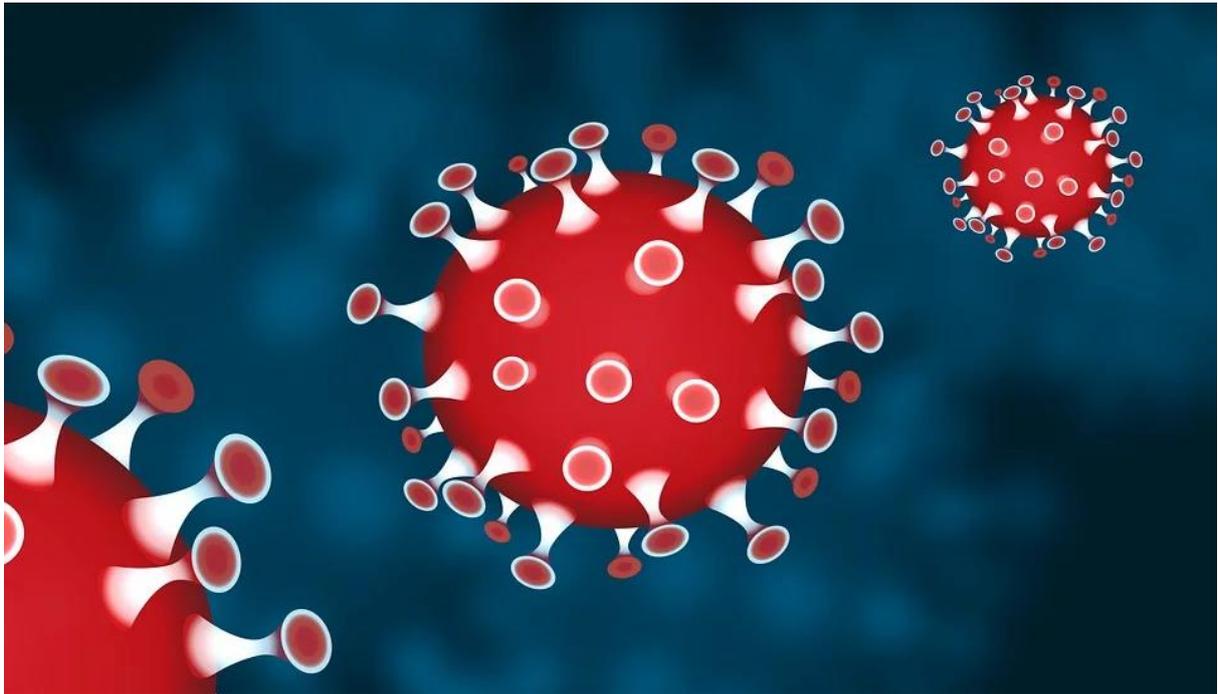


# PARLIAMENT STREET

*partnership in policy*



## MINDING THE PANDEMIC

*Reflection of living in the face of a pandemic and the effects on a regular  
citizens mental health*

*By Danny Bowman, Head of Campaigns at Parliament Street*

# Introduction

Every day from now I'm going to come to my laptop and type possibly insignificant notes about my day as an average citizen living in the face of a pandemic. I am also going to log my mood; morning, afternoon and evening to see what effect living in a time of a pandemic is having on my mental health.

## Key and Mood Scoring

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>MOOD SCALE</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>8 – Ecstatic</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>7- Very Happy</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>6- Moderately Happy</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>5 – Mild Happiness</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>4 – OK</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>3- Mild Unhappiness</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>2- Moderately Unhappy</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>1- Very Unhappy</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>0- Miserable</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>*Lockdown begins</b></p>
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## **.... Week 1 Begins ....**

**21<sup>st</sup> March 2020**

This is the first day I'm writing a reflective entry of what it has been like living in the face of a pandemic and the subsequent effect it has had on my mental health.

I sit in bed scrutinizing my essay for an impending deadline that has yet to be changed by the university. I guess I can't complain, it's helping to distract me from the news about the coronavirus. I've never found sifting through countless pieces of OECD data so therapeutic.

My girlfriend called earlier, had a lovely conversation that didn't include the coronavirus. I guess talking about trivial things has to be the new normal if we are going to get through this with our sanity.

