

LOOKING AFTER YOUR MENTAL HEALTH DURING LOCKDOWN

InnerDrive resources



BLOG 1

ARE YOU EXPERIENCING ZOOM FATIGUE? HERE'S WHY



Recently we came across [this article on the BBC](#) which asks why you might find video calls so tiring, and explains what you might be able to do about it. Given the current climate, we thought that using some of our favourite psychological effects and lessons to help you understand it better would benefit you. So, what does the article actually say?

The article interviews Gianpiero Petriglieri, an associate professor who studies sustainable learning and development, and Marissa Shuffler, an associate professor who studies workplace well-being and teamwork effectiveness.

VIDEO CALLS AND CONCENTRATION

Firstly, Petriglieri says that being on a video call actually requires more focus than a face-to-face meeting would. This is because we have to work that bit harder to process body language, as well as tone and pitch of voice, meaning that we *"cannot relax into the conversation naturally"*. So, if this is the case what can you do about it?

Well, we think you can divide strategies between before, during and after the call.

Before your call

If you know that you have a video call coming up, there are a few things you can do to ensure that you will be able to concentrate better. One example is to remove anything in your workspace that may distract you, such as your phone. Our brains are [really bad at multi-tasking](#) and as such, when we attempt to do it, it drains our concentration and makes us more stressed...which in turn drains our concentration again! If you have a morning meeting for example, make sure to eat breakfast and have enough water beforehand too. For a more in depth guide on how to stay focused for longer, check out [our 8 hacks here](#).

During your call

Other than staying hydrated during your call, there is more you can do to keep your concentration levels high. Taking notes can help you stay focused and attentive, and ensure that you take in all the essential information from your call, for example. Furthermore, nodding and thinking about questions you could ask will also help to keep you engaged and present during your meeting. There is also some interesting research about certain foods that you [can eat or chew](#) to help you stay focused too!

After your call

When the call is finished, you may experience that feeling of fatigue. If this is the case, our first top tip would be not to rush onto another call if possible. Allow yourself time for breaks between meetings to give you a chance to refocus – this is also a great way to break up your screen time.

Another simple and seemingly obvious tip is to make sure you get [enough sleep each night](#). This is something that many people fail to do despite how beneficial it can be. Not only will a good night's sleep boost your motivation, it will also help you to think more positively about what is being said and help you to be more positive when trying to read people's emotions on the screen.

VIDEO CALLS AND SILENCE

Petriglieri adds that silence can be another challenge on video calls. Silence can make people uncomfortable. For example, the article cites [an interesting research project](#) that shows how delays on the phone or on conferencing systems made people view others more negatively. Even if the silence lasted for only 1.2 seconds, people perceived the responder as less friendly or focused. So why does this happen?

We think there are a couple of reasons behind this. Firstly, some people tend to be [scared of silence](#) and others find silences 'awkward'. Often this is because either there is a difference between your perception of how that conversation should be flowing and how it is actually flowing, or because you feel as though not saying something straight away threatened your goal of being accepted by others. In order to overcome these negative associations with silence, try to remember how it can actually be helpful for your conversation. One key message that we love at InnerDrive is to 'embrace the silence'. This means waiting before you speak and using silence as a tool to promote further conversation.

VIDEO CALLS AND STAGE FRIGHT

Shuffler also adds that being on camera can be stressful as people feel they need to perform and can become quite conscious of how they behave in front of others. We think this links to something called the '[Spotlight Effect](#)'.

The Spotlight Effect is when people believe they are being noticed more than they really are. Yet it is likely that on video calls, everyone is in the same boat. So, whilst you are worrying about people judging you, the other participants are probably busy worrying about the same thing.

Another thought to help you when you are in these situations is that the worst-case scenario very rarely happens. Try to think about what you want to happen or some positive outcomes that you would like to see instead, as opposed to what you don't want to happen. This will help you relax.

We also think this links to the '[Confirmation Bias](#)', which is when people favour information that confirms the beliefs they already held. For example, if you think people are judging you, you may start to process information more negatively and focusing on what confirms this belief. This might lead to you interpreting potentially positive behaviours, such as people smiling or silence, as something negative.

