

# **From Survive to Thrive:**

## **A Toolkit for Getting Through Covid-19**

### **Part II: Learning to Thrive**

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golden notebook 

## Introduction

Welcome back to our toolkit.

In our search for ways to cope and adapt to the challenges of our new normal, we might find that our current situation is also forcing many of us to take a reflective pause, to slow down, to strip things right back and look underneath. As a clinical psychologist (Lisa) and business psychologist (Paula), we wanted to do what we can and put together a toolkit of insights, questions and exercises that have helped both our clients *and* ourselves during these challenging times.

In Part I ([available here](#)), we looked at very real issues that came with the pandemic: Coronavirus anxiety, dealing with change, isolation and other practical problems, and how to cope with them. A lot of this centred around the survival side of things; how to deal with this abrupt change and this new way of living and working.

In Part II, we are going to try to make sense of what we have all been going through, and see what we can learn about ourselves from these extraordinary times. After all, we can either rage and rail at what's going on or use it as a way of examining our lives through a new lens, to reconnect with what's important and who we want to be, now and in whatever kind of normality comes after.

We will be doing this by looking through a number of lenses, focusing them both inwards and outwards, to identify and assimilate what we can learn from this pandemic in order to help us in the future. Our aim here is not to give you a list of fixes or tips, but instead to help you ponder the meaning and significance of what has been, and still currently is, a very strange time.

If there's anything you think we missed or would like us to elaborate on, or if you have any questions at all, please don't hesitate to [contact us](#) or leave a comment on our blog post.

Please share this toolkit with anyone you think might find it useful.

Lisa & Paula

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## Looking Inside

For many of us, the first few weeks were packed with news reports from abroad, watching the drama of the virus unfold as if it was a grisly horror film. Now, we are living with it, and for many, that total obsession with the news and social media has turned inwards to ourselves and our families.

We are all in the midst of a process, and our individual feelings will change as the lockdown changes, even though we may not know quite when it will end. Needless to say, this period of lockdown has been a varied experience for different people. For some, this new slower pace may be a refreshing change from the constant rush of the autopiloted, always switched on hamster wheel of life BC (Before Coronavirus). Others may be missing the adrenaline rush of their busy former lives. There may even be huge discrepancies in the same household, with one partner loving the fact that they can read a book and walk the dog every day, and the other mourning their social life and even feeling trapped. These wide-ranging experiences are all valid.

Additionally, there are many factors in our daily lives we cannot control. Some have been beset by worries about their jobs, getting food on the table or even health issues. Others have had to go about their work as normal, perhaps even putting themselves on the front line, while others have had to cope with total isolation and maybe even chronic pain or mental health issues. Some have relished the chance to spend more time with their families, while others are struggling to manage small children in limited space. Some have had to face bereavement, whether Coronavirus related or not, and dealing with that is even harder than usual under lockdown.

There is one thing the majority of us all have in common: we are in the middle of great changes, and with those changes, we face an uncertain future. There will be things about it that we cannot control: social distancing and a down-turn in the economy are things that we are all probably going to have to learn to endure. However, we can use our current situation as an opportunity to tap into something deeper. By examining our experience, we might discover another way of coping, one that allows us to move our focus past current fears and challenges to our own personal growth. In other words, we can move from survive to thrive.

## Tuning into the Big Pause

So many of us have had to stop and take a proper breath for the first time in years, maybe even decades. We have been forced to down-shift to a slower pace of life. Think about this time as being the perfect opportunity to discover a better rhythm. This includes listening...to when your body wants to wake up, to rest, to eat and to move.

### *Rhythm*

Maybe you've found that sticking to your previous schedule, getting up early and attacking the day with gusto, works for you. Fantastic, you now know that you are already living a rhythm that works. Perhaps you are currently working and need to have a 9-5pm. If so, is there room to experiment with rhythm after hours?

Or, you may have been able to let things slide totally, letting days melt into each other until you have no idea what date it really is. Alternatively, perhaps you have merely adjusted your rhythm a little, maybe getting up a little later or being less guided by your to-do list.

