

Operam Education Group 

DEALING WITH LOCKDOWN

By **nullam**
wellbeing

Dealing with lockdown: Clare Holmes, Nullam Wellbeing

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When we are faced with difficult or stressful situations, we often find that we react in ways that we don't fully understand and do things that we wouldn't normally do.

Currently as a nation we are experiencing a threatening situation that we have no control over. Whilst we may accept and understand the need for the measures we are all expected to take, it is undoubtedly making an impact on all of our lives and though we may not recognise it initially, this is causing a lot of anxiety for many people.

Over the last week you may have struggled to adjust to your new 'routine'. Your sleep may well be disturbed, you may be staying up later (why not, you haven't got to get up for work). You may be getting angry with others who are not staying home, or wondering why, in the huge queue to get into the supermarket an entire family has to do the shop. You may be eating and drinking more.

Emotionally you might be feeling overwhelmed, getting headaches, picking fights or getting into arguments with family that you haven't seen this much of since you can't remember when. You may also be laughing unexpectedly or saying random, inappropriate things and you have probably become a Covid-19 expert overnight, with a master plan that means you can still go on your holiday that was cancelled.

Alternatively, you may have just decided to hibernate until it is all over and pressed pause on 2020.

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If you are feeling any of these things you are officially a completely normal: a fully emotionally functional person. All your responses are 100% natural and all to do with the evolution of our brains. Under normal circumstances our Frontal Cortex keeps us in check and helps us to make rational decisions and respond in a socially acceptable way.

However, when we are exposed to threats and need to deal with them, our ancient brain springs into action. Specifically, a tiny, almond sized, thing buried behind your ear called the amygdala. This takes charge and doesn't listen to our more rational frontal cortex. It's the bit of the brain that helps us to survive. You may remember from GCSE Science the fight or flight response.

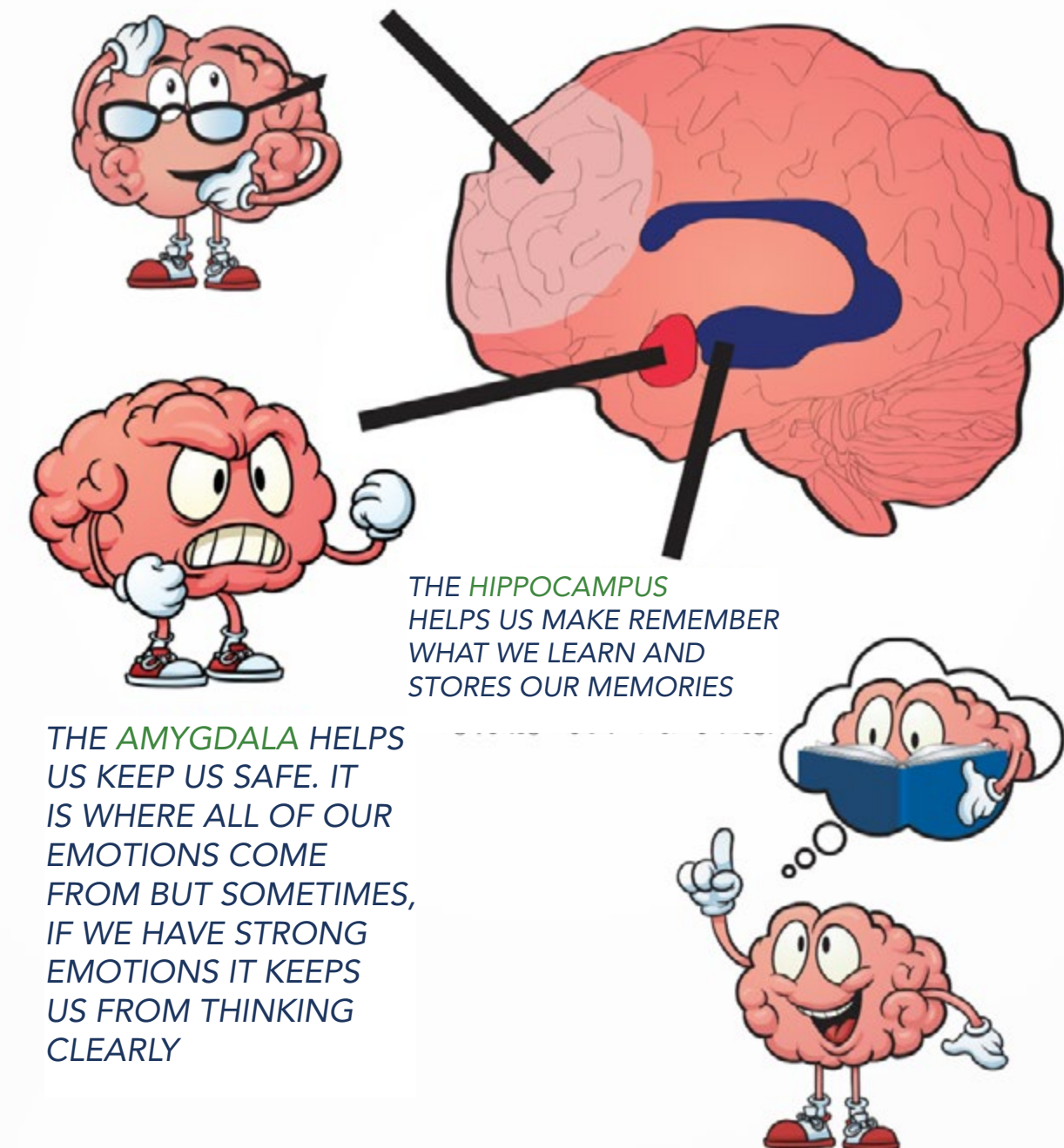
The Amygdala basically has 3 responses to any perceived threat:

