



Mentoring in the Current Crisis

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Ann Rolfe

Introduction

In March 2020 I cut an overseas trip short and headed home. The World Health Organization had just declared COVID19 a global pandemic. The Australian Government instructed citizens to return and closed the borders to non-residents. I was fortunate, I got back quickly and self-isolated in my own home, but I was worried.

I was concerned about family, friends, neighbors and people not as fortunate as me. I also asked myself:

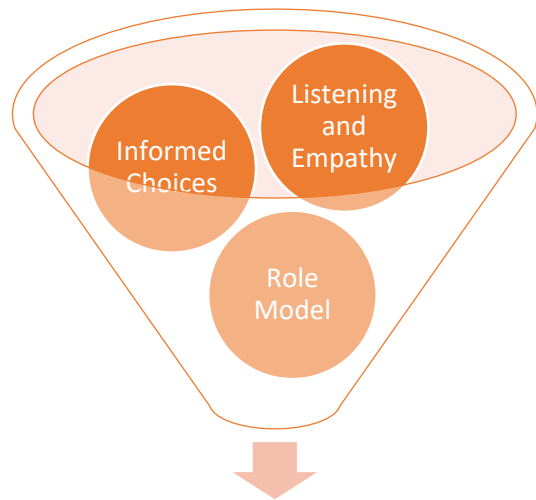
Is Mentoring Even Relevant Right Now?

In the middle of a crisis you have other priorities.
Perhaps you're trying to keep a business running on a skeleton staff.
Maybe you're juggling working from home and home-schooling kids.
You could be struggling in self-isolation
Or worse, you may be sick or have high-risk or sick loved ones.

However, I came to see that mentoring has never been more important!

In this ebook, I'll explain why, and how you can apply your mentoring skills to help your family, friends, people at work or complete strangers

I'm Ann Rolfe and I have a background in adult learning, career counseling and professional development. I've been in business for 30 years and trained professionals in aviation, education, engineering, energy, health, law and science to be mentors. Mentoring Works runs specialised programs for Aboriginal people, graduates, people with disabilities, STEM and women. Our contribution to our client's success, was recognized in 2011, with the LearnX Asia Pacific Platinum Award for Best Coaching/Mentoring Training Program and in 2013 with the Juvenile Justice Excellence Award for Innovation. So I know you are going to gain a lot from your investment in Mentoring,



Overview

Help others cope

Mentoring has never been more important, because:

- Mentoring is **leadership** and everyone is crying out for that!
- The behaviors and **skills** we use as mentors are definitely needed now!
- Mentoring is a sane, **meaningful and caring** conversation and absolutely essential right now!

Whether you're speaking with family or friends, people at work or complete strangers, you can draw on your mentoring skills:

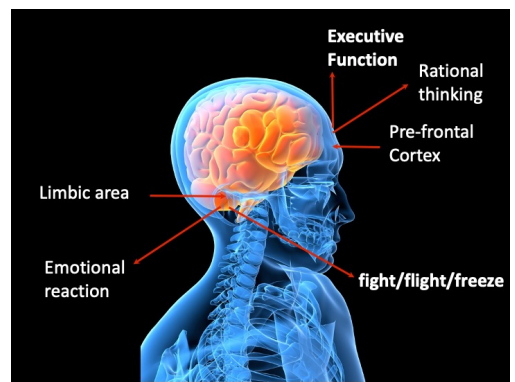
- Listening and empathy
- Facilitating informed choices
- Being a role model

There's a bonus, when you help others to cope with a crisis, you also help yourself. In this ebook I talk about:

- Reducing reaction and building resilience in yourself and others
- How to use mentoring skills to have meaningful conversations
- Practical ways to boost your health, wellbeing and ability to cope

As you read, note down key points and actions you will take.

I want to make it clear, that I am not a psychiatrist, a psychologist or a grief counsellor. Nor are mentors expected to be. If you find that this material raises concerns for you, I urge you to seek professional assistance. Here in Australia, you can call Lifeline 13 11 14 or Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636 for free telephone support or visit their websites for online chat.



