

## Second Lockdown Shock - Change and Loss – Understanding our Emotional States

Let's remind ourselves of some important material. At a time of change, of how things are and of our hopes, dreams and expectations, we all experience change and loss. Sometimes we lose loved ones, or those we care for. Understanding the phases of change helps us cope, as losses continue – loss of status quo, loss of certainty, loss of liberty, loss of leisure, loss of access to friends or family.

The four phases are Recognising Loss, trying to Prevent Loss, Recovering Loss and Letting Go of Loss. At each phase, we experience emotions – actually the Stepping Stones to growth in understanding. The emotions are

- Recognising Loss – Shock and Denial
- Preventing Loss – Anger and Guilt
- Recovering Loss – Bargaining and Depression
- Letting Go of Loss – Acceptance

As we transit these, our brains keep asking questions to understand and make sense of events, questions such as 'What If?' and 'If Only?'

Each of these phases has a meaning (M) and a useful purpose (P):

- Shock – M I doubt my resources, I don't know how to cope; P Stop what you are doing for now, find a safe place to review your resources
- Denial – M I can carry on regardless, if I ignore this it will go away; P Shelve it for now, so I can keep going for what is important right now
- Anger – M I want to prevent the loss of something important to me; P Creative energy to makes changes in the world and self
- Guilt – M I need to question if something I did caused it; P Learning what else I could do that might prevent it happening again
- Bargaining – M I must try to do something to get back what has been lost; P The energy to take risk to deal with the situation in new ways NB Bargaining can be Aggressive (I win, you lose), Passive-Aggressive (I win, you lose), or Assertive (We both understand each other, let's work together to minimise our losses)
- Depression – M I seem empty and powerless; P Seeing my limits might let me stop trying for the impossible
- Acceptance – M Recognise that I am powerless over that particular loss, but there are other areas of life which I discover where I am creative and valued; P I can rejoin the human race more maturely using energy to explore life

Dealing with shock is important – to resolve it, we need to find a safe place. Our safe places come in three types: a **physical place**, a **frame of mind** or a **relationship**. Which are yours? When we are in a safe place, we assess the situation calmly, plan ahead, and reduce the impact of the loss. For instance, losing physical ability to see loved ones can be replaced by connecting by phone, facetime, skype or zoom.

In reflecting on life's events, we always ask questions in our minds. The What Ifs and If Onlys go round and round – What if we'd lived in ..., If only the virus..., what if I'd (stopped smoking, eaten more fruit, taken more exercise), if only the doctors had..., what if the nurses... if only the government.....if only I'd taken that holiday...If only I'd visited my

friend/relative/patient... At a time of high emotion, feelings stick to thoughts, and circle around, cycle, pester, fester and turn to poison – which we either hold in as guilt or cast out as blame – neither of which are fair. So if you ever meet the What Ifs or the If Onlys – please ask them to Go Away!

Understanding the phases of change and loss, helps us observe ourselves and recognise where we are. For a full explanation of the Stepping Stones, please see Health and Self Care, free download from [www.healthandself.care](http://www.healthandself.care), pp115-125 for Dr Trevor Griffiths' excellent explanation of the issues, p179 for a map, and pp93-103.

All support helps us, from talking to a calm friend, to time in nature, to exercise and any hobby or pastime that we find helpful, to faith and any practice that honours our spirituality and connects us to the wonder and energy of life. Mindfulness and other practices are often useful. Peer group support is powerful at times like this.

So, times of change continue. Mutual support is powerful. Reach out and connect – none of us need be alone. Avoid projecting any anger or frustration at others, or guilt at yourself. Be grateful for the small things. Connect to Nature. Be gentle with yourself.

Keep Calm and Stay Grounded. Things do change. Good luck and Go Well.

Useful resource:

Looking after your own mental health – and a useful website for family and patients: <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>

The Somerset Emotional Wellbeing Podcasts on Mental health matters are available on <https://somersementotionalwellbeing.podiant.co>

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