

Managing Anxiety during COVID-19

Managing Thoughts	
Predicting the future	Mind Reading
<p>In the military, trying to predict what will happen helped you to prepare for different outcomes. It was necessary to think of the worst-case scenario, with a greater likelihood it would occur. Living as a civilian, the possible outcomes of events are less clear, but we can all fall into the trap in believing we can accurately predict the future. When anxiety is high, we typically think the worst to protect ourselves. This does not mean our predictions are accurate.</p>	<p>'Know your enemy'. It is natural for humans to assume what other people are thinking. It is a way to predict intentions and potential threatening behaviour. This would have been particularly important and 'amped up' during deployment to hostile environments. If we are anxious or low, we are more likely to assume people are thinking bad things or have negative intent. We can't actually mind read, and all too often we assume wrong.</p>
Catastrophising the future	Self-Criticism
<p>On the battlefield, catastrophic events are much more likely, and thinking about the worst case is important preparation. However, as a civilian, this mindset can lead to blowing things out of proportion, emphasising the worst possible outcomes and ignoring the positive possibilities. It can also lead to taking extreme safety precautions when they might not be entirely necessary</p>	<p>'Be the best'. The British military prides itself on the highest standards in every respect – anything less than perfect would mean a beating. Many leave the military with an old-fashioned drill sergeant still on their shoulder shouting 'DO MORE', 'DO BETTER', 'THERE'S ALWAYS ROOM TO IMPROVE'. As a civilian, this can mean we are never able to accept and be proud of our successes or be satisfied with what we have or what we are and load more and more pressure on ourselves.</p>
Black and White Thinking	Mental Filter
<p>No room for grey. In the military, there are friend or enemy, strong or weak, right or wrong, success or failure. There is no middle ground. This allows the military to set clear expectations, stay focused and communicate clearly. All essential for the machine to work. The civilian world is much less clearly defined, which can lead to feeling unsure and frustrated.</p>	<p>We have a tendency to take on new information better if it fits with our existing beliefs and expectations, whilst rejecting information that contradicts us. Many military men and women have seen the extremes of human behaviour and been immersed in a world where the focus is on potential threat. These experiences may mean that you are too likely to take on new information that confirms the world is unsafe, or that people are dangerous for example.</p>

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Jumping to Conclusions	Emotional Reasoning
<p>Decisions are made quickly in the military. Making a wrong decision is more acceptable than no decision at all, even with perhaps partial intel. As a civilian, this mindset may continue. You may make snap judgements about people or situations based on a very fast and crude assessment and sometimes misinterpretation of the facts.</p>	<p>OK, so 'emotional' might be a dirty word in the military, and you are trained in the main to control your emotions and think logically. Nevertheless, when you leave the military those emotions that had been put aside might reappear and start to influence the way you see or react to things. If you aren't familiar with different emotions, it might just feel scary and lead to responding defensively or angrily when not actually under threat.</p>

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