Of course, going forward you may not have a chance to exercise this same freedom again, but it could inform the type of job you want to have, or the type of workplace you ideally would like to work in.

This may also have been a time when you have synced more with the rhythm of nature, spending time watching the season unfold, and enjoying a connection that you haven't felt for years.

This may, however, just as easily be a time when you've been rallying against things, resisting the gradual slowing down all the way.

### *Reflection Points*

- *What has been your experience of this enforced slow-down?*  
Have you eased into it, like bread mopping up olive oil, delighting in the time you never thought you would have? Or have you railed and rallied against every moment, still glued to the news and scanning every page for mention of when the lockdown will ease? Or perhaps it's somewhere in between the two?

- *Has your rhythm changed?*

Have you resented every lock down minute or relished the space to recharge? Have you let your to-do list slip through your fingers and instead find your validity through stillness or connection, or are you still pushing forwards, swapping your work for chores and “getting those jobs done”, even though it’s perfectly okay to stop and not do them? There is nothing intrinsically wrong with either of these if you get joy and pleasure from them but the question is...is this the experience you actually want?

- *Have your self- expectations shifted?*

Do you still feel that you “should” be as productive as ever? For example, are you beating yourself up for feeling slow and unable to focus on that project you started two years ago? Are you busy pulling weeds and planting tomatoes because you “should” but wishing that you could sit in the garden and purely enjoy a novel?

- *What is this enforced downtime prompting in you?*

Is this different from your life BC (Before Coronavirus)?

What would help you get a little more of the lockdown experience you want?

If you’re wishing you could come out of this having achieved something but are finding it hard, maybe you could:

- Join an online group to support you in your endeavour
- Find a buddy and do it online together
- Give yourself an hour or a set amount of time a day to work on your task/s and practise focus, expanding that time when you’re ready

If you’re still running around but can’t work out how to slow down, maybe you could:

- Set aside a set time every day to do nothing
- Play around with not doing everything on your list – how does it feel?  
Can you make space for it?
- Try yoga, meditation, breathing work or yoga nidra to help you slow down.

### *Sense of Validation*

Many of us have found validation through our accomplishments or just getting things done. This often isn't just about getting those things ticked off, but also about how we want people to see us – as achievers who get stuff done. You may be finding that difficult right now. Or perhaps you haven't changed, and are swapping your former work tasks for things to get sorted around the home, and maybe even being seen to get them done.

Some people talk in terms of energy – the yin and yang, the masculine and feminine, the ebb and flow, the push and pull. Where are you?

Rediscovering the fact that you are a human *being*, and not a human *doing*, can be a great relief.

### *Tuning into What's Important*

One thing this very strange period has likely done is highlight what's important in life. We're not talking about being able to get hold of your favourite brand of coffee here, but your personal values. Your values are the things that give your life meaning and purpose and this has been a time where it may have become blindingly obvious whether you have been living your life with those values in it, or whether they are glaringly absent.

### *Identifying emerging values*

Ironically, this is a time when we've perhaps been able to feel a sense of freedom, of not participating in the daily commute, of not living the same imposed structure of our day. The entwined values of *peace and quiet* may have seemed boring up until now, but we may have discovered a sense of calmness that we now no longer want to lose. Perhaps some have added things like meditation to their day, quiet reading time, long baths or even long technology-free walks. What new values have you discovered and would like to live in accordance with once out of lockdown?

### *Rediscovered values*

This could also be a time of rediscovering what you feel is important to you., such as connecting with family, creativity, fitness, nature, health, or even

learning and education. Many people are saying that they have rediscovered things like healthy cooking, have gotten back in to a fitness or yoga classes, or are now calling people they haven't spoken to in years – and they don't want this to stop once the lockdown is over.

### *Noticing values that aren't being met*

Of course, it's likely that not all of our values are being met at the moment. If security and health are important values for you, this time of financial worry may be pushing all your security buttons, or you may find that you are missing your usual exercise routines.

