room or, it is now too large - the children have all gone and you want less room.

You want to upgrade; you believe that you need a bigger house.

A new job or company relocation makes it necessary for you to move.

Personal or relationship break downs may result in one or both of you moving house.

Possible health problems can also mean moving to a different house will make life easier for you.

Many of us get restless with our lives and believe that a house move will solve the underlining problem. Before you move, you should look at what you are going to miss that is associated with your current house/location. Neighbours, sports facilities, shops, churches, favourite coffee shop, school, work and if you're elderly, the support that you get can all play a huge part of your life and should not be overlooked.

Then, do the same with the things that will change with your move. What is it going to be like in the new town/city/village? Where are all the amenities? What are the journey times to and from these places? You need to consider everything that will affect your life. Then rank them in the order of importance for you and your family. This will highlight your priorities and enable you to make a logical decision.

This decision needs to be discussed with all members of your household, especially children. Their lives will be affected as much as yours. They may well have to leave their school, their friends, all the things that make

their lives safe and gives them stability - they may not fully understand why. They need to be able to see the new house, and know where their bedrooms will be and if they have pets to know they will be okay.

It is also advisable that when you do find your dream house to make sure you see it at all times of the day and at weekends. This should give you an awareness of the neighbours and what the area is like.

Other practical matters that need to be considered are how much will it cost and therefore can I afford to move right now?

If you have children, is it okay to move them from their current school? Are there exams pending and how much will it impact on their academic performance?

If you're not moving for your job but will need one, how easy will it be for you to find a new position?

And the most important question to ask yourself, *"Are my family and I emotionally stable to handle the stress of a move at this time?"*

If you are determined and your priorities have been answered, then this is definitely the time to make your move. You have found the house you all want, the contracts have been signed and a date for the move has been set.

These tips will help the whole move a little less stressful:

Use an address book to make sure that as many of your contacts know you are moving and when. Inform them by letter, email or text whichever is easier for you.

Compare moving costs. If large furniture is being moved consider the cost of hiring a van and asking some friends to help against having a removal company do it for you.

If you have the chance, clean your new house before you move in. No matter how clean it may seem it won't be to your standard and it will save you the trouble later.

Make a packing list. This will help you work out how many boxes of varying sizes are required, remember it is better to have too many than not enough. Don't completely fill large boxes as someone has to lift them! Make sure each box is labelled with contents and the room it is going into.

Check that your contents insurance covers possible transit damage.

Use this time to declutter and rid yourself of unwanted items.

If new schools are a pre-requisite, make sure that the children are booked in and that you have any uniform and equipment. Having this will make the children feel less of an outsider in their first days at the new school.

Prepare an overnight bag and one with mugs, coffee, tea, snacks etc. A cuppa is always welcome! Pack overnight bags for each family member containing toilet paper, toiletries, personal items, a favourite toy for the younger children etc.

Make sure you have informed your current utilities providers that you are moving and when, so that final readings can be taken and agreed. Check the energy, phone and broadband suppliers of your new home. Ensure with them that all utilities will be up and running on the day you are moving in and all payment methods are in place.

On the day of the move start as early as possible, preferably at the top of the house and one room at a time:-

- Make sure all important documents are safe (birth, wedding and death certificates and passports) plus anything that has a sentimental value and would be hard to replace.
- Put all the screws for the furniture into freezer bags and tape them to the items.

- Use some old sheets or flattened boxes on the floor in your current and new house to minimise any possible damage to the flooring whilst moving.
- Make sure the furniture goes in first, you don't want to be moving boxes to get the furniture in.
- Ensure there are light bulbs in the fittings, suddenly finding that you're in the dark and have to start searching for a shop that sells light bulbs at 9pm won't help anyone's mood.

As both households are in transit you need to ask, and tell your old homes new owners the following,

- Where are the boiler controls? How do we get hot water and heating, especially important if it's mid-winter.
- Where is the main stopcock, gas and electricity meters?
- What days do the bins need emptying?
- Are there any instruction leaflets or warranties on items that are included in the sale?
- Where is the central heating thermostat?

Once you are finally in you will need to:

Register for voting, re-register all vehicles. Update driving licenses.

Connect with your new neighbours.

Are you getting your mail? The Post Office can offer an extended period where they will re-route mail that you haven't had time to re-address.

You'll need to register with a local doctor and dentist.

A good idea is for you to invite some of your children's friends over so that contact won't be totally cut off and they will start to feel as if this new house is their home.

Finally, relax and enjoy your new home!!

Fear of Medical or Dental Appointments

Many people have an inherent fear of a dental or doctor's appointment. The fear itself may have come from a bad experience early on in life or perhaps the belief that the practitioner may have been instrumental in something bad.

Many have memories of sitting in a waiting room with other apprehensive patients listening to strange sounds emanating from the other side of the door. At the time these seemed and sounded like a torture chamber! They believe that they have forgotten about these experiences but as soon as they see the white coat, the smell that accompanies it and the sound of the drill they immediately regress back.

You may fear that there will be bad news so your blood pressure rises and you feel light headed as if you are going to faint. You may experience panic attacks, you may be afraid of needles and/or blood. You may be afraid that what they are going to do will hurt or isn't really necessary.

In some cases, claustrophobia can play a huge part. You have to enter a small room and there doesn't seem to be any obvious way out. White coats can be seen as threatening and a sign of authority, although now in most surgeries the white coats have been replaced by coloured ones. All these things play a huge part when considering what may be a necessary visit to either of them.

You may try to hide your fear and this inevitably makes the whole experience even worse, if that is possible. You come up with all sorts of techniques, primarily avoiding going at all costs, denying the problem totally, and having an emotional outburst as the appointment approaches so that you don't have to go.

The biggest worry is that you will pass this fear on to your children. Your children aren't born with any fear, they pick it up from those around them - primarily you. Things that you used to hate, the kids now embrace. Gone are the ugly braces, replaced by brightly coloured ones that almost

become a fashion statement and most kids will want one even if they don't need them. Comics, magazines and toys aimed at younger people are readily available in the waiting areas

The first and most important step to take is to tell the doctor or dentist of this problem and they will help you overcome your fear. Don't be afraid as many people have this fear and no one will view you differently. When booking an appointment, briefly tell the receptionists that you have this fear and they will help.

All of your memories of childhood can be eased, as today the whole experience is different. The surgeries are more open and user-friendly with, in some cases, flowers in the waiting room, music being played quietly everywhere, modern art (not to everyone's taste but creates a talking point) as well as helpful and polite staff. All go a long way to alleviating any fear you may have.

In general, doctors and dentists will do everything they can to help you. They don't want to willingly hurt you. After all their job is to ease your pain and you will help that job by being relaxed. It makes their job so much easier.

Some suggestions which help ease these situations:-

Find a friendly doctor and dentist, one who understands your problem and will aid you in lessening your fear.

Make a 'social' visit. Meet the receptionist and see the environment, if the staff know beforehand they have the chance to make your visit easier for you to handle.

Pick an appointment early in the day as it will give you less time to dwell on it.

Remember that in the dentist, treatments are designed to be as painless as possible. Dental wands, which deliver the anaesthetic slowly, can replace the needle in some surgeries, in others a numbing gel is rubbed on the gum first so you don't feel the needle. All the

instruments are out of sight, and the drills are considerably quieter than those of old.

Take a friend with you. If you ask beforehand neither doctor or dentist are likely to object.

Having a glass of water available that you can sip will help, again most surgeries have water available.

