

It's ok to feel ok: working through your moods in a pandemic

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Susan Clews, Acas Chief Executive

Acas Chief Executive Susan Clews has worked in Acas frontline operations and as Director of Strategy and Chief Operations Officer.

One of the tougher parts of an Acas adviser's job is [helping employers manage redundancies](#). It can be devastating to lose colleagues, particularly in the current crisis. Some staff who retain their jobs suffer from what is known as survivor syndrome – a feeling of guilt at having held on to the income and security, even in the short term, that others have lost.

In the last few weeks, I have noticed a similar thing happening with personal moods – of mine and those of colleagues and friends. It's a time of great stress and anxiety so why, we ask ourselves, do we sometimes feel moments of calm and even joy? Our moods will fluctuate, but it can feel hardest to accept when things are going ok.

Here are my 3 tips on how to embrace the positive.

Give moods the chance to breathe

Like many organisations, Acas has put a lot of focus and energy into supporting our own staff's wellbeing. For example, we have:

- published weekly articles on topical issues such as managing financial worries and coping with loneliness and isolation
- developed online training for our managers to help them deal with heightened levels of stress and anxiety in their teams. This was inspired by the very popular [online training](#) we offer external customers
- created new internal online channels for colleagues to share ideas and feelings

But there needs to be the right balance between *telling* people what to do and *sharing* personal experiences about what coping really means for you. Internal messaging will emerge organically given the chance and should not be over-controlled from the centre – a valuable lesson I have learnt.

Escapism is a form of coping

Escapism may not be a long-term solution, but it can work wonders when used to restore a sense of tranquillity, however fleeting. And it can take many forms, often helping others as well as yourself. A couple of stories I have heard within Acas spring to mind:

- Neil Parker, an adviser from Newcastle, [ran a marathon in his back garden](#) and managed to raise £2,500 for the NHS, as well as all our spirits in the process
- another colleague, Anna Jones, rose to the challenge of celebrating her daughter's birthday by creating a 70s-themed party at her home in the South West

Of course, binge watching Netflix is another credible option!

Take the tips that work for you

I am grateful to my colleague Maxine Henley who shared the following tips on how to look after yourself. They have proved very popular with staff at Acas. In Maxine's words:

- self-care is a priority for everyone:so why not embrace time you would have 'wasted' on commuting and spend it on you
- gratitude is good for you: reflecting on what you are grateful for or appreciative of in your life can lift your mood and relax you
- routine supports you: be structured in your new work routine. Get up, get comfortable and ready for work
- time in nature restores you: try to spend some time outdoors – even if it's walking around the block before work
- connection keeps you going: with loved ones and friends, by phone or virtually – helps reduce feelings of isolation
- productivity is personal to you: know when you are most and least productive and wheel your cogs accordingly

Many colleagues have described recent weeks as a 'rollercoaster', feeling up one day and quite down the next. There is no one way to cope. I hope everyone finds what's right for them.