Not having our values met may cause feelings of anxiety, unease or just a feeling that something important is missing. Of course, this isn't about finding the solution to your money worries, or looking for healthy alternatives (although these are worth investigating), but in noticing that these things are important to you, even if you previously may not have realised how important.

Many of us will have values around connection and being with other people that aren't currently being met, and it can be edifying to notice how important these can be in our lives. This can shine a light on the specific relationships or social interactions we value.

What is definitely missing, however, is a sense of control. While the feeling of being in control might be considered a value by some, the reality is that we are never really in control. If this is pushing your buttons right now, this is a good opportunity to think about your relationship with the idea of control, and what's behind it. We've written quite a bit about control in Part I so please do refer back if you'd like to think further on the topic.

### *Making values work for you*

Whether you've discovered values or identified unmet ones, this time is a great lesson in what is fundamentally important to you, deep down. You can then ask yourself how you can keep this value, or bring even more of it into your life going forward.

Values work is an intrinsic part of exploring your personal brand. We turn to our top values to inform what we would like to be known for. Some we may wish to keep private, such as our need to feel secure for instance. Others may



define the way we would like to be seen at work, or by the world in the future, such as being community-minded. There may even be values that have been hugely important and a strong part of your personal brand BC, like ambition, that you are finding may not fit you the same way post-Coronavirus.

Why should we care how others perceive us? One of our greatest needs is to be understood by others, and when others recognise our values they can see the authentic person beneath. It helps other people understand what we stand for and who we truly are.

Let's take a look at two examples of values and how they might be expressed during the lockdown.

### Creativity

This has been a time when we have had to think creatively, whether that's about the space in our home, or how we spend our time. But it's also been an opportunity to tap into creativity. Everyone is creative in some form or other. If you take a look at Facebook, for instance, the list of activities people are doing includes:

- Poetry
- Baking
- Calligraphy
- Drawing
- Photography
- Screenwriting
- DIY
- Decorating
- Gardening
- Painting
- Novel writing
- Sewing
- Inventing
- Knitting

And these are just a few. Are you one of the people that have been happy to let go and let your creative side come to the surface?

How easy has it been and what have you learned?

Has it been a solo experience or is it a family activity?

If you would take on something creative but you haven't been able to, why not?

Be careful that you're not setting yourself creative goals with some other agenda in mind: writing a book to give away to build a newsletter list is, well, a little creative, but not truly. Creativity is creating for its own sake, and the reward comes from that experience...otherwise it's work masquerading as creativity.

### Health

Perhaps you have found yourself prioritizing your own health during lockdown. This could include both physical and mental health.

Have you discovered different things that nourish mental well-being and physical well-being? This is where self-care also fits in. Here are some examples of how to live in accordance with this value:

- Fitness classes
- Mindfulness/meditation
- Walking
- Journaling
- Boundaries with news
- Self-help/personal growth work (books, apps, YouTube talks, etc)
- Eating well
- Yoga
- Naps
- Breathing exercises
- Technology/social media breaks
- Bike rides
- Relaxing baths
- Taking supplements (Vitamin C, etc)
- Socializing with friends and family remotely
- Getting enough sleep
- Sitting in the sun
- Playing (with kids, our animals, our partners)
- Carving out alone time
- Building pauses into the day

Another aspect of well-being might be discovering a spiritual side. For some this can mean a religious aspect, but for many that encapsulates things like yoga, meditation, philosophy or even just finding a connection with nature. Even a daily practice like journaling can be spiritual. What if you haven't felt the need to tap into this side at all? This probably means that it's not a biggie for you. What would be a shame is that if you've always wanted to and now have the time, and are still leaving it on the shelf for another time.

***Reflection Points***

- What has become important to you, right now?
- What do you want to stand for right now, during this unique period of our lives?
- What do you want to stand for in our “new normal”?
- How do you intend to live in accordance with your values post-lockdown?