Ask the doctor or dentist to explain your treatment before they proceed. Neither practitioner will proceed with any treatments that are unnecessary. If they are necessary they will explain what they propose to do and what the outcome will be. They are both there to help you when you are in a period of pain or discomfort.

When with the dentist, agree with them beforehand, a sign that you can make so that they can stop whatever they are doing for a short time. Unlike the 'old days' they will tell you what they are going to do and what will happen way before any treatment starts.

It may help to take a personal iPod/mp3 player so that you can listen to music which can help you to relax while you are in the waiting room.

If the doctor or the dentist doesn't want to be bothered with alleviating your fears then find another who will.

In extreme cases you can request a referral to a NHS sedation clinic which will help when administering the anaesthetic or advice of alternative options. They may also recommend a course of CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) which is aimed at helping you overcome this fear.

Remember that we all like to see people smiling. If you are suffering embarrassment from your smile because of your teeth you don't need to. Don't let your teeth ruin your self-confidence. Take that first step and make the call. You will then have done something incredible perhaps something that you never ever thought you would do. Be proud of yourself you have earned it.

Asking For Help

Who likes asking for help?

It may be said that having asked for something numerous times before and having been rejected why should anyone put themselves through a potential rejection again?

"I have always done okay in the past without help so I'll just carry on. It's just easier this way."

The questions to seriously ask are:-

"Is this the real reason I don't ask or am I just making up excuses?"

"Where does my need to do everything myself come from?"

Asking for help is a vital skill for many of life's problems. We are unable to do everything that has to be done during our lifetime generally because we don't live long enough to learn how to.

What does asking for help say about you?

Admission of guilt. It makes you believe that you are not perfect.

If you ask for help you fear the rejection of possibly being refused. Rather than face the perceived rejection it may seem easier to become an automaton and do it yourself.

You may also have trouble 'receiving' seeing yourself more in the role of the one doing the 'giving'. You may have a hard time receiving because you believe that you will owe someone something.

You may be feeling unworthy of help, you ask yourself, *"Why on earth would anyone want to help me?"*

You may want control of everything. You don't believe that anyone can do it as well as you can so what is the point of asking in the first place when you already know how it will end up?

It may seem to you that asking for help is a sign that you are physically weak and that if you do ask you will lose control of everything.

Let us look at it from another angle.

How many times have you said to a friend, *"Let me know if I can help."*

How many times when you didn't hear back did you follow up? Does your inaction say to your friend that your feelings were insincere?

Likewise if the situation was reversed you would say the same, *"They asked if they could do something but they never replied."*

In these cases, the person asking for help is genuine but it's the responsibility of the offeror to call and offer again, not on the person to ring and ask – they may well be embarrassed, they may not know how to take that step. A vast majority of people who offer to help are genuinely sincere - they really mean it, they would love to help. The basic problem is that they don't know what you really want.

Here are some tips on asking for help when you need it – and accepting any assistance given:

The first step in accepting that you need help is telling yourself that you do need help.

You have reached the point when you have tried to solve the problem, you're not quite sure how to proceed, you're worried how things will turn out and bad things will happen if you carry on.

Ask yourself, *"What is it that I need help with?"*

If you are unhappy, why? At what point could you have done something different? When or why do you get frustrated? What is the point that you really fear?

The reason for assistance can be as basic as *"How do I do this part of my homework?"* *"How do I sew on this button?"* or more complex: *"How do I mend a burst water main?"* or *"I feel really ill and don't know what to do."*

The best way, when asking for help, is to ask for a specific task.

"Can you help with ... every other week?" rather than, *"Can you help me with..... sometime?"*

The first statement is better as it is a definitive request, (both requests will probably get a "Yes." In either case the person will probably be thrilled that you asked them.

Consider who, when and where to make your request for help.

Initially look for someone responsible to ask, don't ask someone who is never around or who is known to gossip, and could make you feel stupid. The best people are a close friend or family member, a doctor, a counsellor or a minister. In the middle of a supermarket on a busy day may not exactly be the best time. In these cases asking to meet up for a coffee is a far better option.

Always maintain a positive attitude.

Seeking help when in need is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Swallow your pride and admit that you cannot solve every problem.

Be aware of your body language.

People, even close friends, may not offer help because they aren't sure of how you will react.

You don't need to keep acknowledging your previous failures.

There is a belief that if you admit that you do no wrong, life could be unfulfilling.

Asking someone for help can be a sign of closeness and trust.

When asking, you need to watch and listen. If you don't understand - ask again.

This isn't a sign that you're bored just that you need confirmation. If you need to know how to do a maths question and you don't understand the reasoning ask if they can explain it again. If you don't you'll feel foolish and wish you hadn't asked at all.

Thank them for their help. Offer in return to help them.

Internalise the advice you have been given. Remember what it was you learnt from it. You may be able to offer it to someone else at a later date.

Don't be afraid to ask again.

If you ask, yes, you may get turned down, but you will most likely get what you want.

If you don't ask you'll potentially never get what you want.

When you're scared of asking, think what is the very worst that can happen.

Usually the worse case scenario is a 'no' - but remember if you don't ask, you're effectively saying 'no' to yourself.

If you are embarrassed try not to be. Richard Branson says:-

"Don't be afraid of embarrassments - learn from them and start again."

Handling Disappointment

Disappointment is never fun whatever the situation. You didn't get the job, your relationship broke down, you were overlooked for promotion, you didn't achieve the exam results you wanted. It's always an absolute "disaster," makes you feel that the bottom has dropped out of your world, and you're the only one who has ever experienced anything as dreadful as this. Every single one of us has to face these challenges at varying times in our lives. How you deal with them will determine whether you're a victim or a confident person in control of your life.

Whatever the "disaster," it's almost never as bad as it seems. Seeing your disappointment as a means to help you grow and remind you of your priorities may stop you going down the wrong route. There are always more ways out of the dilemma than you think. The trick is to deal with it and you will come out of it a stronger person.

Sometimes you are disappointed that you didn't get what you thought you really wanted or deserved and in these cases the best way out is to explore other avenues. Your self talk is important and perhaps should be: *"I'm better for this experience and I'm not going to give up."*

Here are some suggestions to help you move on from your disappointment:

This is an easy quick "fix": **If you are alone, throw a tantrum and let the anger out.** It's worth remembering, that what you are feeling is your pain, not everyone else's. Get your feelings out in a way that won't hurt you or anyone else. Your emotions are the ones in tatters and it really helps to give them free rein. Men - don't be afraid to cry, women - scream your heart out (letting out emotions is far healthier than keeping them locked in).

Try not to lash out at others by sending emails or texts to people voicing your disapproval at the injustice. This will lose you friends and work colleagues very quickly.

Take some time to heal. It is okay and important to acknowledge that you are feeling sad and disappointed. However, self wallowing in pity cannot be a long term alternative. Many people choose to sit around and whine not only about disappointment but most things in life. This is not good for you, especially if it goes on too long and takes hold of your way of living.

Try and stay calm and give your feelings some time to adjust. It's hard to comprehend at the time but it really won't be as bad tomorrow or next week.

It's worth putting the situation into perspective, because at this point everything seems to be an "absolute disaster." However in a year's time, will it really matter that you broke that vase or that you didn't get that job? Which of us know the future? As the saying goes, "*As one door closes another opens.*"

Talking about the disappointment is a good therapeutic exercise.

Choose your listener with care. The ideal person should be a close, honest, true friend, preferably someone older than you who has experienced something similar and won't just keep saying, "*Poor you.*"

Writing about disappointment is a good release and will help you see the progression that has got you to this point. But definitely do not post it on social media because you never know who is reading it or who knows who.

