Uncertainty
How to cope well in uncertain times

Liggy Webb
This bite-sized book has been designed to give you a useful overview of how to manage your emotions.

• Seek out the potential in each situation
• Avoid getting dragged down by negativity and gossip
• Manage anxiety and stress levels
• Maintain an optimistic outlook
• Focus on the present and be productive
The future seems to be headspinningly unpredictable and we are now living in a world where absolutely anything is possible! You may well be asking yourself “What on earth is going to happen next?”

On a positive note we are also living in exciting times and it doesn't have to be all doom and gloom. The unknown and what is beyond may well deliver some great opportunities and life-enhancing adventures for all of us.

Maturity of mind is the capacity to endure uncertainty

John Finley
Your inner caveperson

Uncertainty, however, can also fuel fear, anxiety and paralysis, which will inhibit your ability to thrive in times of flux. Your brain essentially is hardwired to react to uncertainty with fear. This brain quirk worked very well for human beings years ago.

As cavepeople we would regularly enter an unfamiliar space where we didn't know what might be lurking behind the bushes and the overwhelming caution and fear that was triggered ensured our survival. This primeval instinct, which hasn't evolved, is now a hindrance in the world we are living in today because uncertainty is rife and managing the associated stress is fundamental to personal well-being.

Overriding reactions

It is worth acknowledging then that as you face uncertainty, as you inevitably will, your brain could so easily push you to overreact. The ability to be able to override this reaction and move your thinking into a more rational direction is fundamental in terms of dealing positively and successfully with uncertainty in a more sophisticated world.
The quality of your life is in direct proportion to the amount of uncertainty you can comfortably deal with.

Tony Robbins

How to live with uncertainty
1. Avoid the doom and drama

In times of uncertainty there will be lots of gaps of information, which some people want to fill in anyway. Uncertainty can create a playground for the doom goblins and drama queens who perversely enjoy stoking up any negativity they can. They will be predicting all sorts of doom and gloom and if you get absorbed in the gossip, scaremongering and toxicity it will drag you down and make you feel anxious.

Balance your exposure to negative media and remove yourself from environments wherever possible where this kind of behaviour is rife. You don’t have to listen to it and you certainly don’t have to be part of it. That is entirely your choice.
2. Stay positive

One of the great benefits of positive thinking is that it can quiet the fear and irrational mind chatter by focusing your thoughts on something that is more calming. Thoughts are powerful triggers for emotions and for every negative niggling doubt that you have, on the flip side there will always be a more hopeful alternative.

Give your wandering mind a little help by consciously selecting something positive to think about. Create a positive sanctuary in your mind by focusing on a happy memory or a dream for the future that will refocus your attention. This will help to distract the intensity of what you could otherwise be thinking about and give it less energy.
3. Avoid crystal-ball-gazing

Sometimes a fertile imagination can be your own worst enemy and you may find yourself getting lost in your own feelings. If you are not careful you may take out the imaginary crystal ball and start to “catastrophise” about the future. The what ifs and speculation can lead to feelings of despair and then those feelings can lead to more speculation and then you may become lost and paralysed in an overwhelming whirlpool of fear. Sometimes you need to be able to detach yourself from your situation and consciously observe your emotions and reactions and gently guide yourself into a calmer space. You cannot possibly predict the future; you can, however, feel less anxious by fostering positive thoughts about the alternative possibilities.
4. Manage your inner control freak

Let’s face it, we all like to be in control, however, in some situations you have to put your trust in others’ hands. For example, if you found out that you were going to be made redundant or you were diagnosed with an illness you would need to accept that you couldn’t just wave a magic wand and make the situation go away. It would be impossible to be totally in control of absolutely every situation in your life. You run the risk of putting your body under immense stress if you focus on trying to control things that are simply out of your control.

Madness is the result not of uncertainty but of certainty

Friedrich Nietzsche
5. Believe in yourself

Part of dealing with uncertainty is having the self-belief and confidence in being able to handle whatever comes your way. True confidence is about taking a positive stand, listening to others, asking for help and not being afraid to be wrong sometimes. Owning mistakes and learning from them will help you to be better informed so that you can deal with whatever life throws at you. The future will always be uncertain and trusting and believing in your own ability to deal with uncertainty is the best way to deal with it.
6. Be decisive

Sometimes in life we simply cannot have all the information straight away. In an uncertain world you will never have all the information you need for absolute certainty. Sometimes all you can do is make the best decision based on the knowledge available to you at the time.
7. Be agile

Agility is all about your ability to be flexible and adapt as more information comes to light. Keeping an open mind and fine-tuning the course you are following, just like a precision-guided missile, can help you to be more accurate in reaching a more successful destination.
8. Learn stress reduction techniques

When you are dealing with uncertainty you are bound to feel a level of stress. Over time the body’s stress levels affect blood pressure, blood sugar, muscle tension, cholesterol levels, breathing rate and every organ in the body. It is really important to research ways to relieve stress during times of uncertainty.
9. Practise mindfulness

When you are obsessing about tomorrow you are too busy judging what hasn’t happened to fully experience what is happening right now. Appreciating the beauty and magic of the here and now will release you from being trapped in a fear-driven thought cycle. The practice of mindfulness, which is about being present and fully experiencing the moment, is very powerful. I can certainly say first-hand it is possibly the most effective technique when it comes to dealing with uncertainty.
10. Get on with it!

Uncertainty can have quite a paralysing effect as you may feel that with lack of information you simply don't know which way to turn! Decision-making on occasions can be an agonising process, especially if you have a very analytical mind and you feel that you are not well informed enough. Uncertainty, on some occasions, may mean that you don't necessarily make the right decision. However, don't let that put you off, sometimes even a wrong decision is better than no decision, and besides, a mistake is simply a learning opportunity in disguise.
About the author

This bite-sized book was written by award-winning and bestselling author and presenter Liggy Webb.

Liggy is recognised as a leading authority on behavioural skills and has worked as an international consultant for a range of organisations including the BBC, the NHS, The Walt Disney Company, Ralph Lauren, Sainsbury’s, the World Trade Organization, the United Nations and various universities and government organisations.

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www.liggywebb.com

If we insist on being as sure as is conceivable ... we must be content to creep along the ground, and can never soar

John Henry Cardinal Newman

The Life Skills Library

www.thelearningarchitect.com
For my part I know nothing with any certainty, but the sight of the stars makes me dream.

Vincent Van Gogh