Reducing Reaction and Building Resilience in yourself and Others

There can be no denying that we have experienced a world-wide crisis as a result of the corona virus, Co Vid 19. I'm not going to dwell on the evidence of that, and the impacts will be different for each of us, depending on where we are in the world and our personal circumstance.

We are *all* going to have emotional reactions. It's human. It's normal. *Understanding* these reactions so that we can respond effectively is critical.

Emotional reactions are *fast* and triggered in the limbic area of the brain at the base of the skull. Rational thinking takes longer, and happens in the neo cortex, just behind your forehead, it's often called the executive function.

It is the instantaneous, emotional reaction of the brain that triggers the fight/flight/freeze reaction. We evolved from ancient ancestors whose *survival* depended on their ability to *react fast* to any threat by defending themselves, running away or hiding.

What we need now, to deal with this crisis, is to engage our executive function so that our survival reactions don't get out of hand. We want to recognise and accept emotions and yet, not let them overwhelm us.

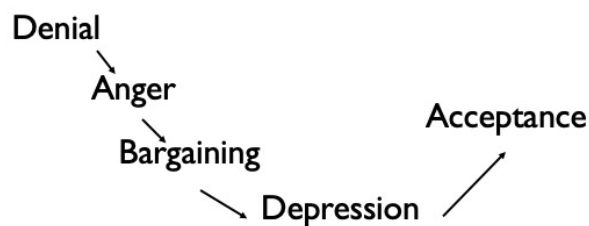
When, our executive function kicks in with its rational thinking, it provides a circuit-breaker between the stimulus (what's going on out there) and our response (how we react).

However, the executive function doesn't work so well when we're tired, hungry or overloaded, or when threats are ongoing and unremitting, like now. Unless we have, and use, strategies to manage ourselves, we're likely to be reactive, snappy and less effective than usual.

The executive function wants to understand and solve problems with actions. So, let's start by understanding some typical reactions to a crisis. Then some practical strategies for thinking, actions and behaviours that make us more resilient and less reactive.

You may be familiar with Kubler-Ross 5 stages of Grief model.

Kubler-Ross: 5 Stages of Grief



Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1969) *On Death and Dying*.

I first came into contact with this when I worked in banking, and we used it to train managers about the impact of armed hold up on staff. The research showed that the sooner that victims received support the better likelihood there was of recovery from trauma. I've also used it in helping people deal with being made redundant. Again, the sooner people receive assistance the more likely it is that they will make a career transition.