Ask yourself: "Is this really worth getting upset over?" It may help if you can identify a real disaster and pitting it against you failing an exam or breaking up with your girlfriend/boyfriend enabling you to see that there is no comparison and may help you gain control of your feelings.

Don't judge yourself. Yes, you failed something, but that doesn't mean that you are a failure. Don't take it personally and try not to dwell on the blame culture. Yes, you may have messed up and yes, just maybe, life is so unfair, but the best course of action is to let it go and move forward with the rest of your life.

Ask yourself "What can I learn from this situation?" and "What were my expectations?" Perhaps you didn't get the job because you were lacking in some areas of experience; therefore asking for training in that area can only enhance your potential and may increase your job satisfaction. Perhaps your former partner had some quirk that long term would have made you both really unhappy or trying to keep a relationship going over a long period just wasn't happening. In these cases is it right to carry on against the odds, or face the disappointment and then carry on with your lives?

Stay away from blaming others. Lashing out seems natural but accusing others with *"It's their fault," "They should have..."* or *"If they hadn't done..."* and especially *"They don't know what they are doing," should be avoided.* It may be a quick fix and for a brief moment it will make you feel justified, but long term it won't help. Remarks like that have a nasty habit of being heard by the people you don't want to hear them and you will be doing yourself no favours.

Make your Self Talk positive and work out a solution! Another favourite saying at these times is: *"I'm so unlucky. Nothing ever goes my way."* It would be more positive if your Self Talk said: *"Why did I really want that new job? Was it for more pay or did I want to get away from these people or do I need a new challenge?"* One of the solutions could be that if you want a new challenge the logical thing is to apply for something else that will challenge you.

In either case, the real reason, if you are honest with yourself, may take you on another journey totally and one where you will be a lot happier.

Take a look at the big picture. If one path doesn't work, try another, make another plan, look at a different life goal, take a look at your life in a new way. Say to yourself: *"How can I still follow my dreams, be happy and allow myself to move forward?"* The answer should be to be open to new opportunities and embrace the future.



A good overall way to look at disappointment is to ask: *"Why am I concentrating on this disappointment? It's taking hold of my life. How should I be figuring out a solution to the problem?"*

Asking yourself something this simple, and answering it honestly, will make a huge difference in your confidence levels and give you an increased sense of satisfaction with your life.

The real beauty about this is, it's entirely your choice what you choose to focus on. Remember if you never fall down you'll never learn how to get back up again.

Dealing with In-Laws

When we marry not only do we gain a spouse but we also gain an extended family package. For some people this is a bonus and everything is just right, but for others it can be a drain on their relationship. People who have always had an extended large family seem to be able to adapt to this easier although that is not always the rule.

Here are some points that may help you achieve an agreed harmony:-

Firstly, you need time to get to know your partner. If this is the first time that you have lived in the same house as one another, life will be different. You have to get to know each other including all the *bad* bits - loo seat left up, dirty underwear on the floor, washing left in the sink, whose doing the shopping and "*Why on earth do we need this?*" and many, many more things that are all part of the learning curve to growing together.

The in-laws also will need time getting used to the new son or daughter they have inherited. It is only after a period of time spent together that you will both know the dynamics of the group.

After you are married there can be no secrets and no divided loyalties. You will have your own 'new' family with the responsibilities that it entails, and that is where your loyalty must be. Keeping secrets with your parents and siblings whilst not telling your partner will lead to distrust. Think about what will work best for you and your partner first before you try to please your parents.

Basic rules should be established at the beginning. When you marry, your in-laws become very similar to your neighbours where boundaries must be established. You and your partner need to discuss the role you want the in-laws to have. Don't assume that your partner can read your mind; you need to discuss the parameters and when they are agreed you need to talk to the in-laws about them and why they are

there. They are not fragile, they need and deserve to know and understand your reasons.

You have to respect that you have a finite amount of energy and your health is paramount. If you start getting into disputes which continually drain you emotionally, the boundaries must change to accommodate you. Ensure that you discuss the situation with your partner and then with them. Explain the position you are in, what you would like to happen and the reason you're doing this. Most importantly, ensure them that you are not shutting them out.

If problems arise, the arbitrator needs to be the daughter or son. They are the one that needs to mediate not the in-law. Tempers will be brittle and the last thing you need is for a full scale shouting match when things could be said but not meant. The only person that can help avoid this is the respective son or daughter.

Try not to criticise your spouse with their parents. It is likely to lead to even more complications, as they are more than likely take their side and bear resentment towards you. The last thing you need are comments like *"How dare they criticise our..."*

Also don't criticise your partner's family. If a situation arises that causes a problem for either of you then ask for an explanation, and take time to discuss the outcome.

Don't assume they understand how you feel as they may not have a clue. They will only know what you tell them, if you only talk to them about the problems and the arguments that's all they will hear. They won't hear that you make up.

If you have a problem in your marriage it needs to be resolved in the marriage. Don't use the in-laws to sort out the problem. You need to love your parents and have an active relationship with them which can't happen if they feel the need to pick sides

Always be polite and friendly when talking to them. If they see you are annoyed or angry they will unconsciously turn it back on you.

Don't ignore your partner while you are with your family. Obviously talk to your parents and siblings but check in with each other regularly. If your partner is nervous or feels uncomfortable this will reassure them that they are part of your family.

If things do get strained, sort it out as soon as possible. Don't let the unpleasantness linger on, it will only get worse as people's minds will start to invent scenarios that simply aren't there. Do something that is time limited to sort it out, such as going out for a coffee or to dinner as everyone is nearly always better behaved in public. It is also good to debrief afterwards. Discuss with your partner how it went and the next course of action.

There is a rule of thumb when dealing with any situation and fits neatly in here. "Put your brain into gear before you open your mouth." Always bite your tongue. If unwanted comments are given turn them back on them. Thank them for their concern, say you hadn't noticed, ask for their advice, whether you take that advice later is up to you but they will have been mollified. If you return like-with-like, a full scale argument will result and that won't help either of you.

If things are fraught, a way to break the impasse is to pick up the phone on a regular basis. You may get the *cold shoulder treatment* but persevere. Keep it to a time limit and focus on the positive, mention the good things that have happened and ask what is happening with them.

If you have children ask them to baby sit, they will probably be thrilled. Generally they will love grandchildren and will relish being able to spend time with them. Don't overdo it though. As they get older they may not be able to cope with boisterous children for too long.

Don't openly favour your own parents as your partner will have trouble with this and it will cause resentment. Remarks like "My mum always does it this way" or "My dad says....." should be met with "Ok then go and live with them then!"

Don't compete for the attention of your in-laws or your own parents. You need them in ally mode not enemy mode. If you try to make them choose it will cause a rift with you and your partner which may be harder to heal.

Be helpful where you can. It won't hurt to lend a helping hand occasionally and it will do wonders for you both. It may help you bond and get to know each other better.

Unfortunately in extreme cases moving away may be the only option. But make sure that it is really the last resort.

Getting along with in laws doesn't need to be escalated into something of World War proportions. They can be a great source of advice; after all they have been through most of the experiences you will encounter. They can be your best friends or your worst enemies, but if you are going to remain married to their son or daughter you are always going to have them in your life. For common sense to prevail it will be far easier to try to make them your best friends!

Bullying

For many adults and children bullying is an everyday occurrence that never seems to go away. It can cause incalculable damage to a person's confidence and self-esteem that some never get over. It can start at junior school and progress throughout their life and can affect them in such a way that they always see themselves as a victim.