DEALING WITH NERVES FOR VIDEO CALLS

Some also get quite nervous when they are on video calls. Here's what you can do to manage these nerves. First, pay attention to [the way you speak to yourself](#) and make the effort to use self-talk in a helpful, uplifting way. Secondly, spend time planning and thinking about what you want to achieve during the meetings you might have. This will reduce the likelihood of you being caught out or feeling unprepared. For more help, check out our guide to managing nerves.

CAN YOU CATCH OTHER PEOPLES' EMOTIONS ON A VIDEO CALL?

In the article, Petriglieri says that video calls are "*our reminder of the people we have lost temporarily*" and as such can be distressing. We also think that constant online calls are a hotbed for catching other people's emotions. This is called [emotional contagion](#) and refers to how feelings are spread from one person to another; it is best thought of as a form of attitudinal osmosis.

Constant calls can also bring about '[group think](#)': if the majority opinion is not challenged or scrutinised, it can become accepted as true. Therefore, constantly talking to the same group of people with the same opinions can influence you to start to think in the same way too.

They say a lie travels faster than the truth, but often a

Finding video calls tiring is normal. But there are things that can help.

half-truth seems to travel faster. So be curious, ask questions, challenge ideas and remember that knowledge is power.

VIDEO CALLS AND FOMO

Petriglieri also believes that people can feel as though they are “*forced into these calls*” or like they “*ought to*” be online talking to others. This can foster feelings of [Fear Of Missing Out \(FOMO\)](#). Being aware of whether you want to be online as opposed to feeling as though you have to be online is an important distinction to make.

A nice question to consider is, “Will it make me happier/help me feel better?” If the answer is no, then we would argue you should probably leave it alone. However, even if you enjoy every chat you have, make sure that you still have some down time too, otherwise you may feel as though you are constantly ‘on’. This can reduce your [motivation](#) and make you feel more drained, plus all screen time will affect your [ability to sleep](#) too.

VIDEO CALLS AND PERSONAL SPACE

Another interesting point made by Petriglieri is that our lives used to be physically separate. For example our work time, social time and personal time often used to take place in different settings. Now, it’s all happening in the same place.

For some, this might sound like the dream. Unfortunately [psychology tells us otherwise](#). Usually people have multiple aspects and context-dependant roles, numerous relationships and take part in a range of activities. However, when these are reduced, “*we are more vulnerable to negative feelings*”. In the current situation, this might feel like a hard thing to avoid, but there are some things you can do that we think might help!

The most important, and probably something that you have heard plenty of other people mention, is [keeping a routine](#). This will help you feel as though you have a purpose, have a sense of control and will provide familiarity.

Secondly, if you can, try to do different things in different

places in your house. For example, you might sit at a desk for work, have lunch at a table and then talk to friends in your room. This adds a little bit of variety and means that you will concentrate better as your brain will learn the association between those places and their functions. Therefore, when you sit down at your desk your brain knows that “this is where work takes place”.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Although people are starting to adjust to the new normal, it doesn't necessarily make it easier to deal with. With these easy tips we hope you avoid 'zoom fatigue' where possible.

As a final note, remember that people are often highly motivated at the start and at the end of tasks, so if you're currently experiencing a lack of motivation, that is normal! We're also in unprecedented, stressful times times – we can't expect ourselves to perform as usual. To avoid letting these feelings take over – check out our guide on [how to stay motivated](#) here, as well as a guide on [how to stay optimistic](#).

THE SPREAD OF MISINFORMATION AND PANIC



“The Boss” Bruce Springsteen once sang that *“you can’t start a fire without a spark”*. These past few weeks, the Coronavirus has definitely proved to be more of a powder keg ready to explode. The ripples of this have been felt far and wide in society, with the FTSE 100 dropping almost 25% in a week and almost 10% in 24 hours.

