

# MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE; HOW EDINBURGH COMPANY OK POSITIVE ARE HELPING COMPANIES IN THE CURRENT CLIMATE



Coronavirus has caused massive disruption within the working world. Companies of all sizes have been affected; people of all professions have felt the ripples in the economic waters. The necessity to social distance and shut down workplaces has meant that companies need to adapt or they will struggle to survive in the years to come.

All scenarios lead to an increase in stress and strain on the mental health of everyone involved. Company owners who must let staff go, or furlough them, at a cost without the levels of revenue they were used to. Employees with no idea when they will be back to work and be able to afford and resume their lifestyles. All while there is a pandemic sweeping our streets.

Ensuring everybody takes a moment to understand how all this will affect their mental health is paramount to the health, wellbeing and continued success of the companies they work for.

This general feeling of helplessness and uncertainty around the COVID

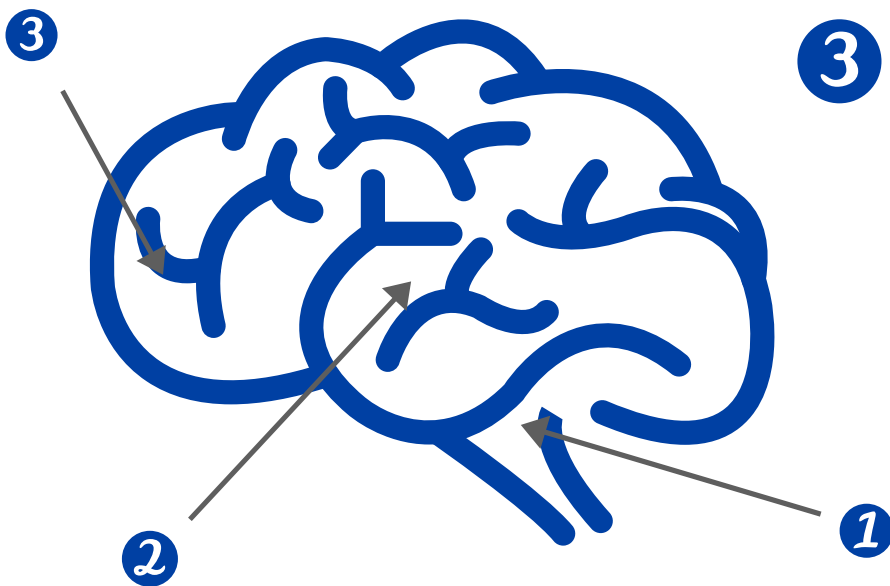
situation leads us down an emotional, thought storm. Perhaps if you are reading this, you (like us) are feeling a bit out of sorts. You might notice erratic emotions, irritability, struggle to sleep, feel jittery, nervous, nauseous, forgetful, unmotivated, lethargic and be behaving in all sorts of weird and wonderful ways, arguing more, panic buying loo roll. If you are feeling any of these things or doing any of these things that's good news! You are 100% not alone. You are completely normal. You are acting like a fully emotionally functional human being reacting to threat, we are all hardwired to do this.

Remember this is not "working from home". We are at home trying to work in a global crisis, you should not try to compensate for lost productivity by working longer hours and measure your success on when things were "normal" this type of thinking will only serve to activate the threat system. Your physical, emotional and relationship health is more important than anything else right now as these are the things that will support you going forward.

# HARDWIRING OF HUMANS

We thought it might be helpful to give a (very) brief overview of the hardwiring we humans have evolved with. If we can understand this, we are better placed to look out for traps and triggers. By gaining an understanding of this function, we can recognise and respond in ways that will work more effectively for us.

The brain is complex and while we are not in any way neuroscientists, there are three parts of the brain that usually work in perfect synchronisation:



**1** The lower brain/brain stem. The part of our brain that is responsible for survival—controlling our heartbeat, breathing, and other autonomic functions “fight, flight or freeze” - excellent survival strategies (for cavemen -less so for modern dwellers).

**2** The mid/limbic brain, the emotional centre. We refer to this as the alarm threat detect and response control centre.

**3** The forebrain/prefrontal cortex is the logical, rational part of the brain. This brain is responsible for the regulation of logic, creativity, problem solving, language, and perspective- the sensible part.

In the presence of threat (real or perceived) brain 1 and 2 close ranks and go into work mode, whilst brain 3 struggles to keep up...can you see where this going? This is a primitive, involuntary response which is essential for our continued survival. It's efficient, perhaps too efficient, but imagine if we did not have this system (the Dodo - now extinct).