It's not so long ago that no one in authority paid much attention to children who spoke about being bullied and it was unheard of for an adult to admit to it. It was taken as normal and for some considered a rite of passage.

Sometimes the cycle goes 360° and the bullied become the bully. Their confidence is boosted by the fact that they have the power the bullies had on them and it is payback time. The fact that the bullied in these cases have nothing to do with the 'original' bully is immaterial. They thrive on insecurity and dislike those who generally do well as it highlights their own inadequacies.

Thankfully the situation is changing and in a majority of cases, action is taken. There are certain strategies that can be taken which work in most situations:

TELL SOMEONE. This is vital whether the bullied individual is a child or an adult. Be it a teacher, supervisor, parent, friend, counsellor, human resources manager. **TELL SOMEONE.** Don't ever be afraid - this is a serious offence.

Don't be frightened of the bully. This fuels their behaviour and makes them worse. Bullies nearly always prey on people who are afraid of them because this boosts their confidence which in turn can make things worse. Give them what they don't expect. Smile at them, tell a joke, anything that gives the impression that you are in charge. Don't get emotional and don't ever blame yourself.

If possible try to ignore them. This can be a useful diversion especially if it's the first time. If they don't get a reaction they may well lose interest. Don't give them what they thrive on. Walk away if they come toward you. If this seems difficult imagine that you are walking away from a friend which will give your body language a more positive feel. You need them to see that you are not intimidated or afraid.

Use visualisation. Bullies can be intimidating but by imagining them in bizarre situations will help. Easy scenarios are seeing them dressed as a clown, in their underwear, or with their heads and arms shrinking. Find one that works for you and is easy for you to imagine.

Being around other people, especially your friends will help. It will boost your confidence being with people you know and like.

Be confident. This is an important aid as bullies won't usually pick on people they think are stronger than them. They will only target those who appear weak or scared.

Use positive self talk. Tell yourself that you are better than them and that they are just people who are cannot hurt you.

It is important to keep a record. Whether at school, college or in the work place, document each encounter so that if it comes to a disciplinary action this can produced as evidence.

Remember, you cannot change the bully. It helps to be aware that you have no control over their willingness to accept that they have a problem. It is up to the company or school to sort out the problem and eradicate this behaviour.

Tips for parents that will help if your child is being bullied:

Praise your child whatever they do. Encourage them especially when they are trying new activities or attempting new challenges. If they have attempted to handle any new situation always tell them you proud of what they have done.

Put a picture of the whole family on the wall in their bedroom. This will reinforce that they are a big part of their family and that you are their safety net.

Tell them that you have total confidence in them, and whatever they do they will always get there in the end.

Go the extra mile and spend as much time with them as you can and take time to listen. Being bullied is a traumatic experience and it may take time for them to totally open up to you.

Work together on how they communicate and suggest different ways they could say things. In some cases, play acting is a useful tool and can be fun if you are enacting a play.

Encourage your child to take part in self-defence classes. There are many classes around that take a special interest in teaching children. It will enable them and boost their confidence as well as mixing with other children who may well be in a similar situation.

Continually reassure them that you love them.

If this is a long term problem always inform the school - they cannot help if they are not made aware of it. This can be done anonymously at first, if your child is unsure. Make a note of each situation your child is in and also each time you report an incident.

Some people believe that physical force is needed to stop bullies. Children need to be aware that hurting someone is not really the right way to deal with a bullying situation, if at all. The only time this would be a possible

option would be when they are being bullied, are in danger and cannot leave or call for help. But this is very much a last resort.

This is difficult territory. As bullying problems are not always the same a lot will depend upon what you and your family's attitude is to fighting. Some schools will not tolerate this behaviour so if you believe this is your last and only option you must inform the school in writing of your actions, as well as noting that the school has been made aware of the situation before, and that you have the evidence to prove that they have not stopped it internally.

Over recent years our society has produced a new form of bullying - **Cyberbullying**. This has the ability to reach vast amounts of people and encompass many areas including:-

- Email/texting threatening messages
- Posting videos or pictures of victims on YouTube
- Setting up harmful profiles on social network sites
- Posting private information without permission
- Sending harmful viruses

The most important thing is **don't get dragged into it**. Think about the impact and possible devastation it will have on the victim. Cyberbullying is particularly problematic because it is very easy to do, all it takes is to write something, press the enter tab and it's done. The destroying part is that the victim cannot see the bully and therefore gives that bully *carte blanche* to do what they like. Remember - it can be traced and it is a criminal offence.

Tips to deal with Cyberbullying:-

As with any bullying situation - **Tell someone** such as friends you can trust, tell the media provider, the phone provider and even tell the police.

- Don't give any personal information online.
- Don't post pictures of yourself (you may think that it's just a laugh but some people won't and will use it against you)
- Only give your phone number to your closest friends and family
- Always protect your password and never give anyone access to your accounts
- Always use the privacy settings on social media
- Don't ever forward any nasty emails or messages and don't delete them. Keep them as evidence as they can be traced
- Don't ever reply, that's what most of them want you to do

Social media is a great part of our modern society and allows people to talk to old friends and interact in a positive way. Let's all try and put a stop to those who are trying to destroy people and try and make a difference to everyone's lives.

You do not have to go through your life as a victim. The thing to keep in mind is that you will be heard and that you will be taken seriously.

Handing In Your Resignation

You have reached a point when you feel that the only way to move forward is to make a fundamental change in your working life. Perhaps you want to further your career, or you need perspective on a different way to reach your life goal. Whatever the reason, resigning should be done gracefully and with respect.

Make sure that you are leaving for the right reasons, for instance, don't leave because you hate your boss. Before you verbally let rip and tell them what you think about their job, company or your colleagues, stop and think about the long term implications not only to them, but to you. There may be other avenues that you want or need to pursue in the future and you just may need their assistance.

It is also wise to make sure that your immediate family are aware of your actions and that you have discussed it with them. Being offered a position in Outer Mongolia may seem like heaven to you but your family may not agree! Open discussions now will ensure that in the long term it doesn't cause problems for those close to you.

At the point of moving, when you have been offered a new position you may initially focus on the negative points of your job. But remember every job has some positive points and although you may not have been happy there recently, you will have been at some point. Whatever you may feel toward your current employer it is wise never to burn your bridges, you may be creating obstacles that hinder future opportunities that may arise.

It may help to look at what you have now and what the new role has to offer, then you can make a logical decision as to your future. Don't ever resign out of anger or emotion.

Once you have finally made your choice these points should help your transition run smoothly:-

Ensure you give the required notice and that you complete this period. At the onset don't leave your employer "in the lurch." You may have a job that is integral, and finding a replacement of your calibre may be difficult.

When you write your resignation letter ensure you make it clear that you are leaving for good. State how much you have learned and enjoyed working there, and that you are grateful you were given the opportunity.

When you have decided to leave and having taken into account your notice period, you will need to tell your boss or supervisor. One of the best ways is to ask for or book an appointment, and specify a time length, to discuss the matter with them in private. After work would be ideal as it shows that you are not taking up work's time. They need to be told face to face, don't email them or leave the letter on their desk. Remember to be respectful and take into account that they will probably be busy, so making a mutually convenient time is giving them time to make space for you.

Don't tell anyone until your supervisor or boss has been told. When they know, then discuss with them the best way that they would like it broadcast to the other employees. You should also consider telling other managers that you have worked for and key employees that have helped you through your journey there, thanking them for their invaluable input.

Be polite and well prepared. Try not to beat around the bush, your boss will appreciate the directness. You will probably be asked the reason for your leaving so make sure that your response is concise and to the point.

