

# Living through uncertainty

A Chaplaincy resource

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[www.ncl.ac.uk/chaplaincy](http://www.ncl.ac.uk/chaplaincy)



# Acknowledgement

Some material in this presentation is drawn from a recent article (September 2020) in the online magazine 'Wired'

<https://www.wired.com/story/how-to-deal-with-uncertainty-coronavirus/>

by **Stéphanie Thomson**

with contributions from

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## Introduction

### **Uncertainty: a feature of many stages of life**

moving to live somewhere else  
a new job or course of study or training  
a new hobby, sport, other interest  
a new relationship  
new friends  
financial uncertainties  
health issues  
the coronavirus pandemic

### **A new University academic year**

new students  
new staff



## Introduction

### Uncertainty at the start of a new academic year

What lies ahead?

What can *I* do about it?

What ***should*** I do?

What difference will it make anyway?

### Uncertainty in life

Not necessarily a problem

An integral part of life



# Uncertainty beyond the normal

## Uncertainty as a problem

- Out of proportion; out of our comfort zone
- Too many unanswered questions
- Too big to handle
- Out of control

## Uncertainty → fear, anxiety

## Consequences can include

- impatience, frustration
- repeated actions that don't help



# Help from the experts!

## Newcastle University

Mark Freeston

Professor of Clinical Psychology

Research into anxiety (Generalized Anxiety Disorder) and OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder)

## How to Deal with the Anxiety of Uncertainty

<https://www.wired.com/story/how-to-deal-with-uncertainty-coronavirus/>



# Suggestions for coping with uncertainty 1

## Reduce the 'mental time travel'

Past regrets: imagining what might have been different  
Future scenarios: imagining what might happen

## Focus on the present

One possible approach: Mindfulness / Meditation  
Online resources and phone apps  
Chaplaincy provision and guidance



## Suggestions for coping with uncertainty 2

### Enjoy the familiar

Favourite foods

Favourite activities

A reminder of past security





# Suggestions for coping with uncertainty 3

## Get absorbed in something enjoyable

Art, craft, music  
Sport, physical exercise  
Video games  
Reading?

## But avoid anything that is

boring  
frustrating  
mentally taxing  
without a sense of progress and achievement

## In balance with study/work etc.



## Suggestions for coping with uncertainty 4

### Establish good habits and routines in daily life

Must be easy to do

Must be practically achievable now

Structure in daily life reduces uncertainty

## Suggestions for coping with uncertainty 5

### Gradually introduce some uncertainty deliberately

Start small!

Helps to expand your tolerance of uncertainty

## Suggestions for coping with uncertainty 6

### Allow people you trust to come alongside you

Involve others in what you do  
Share and confide where you can  
Friends are a resource  
Friends are also one of the sources of uncertainty!

# Suggestions for coping with uncertainty 7

## Consider a spiritual dimension

Active religious faith is also a resource for coping with uncertainty

The faith of friends as well as your own can help

The Bible's most frequent instruction: "Do not be afraid"

University Chaplaincy offers support and advice on spirituality and religious faith as well as general pastoral support

# The King's Speech

## King George VI on Christmas Day 1939

Britain at war (1939–1945)  
Faced with huge uncertainty

Poem by Minnie Louise Haskins 1908

*I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:*

*"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."*

*And he replied:*

*"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.*

*That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."*

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From Newcastle. For the world

