

LOCKDOWN OR BREAKDOWN?

As much as we have been waiting and hoping for our lockdown levels to ease, now that they are, this new state of quasi freedom brings with it a whole new type of anxiety. All being well, restrictions will continue to be lifted in the weeks and months to come, allowing us slowly to return to some kind of “normal”.

This is good news for the economy and employment, and will hopefully help ease the high levels of financial distress and mental health problems our community has been experiencing during the pandemic.

For many people, however, the idea of reconnecting with the outside world may provoke other anxieties. Whether for yourself, the health of your children or the safety of your elderly parents, while we know that easing lockdown is essential, it fills so many with tremendous fear.

Social distancing and mental health: While levels of depression and anxiety were much higher than usual in the community due to the pandemic, these may not drop now just because lockdown is easing. In fact they may rise with the anxiety of being exposed and the possibility of becoming ill. Some people may feel particularly anxious about reconnecting. For example, people with social anxiety might experience heightened anxiety about the prospect of socialising again.

Saving the world: So many people have been hopeful that “society will have improved in one or more ways” after the pandemic. We remain hopeful that the world has been given the breathing space it so desperately needed to realign itself. The ease of lockdown may cause a rise in despondency if people feel that nothing has changed, that people are still the same, and that the beauty of our world is still in jeopardy.

Adjusting to a new normal: Because we haven’t experienced anything like the coronavirus pandemic in recent history, we simply don’t know how our community will readjust as restrictions ease. We don’t know what the future holds, and while some are able to go with the flow and cope with the unknown, others find it extremely challenging to be in the dark about their lives, with no time-frame in sight. This can create high levels of stress.

School: While parents are finally settling into an online routine, schools are starting the

process of opening and integration. This may create enormous pressure on parents who fear their children may be exposed to the virus. It creates a huge dilemma for parents as to whether they should let their children remain at home or make them go back to school. And there are so many different opinions on this matter that we don't really know where to find answers. For so many of our children and teens, the social isolation has been an absolute blessing and has made them feel safe, secure and confident. The thought of going back to a school environment that they may not necessarily enjoy or feel safe in, can create huge levels of anxiety and can have emotional, physical and psychological effects on the child or teen. For those that are desperately missing the social interaction and feel deprived of their basic needs being met, going back to school will be met with excitement and joy. No two children are the same and none experience school in the same way. Parents may need to make decisions based on each child as opposed to making a 'family' decision. It is important that as we ease back into what we knew as normal before the lockdown, we take into account each child's individual needs and concerns.

Work: This is equally important when returning to work if social arrangements and simple day to day life causes you anxiety. As hard as it may have been adjusting to the lockdown and restrictions, re-adjusting may be equally hard in the beginning. This is very interesting as one would think that re-adjusting would be a relief and anxiety-free. Think back to the beginning of the lockdown and how hard it was to adapt, but how quickly we actually did. This goes to show how resilient we are and this resilience will help us adapt back to a new normal once again.

There's much speculation on what the future will look like, resulting in the "new normal" terminology. A key concern as we continue to navigate this is our collective mental health. Japan, for example, experienced a 20% decrease in suicides in April 2020 relative to April 2019. Yet predictive modelling raises concerns about suicide rates potentially rising after the pandemic recedes.

It's important though to remember that no model can perfectly predict the complex impacts of this unprecedented pandemic.

We'll need to collect ongoing data to assess how our community's mental health is faring over the coming months. And we'll need to use this data to implement evidence-based mental health strategies and policies as and when they're needed. We need to raise our awareness around the emotional and mental well-being of those around us, and importantly increase our own self-awareness. Community needs may

change, we may see a rise in people seeking financial assistance and supportive counselling, or generally needing some positivity and upliftment. Reflecting on the past two months of lockdown can help to highlight some positive and beautiful changes, families bonding: children learning to connect in all manner of ways, re-learning the simplicity of life, and perhaps realising that we need very little beyond the close connections we have with those dear to us to help us to feel happy.

As with all change in life we need to embrace it and take it step by step, seeking support where we need it. Change is good, it brings about growth and development and opens up opportunity for new doors to open when old ones have closed.

Chev Social Services is here to support you through all this uncertainty and change.



ChevrahKadisha