

'All is well' - remain positive and embrace change in times of uncertainty

By [Dr Sharon Johnson](#) , issued by [Cornerstone Institute](#)

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Deteriorating mental health throughout the world is being showcased in social media, as people struggle to cope with danger and uncertainty.



Image credit: Unsplash

Psychologists and counsellors are inundated with clients wanting to know how to survive these troubled times. How? You may ask, is it possible to stay positive, when there are so many negative messages flashing across our screens and broadcast on the radio? Is it necessary to isolate ourselves mentally as well as physically, in order to survive?

Denial, shutting down and isolating are not healthy ways of dealing with uncertainty. It is unhealthy to be paralysed by fear and anxiety, obsessed with negative news and expecting the worst. We also do not want to escape through abusive habits, such as overeating, over-drinking, drugs or resorting to abuse and violence.

Our thoughts and words determine our behaviour, and your body does not know what is true. In this time of fake news, whole nations can be led to believe certain thoughts and be convinced to act in a certain way, whether it is the truth or not. We have many examples in politics around the world and in South Africa, where ducking and diving from the truth can be seen as a national pastime.

Just as fake news can grip a nation, so our bodies do not know whether our words and thoughts are true or not. It is just as easy to convince ourselves with positive affirmations, such as 'I am well and strong', 'I will survive this wave of the virus', 'I can help others and stay strong myself' as it is to believe that all is hopeless and that a grim future awaits us. Negative and disempowering thoughts and beliefs change our physiology and can make us sick, as our body adapts for survival.

Psychotherapist, Marisa Peer, in the USA, has developed rapid transformation therapy, for example, to help clients quickly change their thoughts and words to facilitate change. She believes that our negative thoughts – not good enough, not tall

enough, not healthy enough – are leading us down a blind path of self-fulfilling negativity.

She points out that self-doubt and criticism rob us of our best future, and that striving for perfection will lead us to misery. In striving to be perfect we will be forever frustrated because standards keep changing and styles become quickly outdated. Instead, we need to embrace our flaws – we are all imperfect – and we need to recognise that these imperfections can be our greatest attractive qualities.

As a senior lecturer in the psychology department at Cornerstone Institute, I endeavour to inspire and support students. I help them to believe in their full potential, despite circumstances that can be debilitating, such as poverty and lack of resources, with limited access to Wi-Fi and computers. I admire the grit and courage of many students, determined to make a success of their studies.

I also run a part-time private practice as a couples' counsellor and am writing a book entitled: *The Gift of Heartbreak* to help people survive relationship challenges, which have increased since lockdown restrictions. While you may view a break-up or partner difficulties as the worst event that can happen to you, you can also reframe these experiences. What do they teach you and how can you move forward wiser and more connected to yourself?

Instead of criticising our families and those close to us, we should rather embrace our flaws and challenges, finding perfection in imperfection. Take a stance of curiosity rather than judgement, contracting when necessary to ensure that boundaries remain healthy.

Say to yourself: 'All is well', and take a deep breath and pause for a moment. Make a mental list of all that is going well. Finding gratitude for your life – from simple events, such as appreciating the sunshine, to the food on your table - makes a profound shift in your brain. Instead of being biased negatively, which is a natural response, we start to shift into a healthier mindset.

Make this a daily practice. By being grateful and kinder to yourself, you can change thoughts and words and thus change your life through improved behaviour. The more you embrace positive change, the easier it becomes and soon it will be a habit and part of your daily life.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Sharon Johnson works at the psychology department of Cornerstone Institute

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