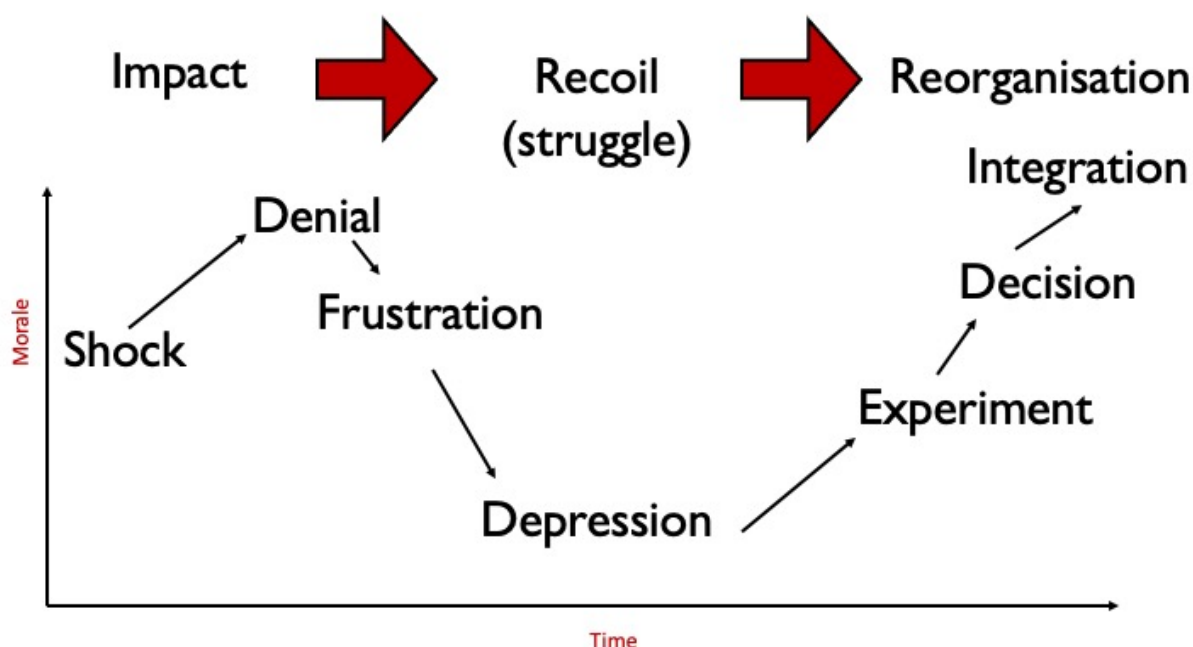
Swiss psychiatrist, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross studied the process of death and dying to identify these five stages of grief. It maybe that you can relate to these from your own experience when losing a loved one. Although **not everyone experiences all, or any of them, in this order**, it is very common for people to feel:

1. An initial reaction of **denial**, disbelief, numbing. You're in a state of shock. You can't take it in. It seems unreal. There must be a mistake! Surely it can't be true? It is only *after* the shock and denial start to recede that you can start to process the reality of the situation. Denial is like a foot on the brake, it dampens emotions that threaten to overwhelm us.

2. As people take the foot off this brake, emotions may surge. Often, people show **anger** and it's a natural and perhaps necessary response. It may be the *fear* within us being expressed. Most of us have been taught *not* to express anger and people are sometimes very uncomfortable expressing any emotions – or even feeling them. Things still seem unreal, and in a state of frustration and fear, we seek answers, maybe asking questions like: “Why me? I don’t deserve this! I did nothing wrong!” It’s easy to look for someone or something to blame. If not ourselves, then who? Trying to *supress* strong emotions only increases suffering and delays recovery. Anger, frustration, fear can energise you and help you avoid staying stuck – if you allow yourself to feel your feelings. Naming the feeling also helps, as in “I feel ...”
3. When the worst happens, it’s not unusual, even for non-believers, to try and do a deal with God. Feelings of desperation prompt **bargaining**. You promise you’ll do better, be better, if only things go back the way they were. You wish you could turn back time. You may feel guilty, even if you’re not responsible for the event. You may find yourself thinking “If only ...” or “What if ...”. You are looking for relief and hope and trying to avoid grief.
4. Unfortunately, the overwhelm of the situation and the emotions triggered can drive us down into **depression**. You may feel drained, empty, wanting to hide away from the world. You may withdraw, find it hard to get out of bed, not want to talk, feel hopeless. Some people feel like things will *never* get better, so there’s no point carrying on. They may have suicidal thoughts.
5. Over time, it is possible to process your grief. That *doesn’t* mean you’re “over it”, nor that you’ve “moved on”. **Your life has changed and will never be exactly as it was.** There will continue to be times when you grieve for what you lost, but you do come to acceptance. There will be times of sadness, anger, fear, frustration. Maybe bargaining and depression will re-emerge, but you are coming to understand the reality, **accept** it, and come to terms with living in the new, altered situation.

Over time, the Kubler-Ross model has been useful in many other situations of crisis. Victims of crime experience similar rollercoaster emotions. It's also proved helpful in understanding people's reaction to dramatic change, and as I mentioned, I've used it helping people deal with career transition after redundancy.