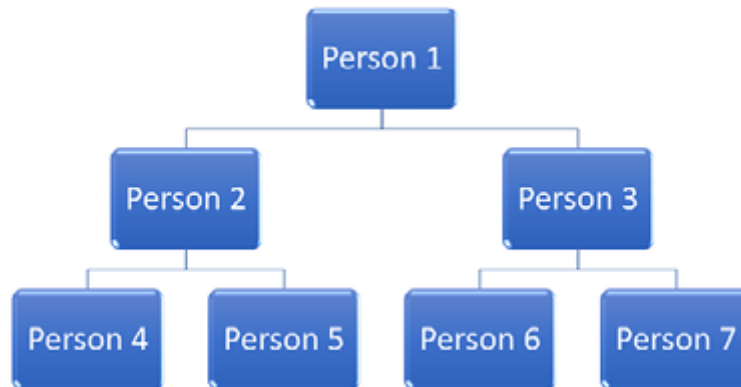
The situation with schools is less clear. Some countries have implemented partial/full closures of their schools. At the time of publishing, schools in England are just about to close. In such climates, it is easy for genuine concerns to morph into full-blown hysteria. So, psychologically speaking, what causes the over-reaction of panic, how does it spread and how can teachers help students navigate this period?

WHY DOES PANIC AND MISINFORMATION SPREAD?

Emotional Contagion

Emotional Contagion refers to how feelings are spread from one person to another. We literally catch other people’s emotions - this is best thought of as a form of attitudinal osmosis. For example, research has found that people [work harder on a task](#) if the person next to them is

putting in a lot of effort. Likewise, football fans feel more intensity and positive emotions if they are [part of a large crowd](#) who are also celebrating. Suicides and riots have also been found to be exacerbated by emotional contagion. What this means is that one person's worry can spread quickly in a group (see how below).



Group Think and Echo Chambers

Group Think refers to how, if the majority (or indeed the loudest) opinion is not challenged or scrutinised, it can become accepted as true. This in itself isn't the biggest issue, but if that opinion reverberates around an echo chamber, such as social media where we can self-select who to follow, then opinions can quickly become seen as 'fact'. This means platforms such as Twitter or Facebook are breeding grounds for Chinese whispers. They say a lie travels faster than the truth, but often a half-truth seems to travel fastest.

Uncertainty

[A recent study](#) by University College London found that uncertainty is one of the biggest sources of stress. In many cases, [uncertainty is even more stressful](#) than the worst-case scenario. When we know the worst-case scenario, we can adjust and prepare accordingly. But uncertainty can feel worse, as it is where ambiguity and misinformation flourish. Given that the country (and indeed the world) don't know much about the extent or the peak of the coronavirus, we find ourselves with an ever-changing picture. In the current climate of uncertainty, stress and panic can escalate rapidly.

3 THINGS TEACHERS CAN DO TO HELP STUDENTS AVOID MISINFORMATION AND PANIC

Knowledge is Power – if uncertainty breeds stress, then knowledge brings power. Former American Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld once commented that “*there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns—the ones we don’t know we don’t know*”. Essentially, once we accept what we do and don’t know about the Coronavirus, we can better prepare for it. This means reading information from their original sources and [not taking what is said on social media as gospel](#).

Questioning what you hear or read can help you avoid unnecessary stress.

Focus on What You Can Control – When people focus on the things they can’t change, it tends to make them quite stressed and frustrated. This is because they are swimming up-tide and, as a result, will make little progress. Helping students focus on what they can control will help them enhance their motivation and confidence towards studies.

Ask for help – Loneliness, self-isolation and fear creates a perfect storm for emotional stress and anxiety. This is true for both staff and students. Encourage students to ask questions, listen to their concerns and let them know you are available to them. You don’t have to know all the answers to their questions, but just listening to them and helping guide them to the appropriate sources will be of great benefit to them.

COPING WITH LOCKDOWN THANKS TO THE STOCKDALE PARADOX



There is no denying we are in uncertain times. It is challenging, scary and somewhat unknown. So how can we get through it? The answer may be in the Stockdale Paradox.

WHAT IS THE STOCKDALE PARADOX?