This is about revisiting and prioritising what's truly important.

Here's a little table where you can jot down what you've learned about values:

Rediscovered (or maintained) Values	New Values	Values Not Being Met

## Tuning into your Beliefs

This forced pause might also be a perfect opportunity to take a look at the way we relate to this and other situations. As touched upon in Part I, there are helpful and unhelpful ways of reacting to any situation, which is often determined by how we think about them. Sometimes these core beliefs about ourselves, others and the world can become unhelpful and life interfering. In psychology, we call these cognitive distortions, and we all have them.

For example, perhaps you are not working and still experience the same level of stress in your daily life. Can you identify any unhelpful thinking styles that continue to be fuelling this stress? For example, it may be that are no longer getting agitated with co-workers in the office, but you find yourself getting just as agitated when you go out because others aren't doing what you think they "should" do during social distancing. Or perhaps you believe that they are intentionally trying to provoke you by violating your two-meter space. As a result, you stop going out when you want. Such beliefs can often trap us in a negative cycle, limiting our life and causing more anger and depression.

Have you noticed rigid rules and demands that contain a "should", "ought" or "must"? Can you practice catching and challenging these rigid beliefs (e.g., replace "shoulds" with preferences (e.g., "I wish more people would do x y z"))? With practice, you'll likely feel more disappointed or sad (*healthy* negative emotions) rather than angry and depressed (*unhealthy* negative emotions).

Of course, there certainly are things people "should" be doing right now to keep themselves and others safe (e.g., a friend who has "just a cough" probably *shouldn't* go to the shops), but even so, getting too "hooked" on these beliefs can fan the flames of anger and become life interfering. Turning to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) techniques can help with "unhooking skills". I would recommend the work of Dr Russ Harris ([The Happiness Trap](#), [The Reality Slap](#)) as a helpful resource. Let go of what you can't control by building acceptance around it and focusing on what you can.

Another helpful strategy is looking at the flip side. If anger were a two-sided coin, what would you find on the other side? If things like justice and social order are important values, consider other ways to influence others or take social action without overly distressing yourself in the process. Even values become problematic when too rigid.

### *Taking Stock of Unhelpful Thoughts*

Take a moment to check out this [CBT Flip Book by David Burns](#). See if any commonly held cognitive distortions resonate with you and which strategies might work for you.

Decades of empirical research have shown that such cognitive distortions lead to unhealthy negative emotions such as anger, depression, anxiety and hopelessness. If you feel this is the time to work on these unhelpful beliefs, there are plenty of good resources like [The CBT Toolbox](#) out there to help.

## **Looking Across**

*Who are you spending time with during lockdown? If you aren't, would you like to be?*

This is where values work can get really interesting, regardless of whether you are locking down with someone else.

If you are living with others in relative harmony, and working towards similar values, it can feel like you're a team. But when that's not happening, it's a totally different story. Perhaps you are being very responsible with your social distancing and staying in, but your partner has flouted lockdown from the very beginning, putting you at risk. Or maybe, you're finding that the friends you live with are inconsiderate and you end up cleaning up after them, with no thanks in return. With work and our usual routines to distract us these things may not seem as important, but now we are seeing them in stark reality. Moreover, how you react with others during this time can also tell you about yourself.

### ***Reflection Points***

*If living with others:*

- Are you feeling that your shared experience is bringing you together or are you counting the days before lockdown can end?

- Do you find that a day and evening with them leaves you feeling a bit deflated, and you find yourself missing your friends and colleagues?
- Do you feel that your time together is making you clingy or dependent?
- Do they need continuous reassurance, or make you feel guilty for wanting more than just to be with them?
- Do you feel they aren't keen to hear your opinion, or let you have a say in how things get done?
- Do you find that they don't let you let you speak your mind and you find yourself holding your tongue to avoid critical comment or even an argument later?

If you've noticed that your partner may do some of the above, you can do one of the following things...

**Collect data.** Instead of making a decision to end the relationship abruptly, observe how you work together over time. Don't forget to also take stock of the positives, see below.