Kubler-Ross: Change Model



This variation of the Kubler-Ross Change Model shows how that might work. Added to the diagram are the dimensions of morale – that is, your emotional condition, cheerfulness, confidence, enthusiasm especially in the face of adversity – and the dimension of time. Now, we do have to remain open as we look at this, and, remember that not everyone will go through a precise series of stages, but over time, the process of dealing with crisis can look like this. However, **without support, people can get stuck**.

It may be helpful to think of reaction to change more simply, as having three main parts: **Impact**, comprising shock and denial; **Recoil**, where we struggle and hopefully begin to accept the new reality; and finally, **Reorganisation** where we try new ways of being, make decisions about our future and integrate them into “new normal” lives.

Fight/flight/freeze is very much an instinctive, stimulus-response reaction to threat. Stress is too. Something in the environment triggers the automatic reaction. By building resilience, we put a gap or a buffer between stimulus and response.



We need to work to build resilience muscles – the thinking, actions and behaviours that make us stronger.



Resilience Thinking

One of the best models I've ever found for creating resilience through thinking is from Stephen R. Covey's classic book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Elsewhere, this concept is called The Control Principle.

As shown below, the circle of concern for each of us may be large. It includes ALL the things we care about, worry about or spend time and energy thinking about! The circle of influence is much smaller, because it *only* includes those things that we have the power to do something about! Being able to make the distinction between what we are concerned about and what we can control saves us stress, energy and time.

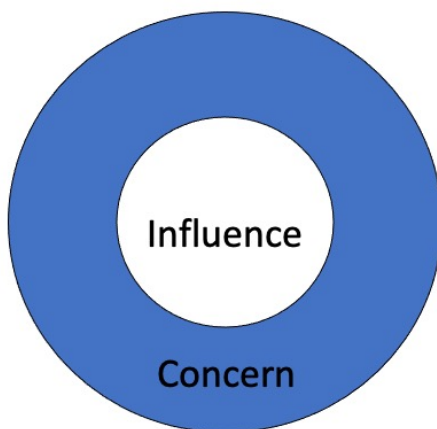
When you focus on the circle of concern, it can become overwhelming. However, when you put your energy, effort and time into your circle of influence, through your thoughts, words and actions, it becomes larger – you have more influence over your world.

This principle is behind advice like: "Think global, act local". Most of us can't change the world (by ourselves), but we can change our part of it.

You may be familiar with The Serenity Prayer, written by Reinhold Niebuhr. It reflects the control principle and is often quoted. Niebuhr's original was:

*"Father, give us courage to change what must be altered,
serenity to accept what cannot be helped,
and the insight to know the one from the other."*


The Control Principle



Covey, S. (1989) *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. The Business Library

Here are some in-the-moment, coping strategies. You need to be proactive, plan and practice these so that they become your habit in times of challenge.

Resilience Thinking



Present	•What's good?
Past	•Successful coping
Focus	•What can you control?
Shift	•Problem-solving
Chunk	•Break it into smaller bits
Set-backs	•Prepare for ups and downs
Compassion	•Be kind to yourself

In the moment, when you are feeling overwhelm, can you be **present** and look for what is good? What’s going well?

It often helps to look to the **past** and remind yourself of things you’ve coped with previously. Think of the skills and strengths that got you through. Remember too, the circle of concern and circle of influence.

Focus on what you can control, maybe taking slow, deep breaths (fight/flight, anxiety or panic can trigger rapid, shallow breathing).

Shift your thinking towards problem solving. What’s the outcome you want? What’s in the way? What can you do differently, to progress?

Chunk big problems into smaller pieces that are easier to manage.

Sometimes we fall into all-or-nothing thinking. Our way is blocked so we’re doomed to failure. Try to think of these as **set-backs**, not insurmountable obstacles. We all have ups and downs, life is seldom all smooth sailing.

Learn to be kind to yourself, have **compassion**. Are you your harshest critic? Check your self-talk, those things you say to yourself, the little insults, self-inflicted put-downs, the doubts, the imposter syndrome. You wouldn’t be that unkind to someone else, so don’t do it to yourself.