[The Stockdale Paradox](#) is named after Admiral James Stockdale, one of the most decorated US Navy Officers, who received the Medal of Honour in The Vietnam War after being a POW for 8 years with no release date. However, throughout this he shouldered the burden of command by always trying to help others survive.

When asked how he survived when many of the other prisoners didn't, he said: *'I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life, which in retrospect, I would not trade'*.

When asked who didn't survive, he said: *'Oh, that's easy – the optimists'*. This was because *'they were the ones that said, "we're going to be out by Christmas". And Christmas would*

come, and Christmas would go. Then they'd say, "we're going to be out by Easter". And Easter would come, and Easter would go'. This blind optimism would cause them to "die of a broken heart".

Stockdale went on to say that 'you must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end – which you can never afford to lose – with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be'.

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE STOCKDALE PARADOX?

It's hard to think about the Stockdale Paradox without also thinking of Viktor Frankl, a Holocaust survivor and author of *Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankl coined the term '[tragic optimism](#)', which refers to how the super optimists would sadly die of hopelessness.

However, while the survivors would also have the enduring belief that they would triumph, they also acknowledged the reality of the difficulties that they were facing.

To us, this means that the Stockdale Paradox refers to the ability to retain faith while confronting the facts of your situation too. In other words, not to have blind optimism, nor heaps of pessimism. This is one of our favourite paradoxes as it suggests we be incredibly grounded yet hopeful - and we think that this is especially important, now more than ever.

So, how can you use the Stockdale Paradox to be a realistic [optimist](#)?

Watch your words

How you talk to yourself has a big impact on how you think, feel and behave. The way you speak to yourself is linked to your [creativity, persistence and ability to deal with stress](#). During these challenging times, lots of people may start to think negatively which is totally normal because those thoughts can protect us. But, to thrive in these times instead of just surviving, good tips would include:

- Saying 'stop' straight after having a negative thought.
- Telling yourself what to do in a positive and helpful way.
- Using energised language with yourself as this can help [block out distractions](#) and increase your motivation.

Regain a sense of control

During times like these, there are two types of people when it comes to thought processes. The first type is what we call 'problem-focused'. These people are always looking for threats and problems.

The second type of people are called '[solution-focused](#)'. These people ask themselves questions like, 'What can I do to improve the situation?'. By doing this, they stop focusing on the problem itself. Instead, they start to focus on what they can do about it which promotes persistence and a sense of comfort and control.

Acknowledge your contribution

Whilst lots of you are [working from home](#) where possible, it's easy to become de-motivated quickly. However, the people that are able to maintain their drive acknowledge the work that they are doing and reflect on why it's important and how it's making a difference. As teachers, you make a difference every day, particularly now.

**Pessimism won't help,
but neither will blind
optimism.**

A nice way to do this is writing to-do lists and reflecting on what you have achieved from your list at the end of the day. Doing this task can also prompt positive thinking as it encourages you to think about [what you are grateful for](#) on a daily basis. This can improve your mood, well-being, and it helps to increase satisfaction.

Take a balanced approach

Sometimes it's easy to forget that things aren't always going to go our way. Especially whilst we are all experiencing new working arrangements, the key is to never get too low when things go against us, but also never get too high when

things go our way. This helps can help you to have a stable emotional base to operate from. So, whilst you should acknowledge how you're feeling, and why you are feeling that way, the most important thing is to debrief with yourself or with others, keep moving forwards, and of course, [learn from any setbacks](#) along the way.

Have a good team around you

In times of isolation, it is incredibly helpful to [have a good team around you](#), both in person and virtually. There are lots of positives to keeping a good team around you. These include:

- Enhancing your effort
- Providing social support and advice
- Helping develop resilience
- Boosting motivation
- Improving your self-view
- Enhancing performance
- Helping you deal with stressful situations

Keep a routine

Lots of us will be using new strategies and trying new behaviours whilst in isolation. Being creative and trying new things is great, but the trick is to keep them going. New behaviours are more likely to endure if you weave them into an existing [daily routine](#).