**Stay and change what you can** (while building acceptance around the rest). Focus on what you can change in your interactions, communication style and the way you relate to it.

**Leave the relationship.** The most dramatic of the options but if you've been thinking this for a while this may just confirm what you've been feeling all along. In some cases, lockdown is bringing out the worst in some relationships.

**Do nothing.** But the likelihood is that more of the same will cause more issues and the situation will eventually deteriorate.

Don't forget to monitor your own behaviour too, just to check if you yourself are dragging your partner down!

### *A word about differences*

Having different values doesn't necessarily mean it's time to re-evaluate the relationship. As long as some overlap, that's important. As for some of the elements mentioned earlier – health, spirituality, creativity, etc. -- this can be an interesting time for you to learn from someone with a different take.

- In what ways are people you are on lockdown with different?
- What can you learn from them?
- What could you try on, just for fun?
- Is there anything that hits a nerve...can you explore why that might be?
- What can you learn to roll with, or build acceptance around?

### *Taking stock of the positives*

On the flip side, this situation could also be bringing out the positives in your relationship. It's equally important to look for these instead of just focusing on the negatives.

- What have you learned to appreciate about each other?
- What are your strengths as a partnership or group?
- What have you enjoyed doing together?
- How have they helped you? How have you supported each other?
- In what ways have you come together as a team?
- What are you grateful for in the relationship?
- What shared values have emerged?
- When have you made each other smile or laugh?

## ***Reflection Points***

*If NOT living with others:*

- Do you feel you thrive living independently and lockdown has confirmed this? What positives have been discovered or reinforced during it?
- Has this experience shifted anything in your decision? If so, why? What type of relationship/living arrangement would you ideally like in your life? What steps can you take to make that work?
- Has loneliness been too prevalent? What are some ways you've identified to help alleviate it?
- If looking for a relationship or flatmate, have any values emerged that you would look for in that person?
- If you've decided not to cohabit or have a relationship, who would you like more of in your life (friends, family, etc)? What can you do to reconnect with them and cultivate those relationships right now?

## ***The big acceleration***

In some cases, relationships have been accelerated due to the decision to lock down with a partner. If this is you, how has the experience been for you?

- Does it feel natural, or forced and contrived due to lockdown?
- What is working? What isn't working?
- Will the situation change after lockdown? In what ways?
- How have you built a better pace into the relationship?
- How have you established autonomy? How can this be maintained?



## Looking Around

As mentioned in Part I, this is a time of immense universality. The pandemic has brought out a strong sense that “we are all in this together”, providing impetus for connecting and reconnecting with others.

For many this time has been the renaissance of community -- during times of crises, people come together and the best of humanity shows up. Signs of community might have become visible in different ways during the lockdown, perhaps through the creation of pebble galleries on walls, rainbows in windows, chalk drawings on pavements, or even the NHS clap every Thursday night. Or perhaps a sense of community has emerged through more of an online presence, such as local listservs offering help to the vulnerable, or charity appeals over Facebook. It could be that you rarely participated in causes in your life BC, however going beyond yourself to serve others may be a top priority right now.

Connecting and giving back can be something like dropping off shopping for a vulnerable neighbour who is self-isolating, or sewing some face masks for our local hospice. However, lifting spirits with signs or sending supportive emails, texts or letters to those you appreciate is also an act of giving. Even a quick “how are you” phone call or text can be immensely appreciated.

### *Reflection Points*

- Have you been able to offer help during these times, or have you been on the receiving end of it? How has doing that made you feel?
- Have you developed a new relationship with your neighbours?
- How has a need for community expressed itself within you?
- Are you feeling that sense of connection, that we are in this together, or are you feeling isolated or as if you’ve experienced all this in a bubble?
- Have you felt a greater sense of compassion for others?
- What of this community experience would you like to continue post lockdown (e.g., saying hello to others on walks, checking on neighbours)

Remember that everyone’s experience of community and what’s going will be different, and equally valid.