Be constructive with any feedback that you may be asked for. They may consider giving you a counter offer. If you had made the decision that if they were able to change certain conditions of employment or increase your salary you may consider staying. Tell them that you need time to think about this and decide on a time for a further meeting. This

will provide you with a period when perhaps you can reassess your options.

Never, ever be negative about your job or slating your old boss or work colleagues on social media. You never know who will be reading it, people from your old company may know your new colleagues or worse still, it could be your new employer, or people who work for them. Your boss would be rightly concerned about your integrity, or lack of it, and it would not be a good start to your new career. Additionally, new colleagues may gossip and embellish things which could be detrimental to your integration.

Old work colleagues may become good contacts for the future so ensure that you share phone numbers and email addresses. Also don't make things awkward for them, they may not like their job and you boasting about your new position may make them feel resentful.

Try to leave on a high note. It is natural to feel that, at some point, physically or mentally you can no longer do your current job to the best of your ability. You should be prepared to complete any project that you are working on and ensure that whoever replaces you will be able to continue your good work. If necessary leaving an itinerary of outstanding work or things that will need attention after you leave will be helpful and show dedication. You should want to be remembered as the hard worker, not the one who left everything in a mess.

Choose the people who you would like to give you references and ask them if they would be prepared to provide a reference if asked. It is useful to bear in mind that they cannot legally give you a bad reference but they can refuse to give you one which can be just as damaging. So consider your options carefully.



Once you have resigned you are free to do as you wish. Follow your dream, fulfil a goal, enjoy the experience. You will have learned a great deal which can only enhance your future experiences. Put them to good use and go forward confident that you will succeed in whatever you have decided upon.

Time Management

Managing time isn't so much about squeezing as many tasks into an already overloaded day; it's more about clearing away space to make time for people, play and rest - essentials that always suffer in these cases.

We all have busy lives with many tasks to accomplish in a day; the question is "*What do you do first?*" It always seems as if there isn't enough time to do everything that you have to do. Your automatic response is either to do the most urgent job or do what you're 'comfortable' with.

Unfortunately, this creates the mindset that you are unable to complete any task because nothing ever gets finished, you always seem to spend your time putting out the fires that rage around you. In these cases, your brain will send you the negative thought of "*I'm useless I can't accomplish anything,*" which is something we can all do without!

We all have the same number of hours in the day and we are all capable of managing what we have to do in those hours, primarily by bringing control and discipline into them.

Time management skills will enable you to manage these problems and help you to achieve a more productive life; it will make you happier, more successful and better able to live a fuller life with less stress.

You will get more done in less time by taking control of your time and you'll stay more focused on the task if you eliminate the stresses that are stopping you working. For instance, you're trying to write a document and the phone keeps ringing or you are constantly interrupted. Your stress levels rise as you believe you will never complete it. Therefore, you need to control the situation and rid your self of the *unwanted*. Controlling your environment will help you control your mind, which in turn will make your life easier. Concentrate on the task in hand, make sure all phones are switched off, the door stays shut and no other distractions are around. If there are no distractions you will find working is easier.

Keep a 'to do' list. Problems arise when you try to remember everything you have to do. Update it daily and as you update, note the urgent and the non urgent tasks and act accordingly.

This will have a number of positive effects. It teaches your brain to focus, you'll be less likely to forget, and helps order your thoughts as you don't have to hold everything in your head. You'll be better able to decide on the priority as you will be able to see it, there will be no excuse for just guessing and you'll be less likely to get side tracked.

Most importantly, it will make you feel in control of your achievements, you will have a record of what you have done and you'll always have the next task in hand. This is an important part of Time Management, as a lot of people are afraid of having nothing to do: "*If I do everything what will I have to do next?*" Using lists will always show you what is next, so you don't have to worry that there will suddenly be nothing.

Be aware of running non stop from one task to another. This may look as if you are busy but you need to stop and ask yourself, "*What tasks am I running to and from and do I really need to run?*"

Planning is paramount. There is a saying, "*If you fail to plan, you'll plan to fail*", and this is very true if embarking on a long term project or goal. The clearer your priorities are in your head and on paper, the more prepared you will be for the unpredictable. In your planning you should always be prepared for the unexpected. When something crops up your plan will clearly show you where it can fit into your tasks and highlight the lower less important tasks that can be sacrificed for these new ones.

Learn to say "No." We all take on too much and occasionally we need to decline. With every good intention, people around you will put their problems on your back if you let them. Learning to say *No* is important as it will highlight to you how much of your time is taken up solving someone else's problems, problems that you shouldn't have. Also, in business learn to delegate. We all believe that we are the only people who can possibly do the job properly but is that because we never let any one else do it?

Try not to allow unimportant details to drag you down. If you are constantly examining what you have done, (making sure the full stops and commas are in the right place), you'll never complete anything. Get it down on paper, then revise and amend.

If you are studying for exams you need to be aware of the amount of time you spend on the internet. Log your time and you will be surprised at just how much time you get side tracked by either surfing the web or playing games.

Define a time limit on each task. Don't say, *"I'm going to stay here till it's done."* Say to yourself, *"I will complete this in three hours."* Having a defined time limit will push your focus to complete the task. Likewise if a task usually takes you three hours, set the limit to two and a half hours; you'll be surprised how easy it becomes to achieve your goal in less time.

Create organised systems around you. Rid yourself and your desk space of all the unnecessary junk and create room for the essentials. Your mind will work far better when everything around you is in order.

Ask yourself, *"Is it necessary or do I do it out of habit?"* If the answer is out of habit - it isn't essential.

Don't procrastinate about all you have to do and don't want to. You need to manage the things you fear doing. The fear of doing it is far worse than actually doing the task and moving on.

Break down the goals into task size pieces so that you can work on them one at a time. Complete the most important tasks first. Then identify the next two or three most crucial and deal with those. This will help you feel as if each day has been a success as you will have achieved something tangible.

Identify areas of your life where you believe you are wasting time. Develop a routine or discipline in your life and stick to it. Avoid doing everything at the last minute, this only creates unnecessary stress levels

and will reinforce in your mind the negative mind-set that you cannot do it.

It may help if you can determine what time of the day you work best. Some of us are morning people some work better in the afternoon or evening. You will know which one you are and whenever possible try to work your most important tasks around that part of your day.

Keep yourself healthy. Make sure you sleep enough. It is recommended that we generally need seven to eight hours per night. Listen to your body and take note of what it's saying to you. Don't skimp on meals and rely on energy drinks and snacks; these may have an immediate effect but long term all it will do is ruin your teeth and may affect your weight. Have a balanced diet and eat at regular times which will help your energy levels.

Always ask yourself, "What can I do to spend more time enjoying what I'm doing?" This might sound like an impossible dream but taking control of the time in your life can help you achieve it. It's all about knowing yourself and being confident that you are in control of your life and not letting the unnecessary control you.

Coping In A Crisis

We are told that adversity or crisis is inevitable. That sounds really ominous but research shows that 75% of us will experience some sort of adversity at least once in our life. This can encompass any situation such as an individual experience of death, threat against you or your family or being told of a life threatening illness. A national event can also trigger a traumatic experience which affects a lot of people, such as the death of Princess Diana.

These crises encourage our bodies to go into shock and our minds to appear totally overwhelmed. This is quite a normal experience; some appear immediately whereas others can take weeks to manifest themselves.

As with many traumatic events, no two people react the same way. What can affect some people will have very little effect on others. This is mainly due to our own individual *filters*. These filters enable us to think, feel, and act differently about the process events that occur in our daily lives.