Not only does having a routine help you to keep up new behaviours and habits, it also makes it easier to achieve things throughout the day and gives you a sense of familiarity and control. Therefore, where possible, keeping your routine as close to normal is important. This includes sleeping at the same times, getting dressed, eating at the same times and exercising where possible.

Picture the positives

Sometimes it's easy to forget the bigger picture; especially nowadays, our focus can naturally narrow into what's

happening on a purely day-to-day basis. However, not forgetting [why you do what you do](#), or what you are working towards, is really important. Although the goal posts may have shifted, the game will still be the same. So, people that deal with the current climate best will see this as an opportunity to focus on how to 'bounce back', whether this means thinking about new learning strategies, new teaching methods or even new school cultures. This will help you keep a bit of perspective and [motivation](#).

FINAL THOUGHTS

In many ways, we're all in our own Stockdale Paradox at the moment, and the question you should be asking is: 'What can I do to improve my situation?'

Yes, it's natural to think about the negatives and by no means should we ignore them either, but less pessimism, more hope and a more realistic optimism can go a long way.

WHY UNCERTAINTY BREEDS STRESS



Uncertainty is inevitable at one point or another in our lives. We may face a decision without enough information to help us make up our mind or there may be too many variables that can influence our desired outcome. Whilst unpredictability may be exciting at times, it is a source of stress for many. So, why does uncertainty breed stress? And can the answer to that question help us better understand how to manage it?

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

[A study](#) conducted by researchers at University College London found that uncertainty caused more stress than a painful outcome. This study involved 45 participants who played a computer game during which they had to guess if there was a snake under a rock they then had to turn over. When there was a snake, they received a painful electric shock. The game continuously changed to keep a level of uncertainty throughout. A few participants were told which rocks were hiding a snake and therefore knew beforehand when they would receive an electric shock.

The results surprisingly found that participants who were told that they had a 50% chance of receiving a painful

electric shock had higher stress levels than those who were told there was a 100% chance of being shocked. People become stressed in times of uncertainty because they are unable to prepare for the potential outcome.

THE EFFECTS OF STRESS

Stress is something we all experience. It's a normal reaction to changes in our environment and often makes us feel that we can't cope with the pressure. Stress has many negative effects on the body, from a weakened immune system to increased irritability. Not managing stress in the appropriate ways can cause these effects to worsen and have a further detrimental impact on our physical and mental health.

[Evidence suggests](#) that stress can severely harm students' motivation and, in turn, their academic achievement. Stress can be caused by many things - however being uncertain about the future or the outcome of a specific event can breed stress that is more difficult to manage.

When students are preparing for exams for instance, they very often feel worried about how they will perform. The pressure can lead to them performing well below their skill level because the stress is overloading their brains and not leaving enough resources to focus on the task at hand. [Cognitive overload](#) as a result of stress is very common, and its effects can lead to declines in all cognitive functions.

[Research shows](#) that experiencing an interference or overload on cognition is strongly associated with poor performance relating to memory and processing. When students are under a lot of pressure, their brains are overworked. This sometimes leads to them forgetting important information and their learning slowing down.

MANAGING UNCERTAINTY AND STRESS

The [Mental Health Foundation](#) suggests that a great way to [reduce stress](#) is to try and relate your situation with something you have previously experienced. By familiarising yourself with

the situation, you are able to recycle your previous coping strategies or figure out new ones that will help you deal with this current problem.

Focus on what you can control to avoid getting stuck and stressed.

A great question to ask yourself is: how is this situation similar to what I have experienced before? This removes ambiguity, which reduces uncertainty, which in turn boosts confidence.

In difficult or uncertain times, it is important to remember that we can't control everything. Instead, we should focus on what we can control, which is how we react. Focus on the process involved to reach a specific outcome as this will help manage uncertainty in decision making. If you feel comfortable during the process and believe you are making the most effective decisions along the way, then you will have faith in yourself and your abilities. This confidence that you develop will reduce the stress that comes along with uncertainty and replace it with excitement and motivation.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Feeling unsure about a situation's outcome is something we face very often, and along with it comes undue stress. The stress lies in the not knowing, which we can seldom control. It is important to find ways to [manage this stress](#) by recognising how the situation may be similar to something we have previously experienced, or to focus on controlling our reaction and try to face every outcome with optimism.