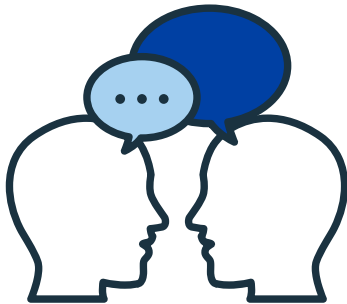
So, with the constant news and reminders of this unprecedented global crisis and threat to human life, job losses, isolation, is it any wonder we are feeling this way? In a fear situation like a pandemic our minds and body will react in this way whether you think you're scared or not - anxiety is even more infectious than COVID19. Your body reacts even if your conscious mind doesn't.

# TIPS ON HOW TO MANAGE THIS



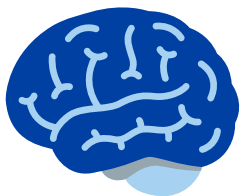
Focus on what is in your control: How coronavirus spreads, the economic situation is NOT within control but how you show up each day IS. Set your **INTENTION** for the day, **STRUCTURE** and **ROUTINE** will give you a sense of focus and purpose. Watch less news and spend less time scrolling through social media – our threat seeking minds like to constantly look for threats, it's not helpful.

Notice your **THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS**. Our minds never stop thinking, the goal is to be the observer of your thoughts, and not be controlled by them. Allow emotions in. To fight with emotions is like having a tug of war with a monster- the more you pull the more the monster will pull. Let go of the rope and name the emotion, change how you relate to it and let it pass. It's ok not to feel ok



**COMMUNICATE** with others about how you are feeling, it's likely they can relate (but only if they know). If you are worried about your job then talk to your employers, if you are concerned about your finances, talking to banks, lenders, service providers. These are all things that are within your control.

Engage fully in what you are doing, be **CURIOUS**, pay **FULL ATTENTION** to things in the present moment. Notice how often the mind will pull you back to its chatter, practice shifting attention back to the activity in hand. If it's a struggle to do this, notice 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can touch, 2 things you can smell and one thing you can taste (5,4,3,2,1 technique). There are some great mindfulness apps out there, make this part of your daily routine. Short regular **MINDFULNESS** practice has been proven to improve wellbeing.



Be aware of your **BREATHING**, sounds so simple, but longer, slower deeper belly breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system and signals to the midbrain (brain 2) that all is well and can deactivate the fight flight response.

Take care of your **PHYSICAL NEEDS**—drinking water, eating, and moving also help to activate the parasympathetic nervous system which reassures the sympathetic response that all is well.



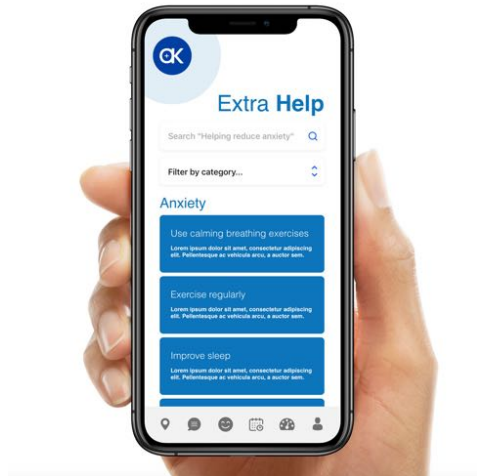
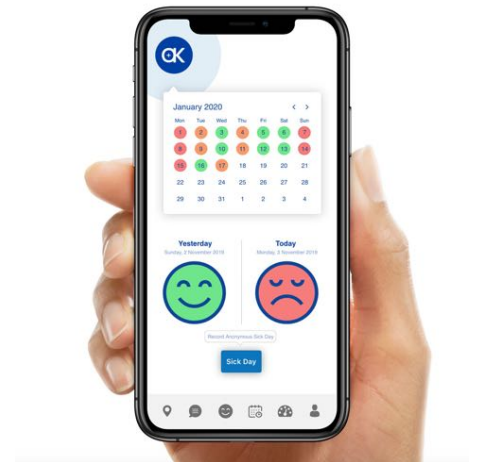
Consider your **PERSONAL VALUES**; what sort of person do you want to be? How do you want to treat others, yourself and the world? Take action towards these. At OK Positive the values we adhere to are **CONNECTION**, **COURAGE**, **COMMITMENT**, **COMMUNICATION**, and there is an endless list of values out there.



We hope this blog is helpful to you in some way.

At OK Positive we are providing the tools to **SUPPORT** your **EMPLOYEES' MENTAL HEALTH** and ensuring it is free for the end user to access this support. The app is a business to business product with a monthly fee per user. Through the app you will be able to access:

- Mental Health Support
- Daily mood calendar to anonymously feedback to your company
- Interactive map highlighting local support and the OK Positive Therapist Network
- Mindfulness/Psychological tools
- Incentives for app use
- Company-wide anonymous mental health analytics/feedback



If you are interested in our free trial in July this year, please do register on the website below and we can provide further detail: [WWW.OKPOSITIVE.ORG](http://WWW.OKPOSITIVE.ORG)



The OK Positive team.