Today's trivial topic included what I'm going to look like when my hair grows long because I am unable to get it cut whilst the hairdressers are closed. My girlfriend seems to give very mixed messages about the favourability of this outcome; one minute immensely happy, the next she seems to provide a more sceptical view of how good it will look. Yeah, told you it was trivial, but useful in blocking the coronavirus from our conversations.

Even in the mist of the coronavirus it's important to keep these calls up however trivial they may be. It's hard to believe I won't see her for the next 3 months, going to miss her so much. I told her I loved her as I left the call to continue working on my essay. A mix of my work and calls with her helped my mood stay relatively stable at around 7 which on my measure is very happy.

### ***Daily Scores on mental wellbeing***

*Evening – 7 (Very Happy)*

## **22<sup>nd</sup> March 2020**

I woke up this morning feeling a little flat taking a little longer to get into my current pandemic schedule. I started my morning routine of getting my shreddies, catching the news headlines (for a limited time), and finally retreating to my room to start another day studying the wellbeing of children and young people for my essay.

I felt my mood slip throughout the day, not sure if it was the constant news updates on death totals for the UK, or the feeling of isolation being stuck in my room alone looking at a screen. My mood was lifted by calling my Mum to wish her a happy Mother's Day. She is back in Northumberland, too far away for my liking, but she is doing all the right things to keep herself safe. The best way to keep her safe is by not going to see her.

My hands ache slightly due to the constant hand washing (thanks OCD), but on the bright side I have a call set up with my girlfriend again and I'm making good progress with my university work. Now for another evening of quick food to avoid too much human contact in the kitchen (MasterChef I am not).

### ***Daily scores on mental wellbeing***

*Morning – 5 (Mild Happiness)*

*Afternoon – 4 (OK)*

*Evening – 4 (OK)*

## **23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020**

I was woken up this morning by a rare bit of sun shining through my closed curtains, brightening up my room. I felt a bit sluggish today again, not physically, but going through a period of mental drain. I

pulled myself up to do the same morning routine with the added extra of stretching my legs in the garden, walking around in circles to keep myself refreshed.

Afterwards I headed to my room with plans to start my work. Looking at the sun peaking through my closed curtains persuaded me to open them for a short period of time, catching the rays behind the safety of a glass window. Never have I felt so safe and comfortable, but also so lonely in equal measure.

I had a nice surprise before starting work with a call from my girlfriend, currently marooned in Huddersfield. She always has a way of lifting my mood. A mix between the sun shining on my face and the call from my girlfriend made me feel better.

I was for a period feeling quite happy, but that was about to be broken slightly by the afternoon.

Talk had spread of a potential lockdown this evening. I guess some people didn't get the memo of 2m distancing and staying at home unless essential travel needs to be undertaken. This added slightly to my anxiety, struggling to comprehend what this may look like in practice.

Ironically by the afternoon I saw first-hand why this approach might be needed. Someone I know had decided to go and get something from the shops, not from the shop down the road, but from one in York City Centre. I guess my anxiety was triggered by this, worrying for them and feeling that by making this choice they could be putting themselves in danger. I tried to tell them this, but possibly not in the most useful way, driven by my anxiety I didn't necessarily use the right tone. Maybe I overreacted, or maybe the reaction was purely based on my anxiety of the current situation. Either way it was the wrong response and I knew it. This lowered my mood substantially, mostly driven by my anxiety.

By the evening I was feeling more motivated after getting lots of work done in the afternoon. I decided to get some exercise the safest way I knew how. I started doing shuttles in my back garden hoping by doing it a zillion times I would achieve a two-mile run (here's hoping I did). It was nice to get out into the fresh air for the first time in days, even if it was confined to my back garden. I guess I must take advantage of the moments my OCD is not telling me it's dangerous.

I called my Mum when I got back in from shuttles, I don't know if it was the build-up of stress from the day or the feeling of just being in the fresh-air but I got a little overwhelmed when talking about the virus and its impact. I may have to toughen up a bit, but I'm only human and sometimes it's good to let some of the emotion out.

I later apologised to my friend (the one who went into York) feeling guilty about the way I had gone about telling him to stay at home. It's important to keep your cool in these situations, and I didn't today, but I will be better moving forward. After the Prime Ministers much needed announcement of a lockdown in the UK (been doing that anyway) I settled down to watch the West Wing.