CRISIS CAN BE AN OPPORTUNITY



When faced with a crisis, what is the first thought that comes to your mind? For most people, it probably won't be "*this is a good thing*". It's human nature to panic in a crisis, which can cause us to miss out on opportunities that may have led to success. However, people are beginning to realise that sometimes, a crisis can be used to your advantage. It all depends on point of view: instead of viewing a stressful situation as a threat, how can we see it as a challenge? And how will this benefit us?

A CHALLENGE VS THREAT MINDSET

A situation can be interpreted as either a challenge or a threat, depending on an individual's mindset. A stressful situation can be viewed...

- As something we have the resources to overcome.
- As an opportunity to build on our skills.
- Or as a crisis we can't get through as we do not possess the necessary abilities and may, as a result, face a loss.

Those who react well under pressure are said to have a 'challenge mindset' whereas those who react negatively

possess a 'threat mindset'. When faced with a crisis, those with a challenge mindset may experience an increase in adrenaline, whereas those with a threat mindset may feel an increase in their stress levels. Whichever state you are in has significant consequences as they have been found to influence how much effort you put in, your concentration levels, and how well you [perform under pressure](#).

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

Researchers at the University of Staffordshire have conducted many studies aimed at investigating challenge and threat states. Their research, whilst focused on sport psychology, can very easily be applied to education. The two fields share many requirements for success, from hard and consistent work, to having the ability to perform under pressure. Similar to the nerves that athletes may face before a competition, students can experience stress throughout the school year, and especially during exams.

[This research shows](#) that those who succeeded when put under pressure were more likely to [develop resilience](#) that would help them face stressful situations in the future. Promoting a challenge state allows individuals to change their perspective of a crisis from negative to positive. This can help them avoid experiencing the negative effects of a threat state.

These findings demonstrate the importance of encouraging students to view every crisis as an opportunity: not only will it help them succeed, it can also help them develop skills that will be useful to them later on in life.

HOW YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR MINDSET

There are a few key ways to transform your mindset. They can help develop motivated students that are ready to face crises. They include:

- ***Believing you have the necessary skills and resources*** - Take a step back and assess your skillset. More often than not, stress clouds our judgements and we are usually more able to

handle the situation than we first thought.

- **Feeling in control of the event** - Whilst you can't be 100% sure of the outcome, you should know that you are in full control of your actions and how they influence a situation.
- **Surrounding yourself with supportive people** - We often look to the people in our lives for comfort or advice in stressful situations. Make sure that [the people around you](#) are optimistic and that they share this optimism with you. Coming from someone you trust, it's more likely to calm your nerves.
- **Reminding yourself of previous experiences** - You will probably have faced similar situations in the past. If you have persevered and succeeded, use it to remind yourself that no crisis is impossible to get through. If it ended poorly, use the lessons it taught you to make this situation a success.

Those with a threat mindset may feel isolated in the face of crisis. They often focus on what they may lose and become overwhelmed with nerves and worry. Sometimes, a crisis can throw a spanner in the works and disrupt someone's process towards their goals. This can make these goals seem unattainable and as a result, lead them to withdraw from the situation and make unfortunate decisions.

Changing how you see negative events can help you grow from them.

Students can face a multitude of crises and stressful situations, from exams to university acceptances. They are almost always performing under pressure, resulting in high levels of nerves and continuous worrying.

To help students adopt a challenge mindset, it is important to encourage them to follow the tips mentioned above. More specifically, you can help them identify what they can control about their situation (in the case of exams, for example, how much revision they do), remind them of what they stand to gain if they perform well, and be someone they can rely on to [calm their nerves](#) and put everything into perspective.

FINAL THOUGHTS

If you believe you have a threat mindset and it is negatively impacting you, don't worry; it can be changed.

Our mindset and thoughts are malleable, and in order to flourish and perform to the highest potential, you should work towards adopting a challenge mindset.