## Looking Beyond

Certainly, we are finding that lockdown has inspired many of us to look a little more objectively at the future, including our immediate jobs and larger aspirations.

### *Tuning in to Work*

This forced pause is a time for us to re-examine our career and perhaps revisit our direction too. Some have been forced to re-examine options through redundancy, while others have used *the big pause* to step back and take in the larger picture, including their current job/career and how it fits into their life.

### *Reflection Points*

- Has the virus impacted the way you will be able to do your work in future?
- How do you feel about returning to the same office environment? The same responsibilities? The same people...routine...commute?
- How do you feel about your work and career path in general?
- Does your career align with your personal values?
- Do your employers' values align with your own?
- Has your employer been supportive and responsive during this time, or have they made unreasonable demands that have put your safety at risk?
- What new goals would you like to set yourself in the short- and long-term?
- Would you like to retrain or learn something new that may or may not be useful for your career long term?

## *Tuning in to Passion and Purpose*

Stepping back and tuning in right now might also offer insight into whether your work or daily activities bring you a sense of passion and purpose. It's worth checking back to the section on values and recalibrating whether they match up with what you are doing at work to check your work still is as relevant to you as it once was.

If you've been touched by loss in this period, the stark realisation that our time here is limited may well be prompting you to consider taking a leap into doing something more purposeful. This might be the time to ponder such ideas through activities like meditation, journaling, walking, yoga or zooming with a career coach to think or talk this through. Remember, there is no rush here. You have the time to think and be sure.

- Is your current work or daily life activating providing you with a sense of purpose? If not, what can you bring into your life to give it more?
- Have you tapped into anything you feel passionate about?
- Is it time to re-ignite an old passion that has taken the back-burner?
- Is there anything that is calling to you right now?
- What do you get from work, besides money?
- Is there anyone who is inspiring you right now...why?
- What impact do you want to have on the community and your world?

## A final word.

This guide has been about contemplating and exploring rather than offering quick fixes. These challenging times have offered us rich material to work with, and parts of ourselves (and others) may be more prominent than usual.

History has taught us that times of adversity can yield new ways of being, new healthy habits of mind and body. We hope that some of the insights, questions and strategies inside this toolkit have inspired you to do just that.

\*\*\*\*\*

*The lotus is a flower that grows in the mud.*

*The deeper and thicker the mud.*

*The more beautiful the lotus blooms.*

*- Buddhist Proverb*

## Appendix

### *Mind Maps*

One way to identify and assimilate what we have learned is by using a **mind map (or mind maps)**, which is essentially a diagram used to organize information visually. Instead of using a linear, structured approach to thinking, mind mapping jogs your creativity to literally "map out" your ideas.

*How to mind map:*

There are plenty of [online mind mapping tools](#) out there, but you can easily do one by hand.

Draw a circle, oval, or cloud shape in the middle a blank page.

We would recommend doing this exercise in one of two ways.

- 1) Create a mind map for each “lens” in this Toolkit. In the middle circle, write:
  - Looking Inward
  - Looking Across
  - Looking Outward
  - Looking Beyond
- 2) Create one master mind map

The middle circle could be something like “Covid-19 Learnings” or “Lockdown Discoveries”, with each lens having its own subcategory.

Whatever you’ve discovered through the above sections and reflection points would branch out from each “lens”, and create further branches if you’d like. You can list your ideas in any order, as soon as they pop into your head. The great thing about mind maps is that you are not constrained by thinking in order.

You can further define subcategories in your mind map, with colours or codes. For example, *Yellow = an insight, Green = a value, Blue = what’s helpful, Red = what’s not helpful, Purple = a goal, etc.*

See the following examples for each mind map version above, but feel free to get as creative as you like. Use different coloured markers, post-it notes, draw pictures, whatever works for you. The idea is to throw out any and all ideas or insights, and not constrain yourself by ordered thinking. You can always order or code them later. Most importantly, have fun with it!