Our reactions to a crisis are both emotional and physical and affect different people in different ways. Some may experience both, others only one or some a combination of both.

Emotional reactions can be:-

- 👤 A feeling of intense anxiety, unexplained body pain, fear of everything, anger against ourselves or a particular person or event, shock – (can you actually believe this has happened?), and having difficulty in relaxing or sleeping.
- 👤 Numbness in your mind and body, being unable to concentrate on anything, not being able to remember the event or past events in our lives, experiencing prolonged crying spells and the feeling of being completely helpless.
- 👤 Depression and flashbacks are also a common occurrence as is the feeling of not being in control of anything.

- 👉 Nightmares haunt a lot of people, it seems as if you are re-experiencing the trauma of the event and it heightens the feeling of hopelessness.

Possible physical reactions can include:-

- 👉 Unexplained aches and pains over your body,
- 👉 Weakness and fatigue,
- 👉 Being unable to summon any strength for anything,
- 👉 Just wanting to sit and cry,
- 👉 Heart palpitations,
- 👉 Sweating - (the sudden feeling of being extremely hot and then cold),
- 👉 Being easily startled by something like a knock on the door or someone's voice, and
- 👉 An increase in alcohol consumption, as alcohol seems to numb our thoughts.

Ways you can helping yourself:-

You need to focus on what is important, that is initially getting you through each day. Take out all unnecessary commitments and responsibilities.

Recognise your own feelings and understand why you are having them. You may be tempted to ignore certain feelings as you believe that they will take over and you'll end up wallowing, but they are a necessary part of healing and you need to allow yourself to process them. Be patient with yourself; it's natural not to feel yourself and accepting your reactions will help you feel better.

Find some support - let your family or friends take control a little. Talking to someone will help, be it family, friend or professional.

There will be a lot to get through so setting small realistic goals to tackle what seem like huge obstacles will help you through the difficult periods.

Doing gentle exercise (or strenuous exercise if you can) will help, as will relaxation techniques. Your physical state can affect your mental state therefore practising one will help the other.

Try to maintain a routine in your life which will including doing things that have caused you pleasure in the past such as going to the cinema or coffee with friends. Try not to rush the process and give your self time to heal.

Ensure that you are safe. Crises can cause a state of chaos which will seem to take over your life. You may find yourself leaving the oven on, or not being totally aware of where you are or your surroundings.

Ways you can helping family or friends who are experiencing a crisis:-

Listen to what they have to say and empathise with them. Try not to offer advice unless they ask for it, but do not judge their feelings and emotions.

Respect their need for privacy. Offering to help is great but you must respect that for a time they may require solitude.

If they need help but are unsure what, help them set priorities for the immediate and then longer term.

Re-assure older people and children that they are safe. Older and younger people can get very confused when a traumatic experience happens, they will pick up on the mood of those who are experiencing the crisis and may not know the cause. This leads to uncertainty, and therefore, reassurance that they are safe and everything will be ok will help.

Give hugs and offer praise, this is especially beneficial to the person. Knowing that they are loved and needed will help their confidence.

After some time has passed, help them to focus on the future and together reassess how each person has changed and how stronger they have become and that they can start looking forward.

As you go through this process you will experience many ranges of emotions and it will feel as if life as you know it will never be the same. Take heart, life will return to some sort of normality and the hurt that you are feeling will lessen. There is a fitting saying in the film *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*:-

"Everything will be ok in the end, and if it isn't ok, it isn't the end."

Handling Difficult Conversations

How many times have you needed to have a conversation which you have continually avoided? How much worse did the situation become the longer you continued to put it off? Perhaps you tried to start and it didn't go well, perhaps you thought that it would go away if you left it, and as a last resort if you pushed it under the carpet it would miraculously disappear.

We all have, at some time in our lives, had to have a difficult conversation. It may be with our neighbour, a school teacher, employer, or even a family member. Rather than put it off, it's better to confront the situation and clear the air. Chances are that the other party feels exactly the same way as you and will welcome the chance to explore a solution.

We are all programmed to dislike difficult words or criticisms as it raises a varied state of emotions within us, which we would prefer not to explore. We fool ourselves into believing that the pain of not having the conversation is lesser than not having it. Experience will tell us that the problem will not just go away, especially if it's with a family member or someone with whom we are fond of. The contrary will always happen and both parties will feel caged in with nowhere to go.

We generally fall into a set pattern when tackling any confrontational situation.

We approach it like one would a war zone. In other words, in your mind there has to be a winner and a loser and you will try to make sure that you are the winner.

We try to oversimplify the situation. If the argument were straightforward we generally wouldn't argue about it. What starts off with one item suddenly gets rolled out and we struggle to make sense as we try to bring any number of topics into the arena with the hope that just one will get sorted out.

We generally either lash out or shut down. Approaching the conversation makes us feel a mixture of anger, frustration, embarrassment and defensiveness. This causes a peculiar state in that we either try to smooth things over, confront our counterpart with aggression or aim for the middle road and say what we think they want to hear.

We don't bring respect to the conversation. We need to respond in a way that in the future we can look back and know that we handled it in a way that we can be proud of.

We react by using techniques like crying, shouting, lying, silence, accusation, offensive, etc.

We rehearse what we will say and what the other person will say. The trouble with this is that they never says what we think they will say and consequently the rehearsing falls apart because we haven't rehearsed the 'new' scenario.

We make assumptions about what the other person's intentions are. They are individuals with their own experiences and will therefore have a different perspective on things.

We need to realise that the outcome will not be us winning as, in this case, the other person will see it as them losing.

The following are some areas that you should be aware of and what needs to be in your mind as you approach the conversation:-

Be clear about what the issue is and have a goal. You need to have clarity about the issue or you stand the chance of going off at a tangent. Know your objective, what in an ideal world you want to achieve, bearing in mind that the other person will probably know their agenda.

Some people find writing a letter will help. This isn't a letter that will ever be sent but it can enable you to express yourself and will highlight the actual situation. You can then put yourself into the other person's shoes and it will give you a perspective of what their reaction is likely to be. You can respond to yourself as the other person but remember that they may never say what you want them to.

Keep looking for signs of agreement as this will help you both to move on. Be aware of their body language which will help you realise the other person's state of mind and how they are handling the situation.

You must be blunt with yourself and remember that you are not the only one that is right. If you enter into this mindset the conversation will most certainly be difficult. You must accept that the other person will have a different perspective of the situation and consequently be just as right as you.

Manage your emotions. What can start as a discussion can soon escalate out of control into a full blown argument. In these cases, no one wins.

If the conversation seems to be at stalemate, admitting that you don't fully understand how you see this problem can be a powerful tool. Your counterpart will see this as you trying to be accommodating and will be more open about the situation.

Be aware of 'your buttons' and try not to let the other person 'push' them.

Be comfortable with silences. Every silence doesn't need to be filled with noise. Silences can have a calming influence and will allow you to hear what has and hasn't been said.

Remember that preserving the relationship is important. Creating irreparable damage in the relationship can only take a couple of minutes if ill thought out words are used.

You need to avoid an atmosphere of "Let's just get it over and done with." So choose the right time and place to have the conversation and be aware of yours and the other person's body language. If you can pick up the signs it can help you diffuse what could be a volatile situation. Consider the timing as well, giving notice to the other person may well be helpful.

Having a plan is useful, but don't over plan as the other person will nearly always act differently to what you think they should or how you envisaged the conversation to go.

Always try to look for solutions and don't apportion blame. Starting with "You said" or "You did" makes it a personal attack and will not help resolve the argument. Keep it straightforward and short and don't cloud your issues.