Resilience Actions



We know that survivors have good **social connections**, so nourish your vital relationships – make time for virtual coffee, catch-ups, social phone calls. Don’t constantly put socialising off because you’re too busy. Reach out to your network – when you’re in trouble people say: “let me know if there’s anything I can do.” Do. Ask. Most people mean it when they offer help, but they don’t know what you need. You may have to be explicit: “I just need to blow off steam, I need a shoulder to cry on, I need someone to listen and *not* give advice etc. Talk to people – don’t hold it all in or your likely to explode, choose friends or colleagues you can trust and confide in. If there is no one you feel confident in or the matter is too serious, find a professional. Use your organisation’s Employee Assistance Scheme or ask your doctor for a referral. You don’t have to go it alone.

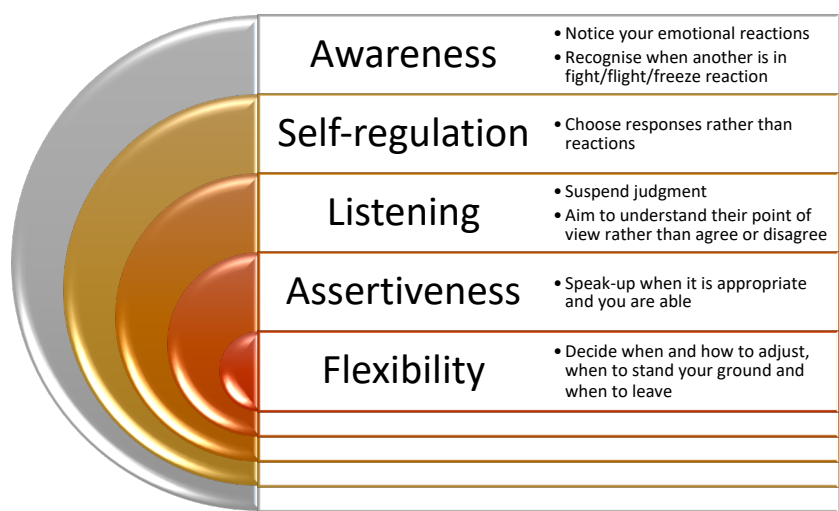
Self-nurturing, is a proactive way to build resilience. I learned about it from a rape counsellor, who watched so many of her strong professional colleagues burn out. She had a whole suite of things that nurtured her physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Choose what works for you, be it meditation, yoga, running, art, massage, hobbies, whatever relaxes you, strengthens you and brings you pleasure or respite, and build it into your life, every day if you can, but certainly every week. It’s not an indulgence to look after yourself, it’s a necessity.

Set realistic **goals** and celebrate achievements. At the end of every day, review what you’ve accomplished. A simple to do list with items ticked off (I seldom get all mine done, but as long as it's the most important ones you’ve progressed you can take satisfaction from it).

Focus on **strengths**. Your best results will come from building on your strengths. Identify your natural talents with an instrument like the Clifton Strengths Assessment and develop them.

We all need a sense of **purpose**. Find the meaning in your work, how does it help others, make the world better, contribute to something you care about or align with your values? If you’re not doing something you love in your job, make sure you do in your own time as a volunteer, in a hobby or with the people you love. Is there a cause you believe in? Can you contribute to something you feel is worthwhile? Do you have a personal purpose for your life?

Resilience Behaviours



Awareness is is often called emotional intelligence, it involves noticing your own reactions, creating that gap between stimulus and response and **self-regulation**, *choosing* how you respond rather than automatically reacting. Emotional intelligence also takes account of other people’s emotional reactions. If you can see that someone is in fight/flight/freeze, you know that emotion, not rational thinking, is driving their behaviour. Is there some way you can reduce the threat they feel? For example, you might empathise and reassure them that their feelings are normal.