- Take it
- Hit it
- Run away from it

It does this by flooding your body with chemicals like cortisol, and adrenaline. Your heart rate goes up, you feel super alert, your breathing goes shallow, your muscles are ready for action and you may feel sick and like you need the toilet. These chemicals are also largely responsible for the huge range of other cognitive/physical/emotional reactions described above. In situations like the Covid-19 pandemic, this tends to happen whether you think you're scared or not. Anxiety can be even more infectious than the virus and your brain reacts even if your conscious mind doesn't, particularly if others around you are having a 'wobble'.

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It's important to recognise that anxiety isn't just a mental condition. It is also manifested in physical, cognitive and behavioural ways. You may notice all kinds of things: stomach upsets, headaches, insomnia, changes to eating, changes to the way you talk. It's also cognitive: it's very difficult to think straight when your amygdala is in charge and so you may become very bad at making decisions, absorbing information and generally thinking rationally. Sadly, this is exactly what you need to do in the current crisis.

The good news is that for the vast majority of us, is that it is possible to manage your anxiety. You can turn the amygdala down and reduce its impact on you. General things you can do include:

Breathing:

I know we all do it all of the time, but when we are anxious, we can calm ourselves by focussing on how we breathe. This works because when the amygdala triggers, rapid breathing is one of the physical responses. Luckily when we control our breathing our bodies start to reduce the production of adrenaline and cortisol and any other physical reactions will lessen or stop. There are numerous apps that help to teach calm breathing techniques: try one of these Top 10 Breathing Apps:

1. Zenfie
2. Breath Ball
3. Health through Breath
4. The Breathing App
5. Kardia
6. Breathe2Relax
7. Stop, Breathe & Think
8. Just Breathe
9. Headspace
10. Breethe

Alternatively just try this:

- Breathe in through the nose, out through the mouth. SLOWLY
- Make the outbreath longer than the inbreath: imagine there's a candle in front of you and it mustn't go out
- Breathe from your stomach not chest: your stomach should go out when you breathe in.
- Do it for two minutes



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Keep in touch with friends/family: Make good use of social media and technology like Skype, WhatsApp, Facetime etc. Call someone who'll listen while you have a wobble. Someone you can trust not to judge you and who'll just sympathise. Check in with your friends regularly, especially if they've gone silent. You could also arrange a virtual night out.

Remember to laugh: Laughter helps release endorphins that make you feel good. Silly memes, silly jokes, stupid videos on YouTube. It's also good to share to keep bonding with friends and family, which will also help you feel less alone.

Focus on the moment: You can meditate or do yoga if this is your thing, but for those who haven't tried it before, trying to start anything new when you're already anxious is really hard. So instead do something with your hands, that you must focus on to get right. Examples are cooking, knitting, sewing, painting, making things (get the Lego or a jigsaw out of the cupboard). Really focus on what you are doing: this is Mindfulness.

Be kind: To yourself and others. Now is not the time to go on a diet, unless you are already on one then it may be helpful to try to stick to it, to avoid beating yourself up for putting on weight and undoing all your good work. Think comfort books, games, telly; comfort everything. Everyone is likely to have a meltdown at some point. Understand that if someone is angry or aggressive, then they are probably scared.

Enjoy the changing season: It's Spring and despite the human population being in meltdown the rest of the planet is quietly getting on with it. If you can't go outside, open the windows and feel the air on your face and breathe it in. If it's safe for you to go outside for exercise, do it, while of course observing social distance. Go for a walk and notice the trees and flowers and how they change each day. Listen to the birds and other sounds. Being outdoors, connecting to nature, is hugely calming.

Step away from negative coping mechanisms: Step away from social media and the news. Limit yourself to short need-to-know bits once a day. Stick to trusted news sources and the NHS and avoid the digital nightmare that is Twitter. You'll feel better immediately. Tempting as it is, don't get drunk, especially if you're alone. Don't stay up all night reading or watching TV. Don't get sucked into conspiracy theories and definitely don't pay attention to anything Donald Trump says!

NEXT UPDATE WE'LL GUIDE YOU THROUGH
The Five Ways to Wellbeing

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