



Mental Health Matters: One year on

Reflecting backwards...and forwards...

On the 23rd March 2020, when Covid-19 had claimed 335 lives in the UK, Boris Johnson announced the first national stay-at-home order, plunging the nation into the first of three lockdowns the likes of which none of us had ever experienced before. As we approach the first anniversary of that announcement, with the virus having contributed to over 143,259 deaths and a major vaccination programme well under way, we might find ourselves starting to reflect on and process the events of the last twelve months.

Each individual will have experienced the Pandemic differently: not only have we all lived it in different circumstances – working or studying from home, being on the NHS frontline, living alone or in sometimes fraught family units, teaching keyworker children in school – but we all have unique responses to stressful situations, and what is not stressful for one may be distressing for another. Whatever our personal experience, we've all lived through what might be described as a shared national and international trauma: we may not have been in the same boat, but we have all been in the same storm.

Experts predict that, as a result of the crisis, we will see an increase in cases of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the UK, perhaps – though not exclusively – especially among those who have experienced first-hand the effects of the virus whether as patient or carer.



It may be worth just being aware of signs and symptoms of the condition: **as usual ...** [Mind has some helpful information.](#)

Less well known than PTSD is the positive psychology phenomenon of **Post-Traumatic Growth**. This doesn't dispute the distress that those affected by trauma can experience but recognises that individuals can also experience positive effects following stressful or traumatic events. There are 5 dimensions to Post-Traumatic Growth and it's anticipated that up to 90% of trauma survivors experience at least one of them:

1. **Greater personal strength:** Coming through trauma, you might feel more alive and have a deeper understanding of yourself – a sense that you have grown in strength or wisdom.
2. **Closer relationships:** You might find a greater sense of closeness and authenticity in relationships, both existing and new; and you might also have experienced the kindness of strangers more than ever before.
3. **New appreciation of life:** Adversity might lead you to question the meaning of life, perhaps leading you to alter your world view and find a fresh appreciation.
4. **New priorities and possibilities:** In changing circumstances, priorities change – you might feel motivated to do something new or differently going forward.
5. **Spiritual development:** Experiencing trauma can trigger spiritual growth, whether it be through connection with religion, nature or simply faith in the power of love or human kindness.

As the first anniversary of lockdown approaches, then, here is a challenge and an opportunity:

A Challenge: *Take some time out to reflect on the last twelve months and how they have affected you. Where have the challenges been and how have you managed them? Have there been any positives for you? And do you think your experience will change anything for you going forward? You might just think, or perhaps write, or maybe even express your feelings creatively, perhaps through art or poetry. If you'd like to share something of your experience with the group (anonymously if you prefer), please feel free to email it to mentalhealthmatters@bradninchtogether.org.uk – we will compile and share any submissions by e-mail.*

An Opportunity: *On Friday evening (19th March), we'll be having informal Mental Health Matters drinks on Zoom to chat about how the last 12 months have impacted our community and think about how we might raise awareness and understanding of mental health going forward. What does a community that cares about mental health look like? Join us via the Zoom link below between 8 and 9, with no obligation to speak or to commit to anything: you may just want to turn up and listen. Bring your own drinks...hopefully we'll be able to meet in the pub before too long!*



Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87430954308>

Meeting ID: 874 3095 4308

Take care, and with all good wishes

Sophie, Kate and Glenn

For BradTog MHM

Ps. Do let us know if you have suggestions or offers to make for future postings