“You might be feeling a little anxious right now, I certainly am, at times”

Listening often lessens fight/flight/freeze reactions – your own and those of others. Suspend judgment, we tend to classify everything as right/wrong good/bad, but we don't *have* to jump to those conclusions. When we build our resilience we are *strong* enough to pause and choose to try and understand their point of view. We don't *have* to agree or disagree.

Assertiveness means speaking up, calmly standing up for your rights - not aggressively trampling over the rights of others – but stating what you want. It takes some skill and courage and practice. It's not always appropriate to assert your rights and you must make an intelligent choice.

This is where **flexibility** comes in. You decide when and how to adjust and perhaps accommodate someone else's needs. You choose when to stand your ground, when to back down, and when to leave.

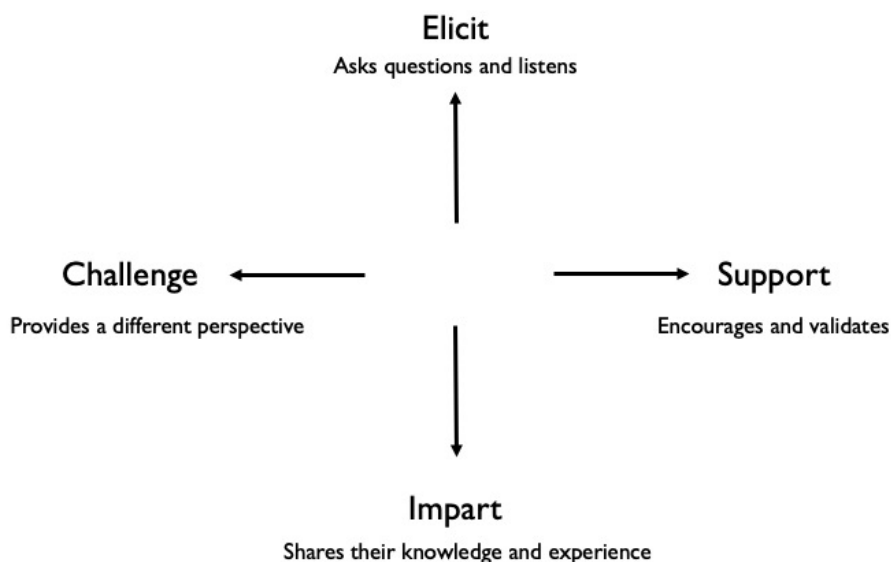




How to Use Mentoring Skills to Have Meaningful Conversations

Meaningful conversations, are not superficial, or shallow, but conversations that make a difference, that do good and leave you both feeling better.

This model, I call the mentoring dynamic, is the foundation of mentoring.



It shows that there are two important dimensions to the conversation and that a mentoring relationship is not static, it moves and changes. The traditional view of mentoring is that of someone who imparts their wisdom, sharing their knowledge and experience. And, while that is useful, in contemporary mentoring, a mentor does a lot more listening than talking. First and foremost, your job is to elicit what's going on for the mentee. You ask a lot of questions before you ever offer an opinion, suggestion or advice. Likewise, we think of mentors as people who provide support and certainly a good mentor will encourage and validate the mentee. But wouldn't you also want someone who would challenge you? Offer a different perspective, another point of view? These elements are not either/or, the mentor will both elicit and impart, support and challenge, shifting as needed.

Meaningful conversations start with good questions and good listening combined with supportive comments. This will build trust and rapport that allows the conversation to become deeper. Then, if appropriate you can impart your knowledge and experience and perhaps challenge, with a different perspective.



What will help you make conversations meaningful is:

- Expand your range of questions
- Ensure that in building rapport, you use empathy, not sympathy – you don't want this to become a pity-party!
- Only move into the impart/challenge realm to educate if it is appropriate.

Expand Your Range of Questions

You may need to ease into the mentoring conversation, but you don't want to waste time. So, here are three techniques that help you use questions and get to the heart of the matter.