***Daily scores on mental wellbeing***

*Morning – 3 (mild Unhappiness)*

*Afternoon – 3 (Mild Unhappiness)*

*Evening – 5 (Mild Happiness)*

## **.... LOCKDOWN BEGINS....**

**24<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

Since the lockdown got announced yesterday I've started to feel a little brighter about things. It's made me feel safer and less worried about some people not abiding by the rules. Waking up this morning to another bright sunny day was lovely, peering out of the window to see no pedestrians walking on the street made me feel more secure and hopeful about us combating this pandemic. I called my girlfriend briefly telling her how much she meant to me, before calling my Mum to check on her and my Dad.

The work was a little slow today though, feeling like nothing is going in or out can be frustrating, but I managed to cut down on the number of words I had written by meticulously scanning the pages. Skipped my exercise this evening, which was a bummer, but hoping to pick it up again tomorrow, and looking forward to watching a movie with housemates this evening (sitting 2 metres apart). Today has been better! Big news of the day signing up to be a volunteer for the NHS. I look forward to playing my small part in reducing loneliness throughout this period by checking in!.

### ***Daily scores on mental wellbeing***

*Morning – 7 (Very Happy)*

*Afternoon – 6 (Mild Happiness)*

*Evening – 6 (Mild Happiness)*

**25<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

Another sunny day in York! There is no cloud in sight allowing me to have a coffee in the garden before my housemates get up. I started my work in the morning but can't seem to get into the final bits of the essay. It seems there is still part of me that's full of worry for my parents, sisters and girlfriend's health. Although, I am filled with worry for them, I'm also filled with pride by all they are doing to help out with my parents and Sister all working on the frontline or in the background for the NHS and my girlfriend who has signed up to volunteer for a charity.

I got as much done as possible before sitting in the garden again doing some reading for my dissertation. All housemates 2m apart in the garden! I guess doing work in the garden was the closest any of us had come to a sense of normality, chatting and laughing at trivial things.

By the end of the afternoon it was time for me to leave for my social care job, walking between Hull Road and Huntington felt surreal. I made sure I smiled as people passed hoping to get one in return (yet again 2m apart!). The shift at the social care place went well, I can't praise the people I work with enough! Their kindness, professionalism and helpful nature supporting vulnerable people is something we should all commend and celebrate. They truly are the best of this country!

Walking back from work equally as surreal, no cars on the road or people in sight. I felt myself hurrying, feeling like I shouldn't be out at this time. The traffic lights were on with no traffic in sight, and the pavements were well lit, but with no pedestrians to walk on them. I quickly made my way home through the completely silent and empty streets of York. Got home, quick call to my girlfriend and then off to bed.

### ***Daily scores on mental wellbeing***

*Morning – 6 (Very Happy)*

*Afternoon – 5 (Mild Happiness)*

*Evening – 6 (Very Happy)*

### **26<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

Waking up with work on my mind again! Today was all about reassuring students that were worried about the pressures of the coronavirus influencing their work. I felt a sense of concern for student's wellbeing in this time, particularly those working in health and social care, self-isolating, and those with children.

What a year to be Departmental Rep! I attempted to answer most of the concerns coming through in the morning attempting to reassure people till something official came through from the department. I knew the department would be commenting on extensions by the end of the day, so the key was to keep people as calm as possible. Bit stressful for me mind!

In the afternoon the email finally came through! What an outcome! Extensions for both essays and dissertations. I knew the department were working hard to make sure they supported students, and this was the evidence! It was nice to get some thanks from students, but most of all I was just glad it put people's minds at rest. This change may seem so small and insignificant in the chaotic climate we'd all found ourselves in, but for students working in health and social care now, or self-isolating, this was a game-changer!

By the evening, I had developed a headache and was feeling very sickly. I did my cheer and clap at 8pm for the wonderful staff of the NHS and aimed to go to bed

I felt a little better about an hour on and tried to get through virtual pub night (group of friends on google hangouts with beer) but felt too ill to continue. Ended up taking myself to bed early via a quick call with my girlfriend.

***Daily scores on mental wellbeing***

*Morning – 5 (Mild Happiness)*

*Afternoon – 6 (Very Happy)*

*Evening – 4 (OK)*

**27<sup>th</sup> March 2019**

Today was possibly the least eventful day I've had since the lockdown began. Sitting in the garden with a coffee and typing away at my laptop was refreshing.