Focus on the effect things have on you and speak with care not caution. Caution can prevent you from talking about the truth, whereas speaking with care enables you to be accurate and respectful. A follow up discussion can also be helpful, and checking in the following day can ensure that you are both ok.

Be aware of your attitude to the conversation. If you believe it will be difficult then it most likely will be. If, however, you believe

that whatever happens some good will come out of it, this can maximise your effectiveness.

Difficult conversation have been likened to how to tell someone you think they are doing something stupid without telling them they are doing something stupid. You must remove the threat stimulus that cause people to resist you while still getting your message across

There is a saying "*If you don't say it, you'll show it.*" We all pick up on unexpressed feelings or emotions. Be courageous and have the conversation. Courageousness is contagious and the people around you will listen to your reasoning, especially when things get tough.

Reassessing Your Life and Goals

We all, at times, seem to get into a rut and the feeling of stagnating in our current situation seems to overpower us. We may have set out goals some months or even years ago and somewhere along the way they disappeared. What seemed definite 12 months ago is now looking hazy and it may not even appear to be the right goal now. In everyday life we experience issues such as promotions, change of job roles and redundancies. The children leave home and take the stability with them. A close friend or relative may have died. These and more similar instances can flummox us and make us ask ourselves: *"Why? What's the point? Where is my life going?"*

If this is you, now is the time to revisit and reassess your life. Goals can play a major part of your life as they give you focus, something to aim for. They will equip you in being able to handle any challenges, opportunities or situations which you will be presented with and which can easily throw you of course if you are not careful. Your goals are there to help you focus your mind on what is important to you.

The starting point is to make a list of all the areas in your life, including everything that is unique and important to you. Then rate them from bad to brilliant based on how satisfied you are with that element of your life now.

If you have done this previously on the Advance Peak Performance course, compare the current ratings to the list you have made before. You will be amazed as it will highlight the areas that haven't changed in 12 months plus. You need to honestly question yourself as to why they haven't changed.

With this information you have your starting point. You decide which area you are going to tackle first; the obvious perhaps should be the one with your lowest rating.

Month by month or even week by week you will always find reasons and ways to either stop working toward your goal altogether or push yourself even harder to reach your next limit.

As you head off into the future there are a number of things that you should question, the first probably being, are you ready to commit to whatever goal you set yourself?

These easy to follow tips may be all you need to help you make more sense of your life and enable you to recommit to your long term growth:-

Having a long term goal has been linked to having happiness and satisfaction in your life. Sometimes you may not see them as goals, more like hopes and dreams, but having them, and the direction that they take you, is really important for your life satisfaction and happiness.

Goals need deadlines or else they can just fall by the wayside. A long term goal may seem out of reach or just too hard to achieve, so having many short term goals that you can reach in sequence will help you achieve your long term goal

When you reach each goal you need to reward yourself. You need to acknowledge your success. Your motivation will get stronger which will help you all along your journey.

Aim toward positive goals and don't let the negative side influence you. Saying to yourself:- "*I will finish my work at 5.30*" is positive as it gives you a time limit, rather than saying "*I will stop working long hours*" which is indefinable and will have a negative effect on you.

As well as being important and meaningful to you, your goals should also be challenging and realistic. If you do have a list from the past and the one you have just written are similar and the same element is still at the bottom, ask yourself why. Be honest with yourself. Is it totally unrealistic? Will it take too much effort? Are you afraid of what will happen to you if you achieve this goal? You won't suddenly disappear, you can then strive for the next one and your life will be even more rewarding. Likewise, as you progress, revisit your list at regular intervals. This will help you to reinforce your progress and show you how much you have achieved.

If you have had a hard time sticking to your goals before, change the way you are working. If your goal seems too big or you are not sure how to tackle it, break it down into bite sized chunks and take it a day at a time. Don't be put off, or worry about what may happen next week, after all whatever it is may not happen and you have been worrying for nothing!

Keep your focus on the end result. Make sure your goals are written down on stickers and placed everywhere. Use triggers such as pictures or music to listen to, to help you focus on the end result.

There is a well-known saying "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got."

Remember, achieving any goal means creating new habits. Whatever you may think or believe you won't lose any weight if you don't exercise and alter your diet.

Sharing your goals with others can help your motivation. This can focus your mind on the end result and instil in you that "*I have to do it now as knows.*" It will also allow you to ask for help. Remember though that sharing isn't enough on its own, the person you have shared it with cannot do it for you, it is your responsibility to work towards that yourself.

There are certain things you must ask yourself as you plan your goals. They should be personally meaningful to you and to satisfy you intrinsically and conform to your values.

Does the goal outcome make you happy? Making yourself happy is something you need to consider. Even something as simple as genuinely being able to smile every day is important. You will never reach your goal if every day you wake up saying, "*Oh no – I'm not still chasing this am I?*" Happiness is being able to say confidently that you are pleased with your life and that you are satisfied with the way that it is going.

Is the goal what you need? Recognising what you need will help you when you prioritise the important things in your life.

Is the goal what you want? Prioritise things in order of importance with regard to your own feelings, happiness, fulfilment, and satisfaction.

Do you have bad habits with regard to the way you function?

Old habits will run you if not kept in check - you may not even know they are controlling you. This could have happened the last time you tried to set goals and may be the reason you didn't achieve them. Be aware of your daily routine and again be honest with yourself. Be aware of what you do and continually ask yourself, "*Is what I am doing necessary or is it repetition because I have always done it this way?*" If it's the latter then you are not really helping yourself achieve your potential.

Ask yourself at regular intervals: "*What have I learned so far and where have I grown?*"

Seeing the progress you have made will highlight your achievements and also show you where more work is needed.

Do you need to spend more time doing the things that perhaps you don't like, to get to the things that you want?

For instance if your goal is health or exercise related, working an extra fifteen minutes each session over a short period soon adds up, and that may be all you need to achieve your quest.

Having a goal in your life, something to aim for, can be very rewarding. It can teach you how to discipline yourself to get what you want. Your motivation and self-assurance will grow and will have a positive impact in all areas of your life. As you grow, others will see you chase and catch your dream. Many will admire your determination and try to emulate you. Not only are you enriching your life but the lives of those that are around you. Don't stagnate because you don't know what to do or everything seems so pointless. Grasp the nettle, reassess your life and goals, and achieve what you know deep down you can.

Approaching Retirement

Deciding when to retire should be a personal choice. Some people can't wait; others are reluctant to stop working. As we all approach retirement age there are a number of areas that need to be evaluated.

Probably the two most important areas for serious consideration are:-

- 1) Will you have enough money to live on comfortably? When you are ready to retire it is advisable to talk to your Personnel Officer who should be able to give you all the relevant information and a breakdown of figures concerning your pension. Also, arrange to see a Tax Advisor who can discuss your options to make the transition easier. They should also be able to advise you on your statutory rights, what you are able to claim for and what is readily available to you.
- 2) Health issues with either yourself or your partner/spouse. If health is an issue for one of you, seeking long term advice from doctors, health visitors, and your family etc. is paramount. They can advise you of your rights and what you would be legally entitled to and give you comfort and security.

If you are in the fortunate position of being financially stable, there are many other factors you should consider.

You may want to continue working to make your finances a little more secure in case anything should happen to you. You obviously need to do a competent job, but when you aren't worried about losing your job because you can afford to give it up, saying 'No' to various things should be uppermost in your mind. For instance, no to overtime, no to weekend working, and no to uninteresting projects may well be a starting point.

If that isn't an option for you, consider asking for reduced hours.

