Getting our heads around the Coronavirus is all about choice

Day 1.

We have 2 choices:

Option1:

We can allow it to get us down by choosing to get angry, frustrated and depressed (negative option)

OR

Option2:

We can accept that the situation is what it is (positive option)

Keeping in mind that what we think (our thoughts) influences what we feel (emotions) and how we behave in the world.

If we choose option 1 our negative thoughts will transition into negative feelings and negative behaviour – these fuel each other taking us on a downward spiral. For example, if we think that we can’t cope, we start feeling helpless, our confidence goes out the window and we make mistakes.

Whilst, if we choose option 2 we can initiate an upward spiral.

Option 2 speaks to acceptance of the situation. Now, acceptance does not mean giving up, becoming detached or simply not caring. Acceptance means being attached, taking hold of something no matter how difficult and embracing the true, deep understanding of how things really are.

In Mindfulness practice we see acceptance as a pause, a period of allowing things to be just as they are, a period of seeing clearly and of turning towards the difficulty rather than trying to avoid it.

When we pause and acknowledge and accept our negative thoughts, feelings and sensations it breaks the initial link in the chain that leads to negative downward spiral and prevents the mind’s automatic aversion pathway from kicking in.

Therefore, when we pause we give ourselves more time and space to respond in the wisest and most creative way to difficult situations.

If we choose to accept the situation as it is, we open ourselves up to new possibilities which could include the view that this crisis too shall pass.

Imagine you are a surfer, no wave is ever the same, sometimes the conditions are rough and sometimes calm, sometimes the waves are small and sometimes enormous. This is much the same in life, we never know what challenges we will face and often circumstances are out of our control. As in life and in surfing, we can’t control the waves but we can learn to ride them. So rather than fear the wave, harness the power and energy of this force and have the ride of your life.

Enjoy the ride and remember to breathe.
Day 2 of getting our heads around the Coronavirus

Yesterday I wrote about choice and I reminded you to breathe.

On the matter of choice, central to my life, is the phrase: “the choices we make will determine the life we lead”. How we ride this Coronavirus wave is up to each one of us – after all, we do have the freedom of choice no matter what the circumstances.

On the matter of remembering to breathe, it is not so much about remembering to breathe as it is about bringing an awareness to the breath because ultimately the breath happens without any intervention from ourselves (‘it breathes itself’ – that’s what lungs do). In the same way that our lungs breathe our minds think – it just happens.

Bringing awareness to the breath has some advantages. One of the good things about drawing our attention to the breath is that it reminds us that if we are still breathing there is more right with us than wrong, so we have a great deal to be thankful for. We can either embrace this blessing and make the most of every moment in our lives, or we can choose to be alive and miserable and make everyone around us miserable too.

The second thing about bringing awareness to the breath is that we can use it as an anchor to steady ourselves when things feel just that little bit out of our control.

Because the breath happens on its’ own accord, I am not for one minute suggesting you interfere with this process. I would, however, like to invite you to become acquainted with the wonders of your breath, this life given force that we take for granted. Seek out a quiet place in your home, a place where you feel most safe, comfortable and where you will not be disturbed. Find an area where you can either sit upright on a chair or on the floor or you can lie down. Take a moment to settle and ground yourself, you can close your eyes or lower your gaze if you wish and just for a moment bring your awareness to your whole body, starting with your toes and moving up towards your head, shifting your attention from one area to the next, noticing any and all sensations that are present in the here and now – no need to adjust anything, simply just notice. When you are ready, move the focus of your attention to the breath, simply noticing the inbreath and the outbreath – just notice! There is no need to adjust or change in any way, the way you breathe – simply notice the inbreath and the outbreath. Do this for a few minutes.

You will notice that after a while your mind starts to wander, you get distracted by thoughts. It’s ok, it’s just thoughts and it is what the mind does (just like the lungs breath, the mind thinks) – no need to beat yourself up about this. Thoughts are just thoughts, we can’t halt thinking but we can remind ourselves that thoughts are not our reality, we make them our reality – remember the word, choice. We can choose to get caught up in the content of our thoughts or we can choose to notice that they are a little crazy and make the choice to shift our attention. So, when you become aware that the focus of your attention has shifted to your thoughts, notice where it has gone and gently escort your attention back to the breath. Try doing this for 5 minutes on your own. If it is difficult to do this unguided practice you might want to try Mark Williams, mindfulness meditation track 1, Body and Breath on youtube.

Make the breath your anchor!