1. **Cushions** let you ask a lot of questions without it ever seeming like an interrogation. They soften a confronting question. For example:

*"Do you mind if I ask ...
"I'm wondering ...
"Would you like to tell me ...*

Combine these phrases with rapport-building, non-verbal communication to gently preface a confronting question. Your approach should be respectful curiosity, this reduces the chance of sounding like an interrogator.

2. Probing gets a person to talk more

“Can you say a little more about ...

“Would you expand on that ...

“Perhaps you’d like to tell how ...

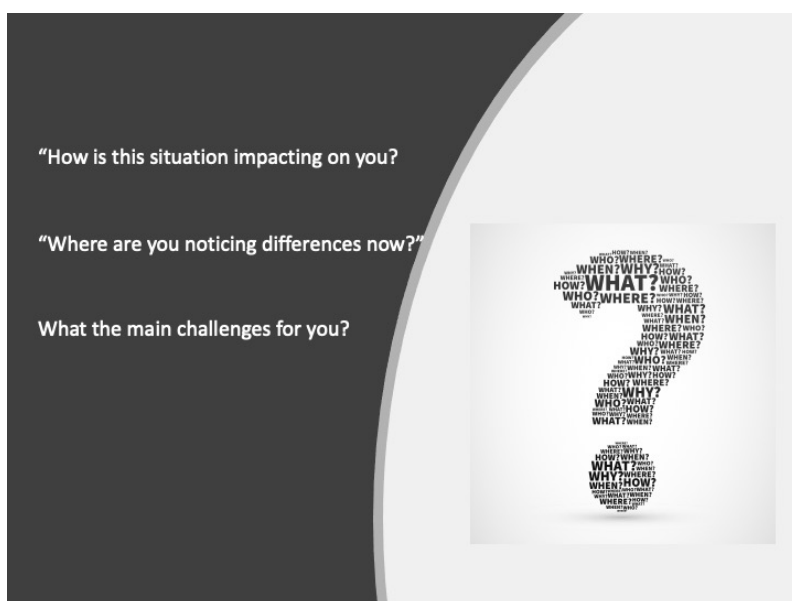
3. Summarising allows you to check your understanding

“So what you’re saying is ...

“What I’m hearing is ...

“From your point of view ...

We all know to use open (beginning with what, how, where, when, why, who) rather than closed questions that can be answered with “yes or no” and leave us nowhere to go, but even an open question like: “how are you?” can elicit a single word answer. Here are some examples of open questions you might use.



Use Empathy not Sympathy

When you listen well and without judgment, so that people feel safe to keep talking you need empathy not sympathy. That means showing that you really understand their feelings without getting dragged into those feelings yourself. It's important now, because we *will* be feeling a lot of similar emotions, yet in this instance we have to be strong enough not to drown in them.

Reflecting and paraphrasing can be useful. Just like summarising, here you concisely feedback what they've said. When you reflect you repeat their words back to them. When you paraphrase you use your own words to convey what you believe they meant. This allows you to check that you do understand what they've said and lets them clarify their thoughts and feelings, for you and themselves.

The experience of a meaningful conversation, the *genuine* interest you show, the respectful way you ask questions, listening so that they actually feel heard, may be *enough*. These conversations are rare! And they are appreciated. So please don't leap into advice-giving, offering solutions where none are sought, or being too quick with solutions.

One of the problems, at the moment, is having our choices and freedoms taken from us, being told what to do! So be alert, only go further if it is really necessary. We're talking about a *real need* to share your knowledge and wisdom or challenge them.





Educate

We need to educate ourselves before we try to educate others. It's never been more important to be able to distinguish between **facts and opinion**. Be rigorous and disciplined with yourself, what you say and what you share. Fact check, don't assume something is true. If you voice an opinion, get into the habit of stating it as such. "In my opinion, "My personal view is, "What I've found, in my experience.

Get your information from **trusted sources**. Use government websites, expert, credentialed authorities.