Working part time may suit you. If this isn't possible, consider increasing your holiday entitlement or working from home.

Both these options will still give you structure in your life and give it some meaning.

You don't have to continue working once you have enough to live on if you don't want to. However, it can still be difficult to give up the security of a pay check.

If you do decide to stay on, ensure that you have put in place the steps to make your life easier.

For some, the other question that is frequently asked is "*How do I know when the time is right?*"

The following are areas that perhaps you should ask yourself and consider as you make your choice:-

You want to retire while you still have the health and strength to do the things that you enjoy doing. This could be spending more time with children or grandchildren or making that all important trip you have planned but never got around to. These and many other things will be going around in your head, and being healthy enough to do them is an important factor.

You have a sense that you would regret continuing to work full time if you did it much longer. You know you could do your job perfectly well until you die but you are no longer happy or fulfilled.

Life seems too short to carry on working. As you get older the thought that you are no longer immortal, and spending time at a place where you don't really want to be, can heighten the feeling that you are missing out on other areas of your life.

You want to explore your other talents and prove to yourself that there is life after work.

You are prepared and in a position to lower your overheads. If situations permit, downsizing is an option that will free up capital and time spent on the upkeep of a house that is too big for you.

Your children have left home and you want to spend more time with your partner/spouse. Your partner/spouse is retiring, and you believe that this is the right time to start the next part of your life together. If this is the case, you will need some time to get to 'know each other again'. Remember that you have both been in a routine for many years and the sudden rush of being under one another's feet all the time is daunting. Neither of you can just step into the other's routine. You will both need time to adjust. Making sure that you both have some self time is important. Try some volunteer work, start an exercise routine, meeting friends, anything that will give you both time to adjust.

You have already made plans for an active retirement. All the things that you have been putting off for all the right or wrong reasons are now there for you to tackle

You have plans to maybe start your own business. Starting it as a joint venture or if your partner/spouse have already started one and you want to join your efforts in to the project.

Your family are living a distance away and you would like to move to be near them.

Making plans with your partner/spouse can be an exciting new way to enjoy your time together. Exploring ideas together without having to worry or consider daily jobs can be invigorating and a new experience that you have worked towards. Grasp the nettle and enjoy this new period of your life.

Coping With 'Empty Nest' Syndrome

Families can be likened to a nest of birds.

The parents spend all their time feeding and nurturing them then, when it is the right time, the chicks fly away. As is the way of life, your children will eventually leave home, which is primarily, what you as a parent have spent your time working towards. Teaching them about life and equipping them with knowledge to look after themselves so that one day they can make their own way in the world. This can encompass going to university, having a gap year, starting work or an apprenticeship, getting married or just moving in with their partner.

You are proud of them as you watch them embark on a journey at the start of the rest of their lives. That may be the vision to the world and must be the vision you give to your children, but inside it can be one of the most heartbreaking days of your life.

Coupled with them leaving, in the previous years, you have also had to learn to live with them as their emotions and feelings change. They stop verbalising with you (and grunts seem to take over!), they no longer need you 24:7, they appear to become secretive and wanting their own 'space', not wanting to go out with you, going on holidays without you, spending more time with their friends. This is all a necessary part of growing up, but can also be extremely frustrating and upsetting for parents.

You have to deal with their departure primarily on your own. You find your home that used to be a place of noise, bustle, washing, cooking, incessant loud music and a taxi service is suddenly transformed into a place of comparative silence.

To some, especially the primary care giver, this can be a time of feeling great emptiness and sadness. Your children have been the focus of your energy and attention for many years. They have been the individuals to whom you have given your total time and now they do not need you in

the same way and you can be left feeling totally on your own. With some people it can easily tip into depression and some women have likened it to post-natal depression. And whilst the feeling diminishes over the following weeks and months it never totally leaves you.

In today's society this feeling isn't exclusive to women as many men either share the responsibility, or give up work to be the primary carer. Whoever is the partner left alone in the home most of the time are the ones that primarily seem to suffer the most and it is those people that tend to take longer to get over it.

One of the best ways to diminish these initial feelings is to prepare for the departure.

Assuming that your child is happy to stay in contact with you (unfortunately some don't) make sure that you are abreast of all the technology they use. Don't be surprised though if you don't hear from them for months at a time as their lives take propriety and all else seems to disappear into a chasm that occasionally they will dip into. It isn't because they don't want you, or love you, rather that they are enjoying their life and contacting parents is the last thing on their mind.

If you're expecting the move, check that they know the essentials; how to cook, use a washing machine, what to buy food-wise for best bargains. If they are off on a gap year make sure they know about Consuls in the country they are going to and that you agree on a set time when they will contact you.

If you're not expecting it, don't panic. Try and accept that it is happening and be enthusiastic for them. It is far better for them to see and know that you will always be there for them than seeing you worrying.

Shift away from the terrifying thoughts. You have to be strong for them. They will be experiencing an array of emotions, from being scared to being 'over the moon'. Help them understand that once they are forming a new routine, life will be an adventure. Let them know that your home will always be a permanent base for them.

When they have left, if you find out that your kids are miserable you have to find the middle ground. That is, not suggesting they come running back or that you sort out the problem for them. They need to sort it out themselves. They will make mistakes but they will learn that way.

Moving in with a partner. If they are moving in or getting married, the dynamic between you both, should and will change.

If you agree with the old saying that 'no man or woman is ever good enough for your child' then this will lead to all sorts of problems. Don't try to break them up because you think they are making the wrong choice.

They will talk to their new partners now, more than to you and you will learn less about their lives. Generally they will make decisions on what they want and perhaps think only about coming to you as a matter of courtesy. Don't offer opinions unless asked and don't take sides. Accept that this is their choice and be enthusiastic for them. Always reassure them both that you will always be there for them. Remember that you will be gaining a new son/daughter. Enjoy the experience!

After they have left, you will be in a position to make other choices which are based on what you want and not what the wider family wants. As your brain opens up to these possibilities, new neurons are forged in our brain and we start thinking in a new way. To some this is exciting, to others a little scary, but it is a positive step to making the first steps in your life change.

Understand the concept of empty nest syndrome. It is something that affects all carers. It leaves individuals feeling inadequate and unwanted. Some psychologists say that from transition to being actively involved in your own life can take as long as 18 months. Therefore allow yourself time to adjust and rebuild your personal life.

Accept support, it doesn't matter what other people think or say about getting on with it. You are living your life, with your feelings and emotions, not them. Talking to your spouse may help as they may be experiencing very similar things or they can just listen and acknowledge what you are going through.

Start looking to your needs. Don't make a shrine out of their bedroom. Write down all the things you said you would do one day - because that day has now come! Take up a new hobby, go back to college, restart a career or consider voluntary work. As you have probably told your children, you can now tell yourself, "*The world is your oyster!*"

Focus on some of the positive points of them moving out. This won't belittle the emotion that you and your children are going through but it will make some aspects brighter. You will notice that the fridge doesn't empty anywhere as quickly as it used to. The washing machine won't have to go on as often. If you only have one bathroom you will suddenly get it back. You can listen to your music and you can finally have a discussion with someone (your spouse/partner) who isn't permanently glued to some mobile gadget or other!

When they do come home, which they may after university or a gap year, don't get back into doing everything for them. They will have grown up



enough to look after themselves. Remember they will most likely leave again so try and make sure they continue with their independence.

Feel proud that you have raised children who are capable of going out into the world and surviving and thriving on their own. Look on with pride as you see them achieve their goals.

Make them proud by enjoying life and achieving your goals.