I never usually get the time to experience concentrated air as I'm normally rushing through it. This time has forced me into taking pauses, experiencing what's around me, taking in the landscape, and learning to enjoy my own company. This was probably why my mood was so stable today, accepting the art of just being, something that doesn't always come so naturally to me. My mind was in steady mode, gradually working its way through the day and the jobs I had assigned myself to do.

***Daily scores on mental wellbeing***

*Morning – 5 (Mild Happiness)*

*Afternoon – 5 (Mild Happiness)*

*Evening – 5 (Mild Happiness)*

**28<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

Today was harder, waking up a little flat, but attempted to get on with my work to distract myself. I called my girlfriend when on a break from my work. The call was difficult, both of us missing each other a lot. It's not being able to put a time limit on how long this situation will last which is the hardest thing. It could be 2 months, 3 months, or even 6 months before we get to see each other again.

Not sure if it was because I was so intent on distracting myself, but I got a lot of work done this afternoon almost finishing my essay. Although I am trying to stop anxiety working, mainly because it doesn't produce the best work and my university work will be finished way too early. This will reduce the amount of stuff I have to do and I will end up extremely bored which is never good for my OCD.

At 5pm came I decided to risk going to the shops for the essentials (gloves on and ready to go). I felt so anxious in the supermarket, avoiding aisles where people were, and trying to gather my stuff as quick

as I could. People were somewhat obeying the rules, but others seemed to take them more liberally, swaying back and forward in the isles. Leaving the shop, I felt a little stressed out, OCD coming in fast, but managed to put in the coping mechanisms I have learnt over periods of time.

This evening probably going to focus on dissertation stuff, before maybe having a sneaky glass of wine.

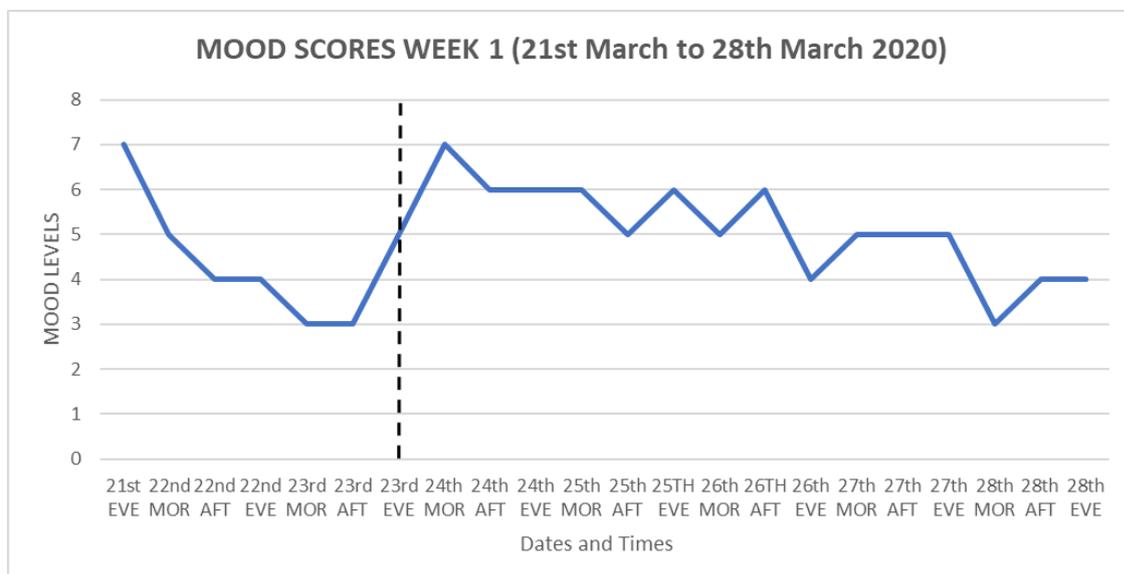
***Daily scores on mental wellbeing***

*Morning – 3 (Unhappy)*

*Afternoon – 4 (OK)*

*Evening – 4 (OK)*

## **WEEK 1 MOOD REVIEW**



**Highest Mood Score – 7 (Very Happy)**

**Lowest Mood Score – 3 (Mild Unhappiness)**

**Average Mood Score – 4.9 (Rounded Up – Mild Happiness)**