Beware the myriad of **misinformation** out there! Fake cures or preventatives, stories that seek to blame, or call for retribution, or cause panic. A lot of these stories are designed to wind people up, create fear and hatred. Don't fall for them and don't spread them by sharing.

Be kind. Gentle, humble, not quick to criticise or join the blame game. Give people the benefit of the doubt.

Offer hope. Things will get better. This disease and its after-effects are not magically going to go away tomorrow, in a week a month or even a year. We have to be realistic. Things will never be the same as they were, but things will improve over time and there will be a new normal that is OK.



Wellbeing
and ability
to cope

Practical Ways to Boost Your Health, Wellbeing and Ability to Cope

If you have ever been on an aeroplane, you've seen and heard the safety demonstration where they tell you to fit your own mask before attempting to help others if there is an emergency requiring oxygen. It's worth keeping this in mind in everyday life. You need to look after yourself if you are to be able to assist others. This does not mean being selfish or always putting yourself first, but it does mean keeping yourself safe and strong.

Some proven ways to support your own wellness and resilience are:

- Keeping a gratitude journal
- Practicing relaxation techniques, meditation or mindfulness
- Exercise, especially walking in nature, swimming, yoga, Tai Chi
- Eating nutritious, healthy foods
- Laughter, listening to or watching comedy
- Getting enough sleep (7-8 hours every night)
- Playing – with kids or pets if you have them, games, puzzles, hobbies



I hope that this ebook has gone some way to answer the questions:

- What happens when we experience a crisis?
- As mentors, managers, parents, friends and colleagues, how can we help?
And,
- How can we look after ourselves so we're able to be there for others?

I hope you noted down some key points that stood out for you and actions you could take. If not, skim back through and do that now.



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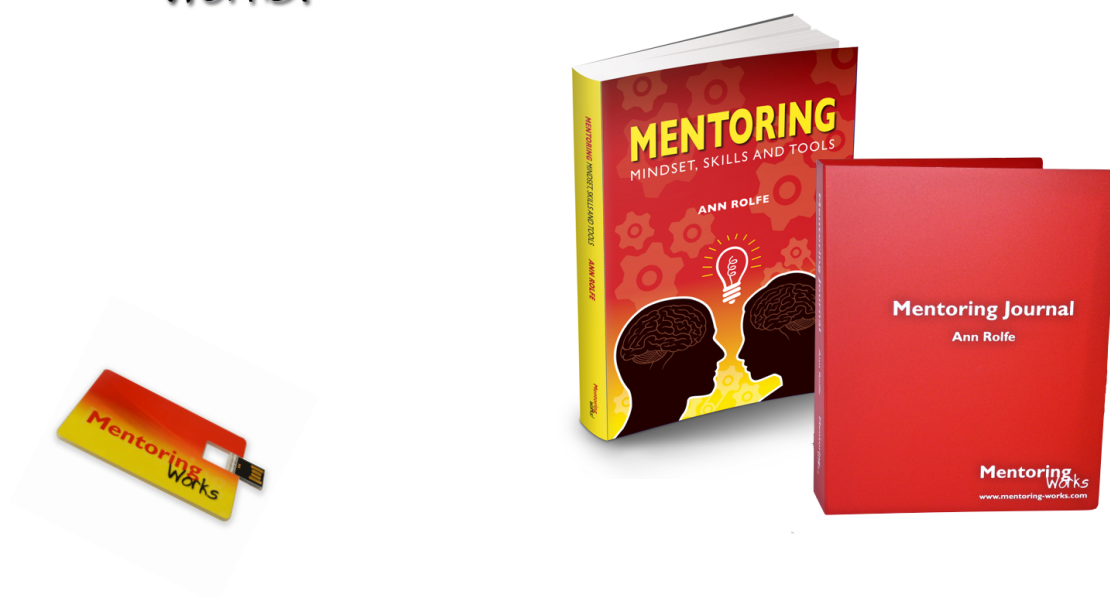


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