

Mutual Support Notes



A Note from the Chair

As I start this letter I have no idea at one level what I am going to be saying but what I do know is that Kathryn, Lesley and I want to connect with all our members and remind you that you are not alone in all this awful and frightening chaos. This interim mutual support newsletter will not have the lovely articles we have ready for our official one in June. That edition will contain the deeper more profound articles. If you have been thinking of writing, please do so. I know we have spaces in the June edition. If we receive enough contributions from members for inclusion in another interim mutual support newsletter we will do another of these in May. My aim in this one is to capture how much we care, a sense of pacing ourselves, life balance, serious things, fun and inconsequential things. This is a deliberate attempt

to try and cheer you up, even if just momentarily and I hope nothing will feel that we are being insensitive.

Of course, this worldwide shutdown will affect each and every one of us differently and probably each and every part of us. We all have our own personal worries about loved ones. How can I get food while keeping safe? How will I cope if I lose control and have to be hospitalised? Many have pets as their sole and trusted companion and the implications for walking dogs and getting pet food are high on the list for those folks. Whatever your worry is about in the present, it is real to you and we are all having to learn we must not trivialise it because others are worse off than me/us. At one level that maybe true but it does not make your or my concerns any easier for us, so I ask you to please be gentle and kind to yourself.

That will be a much-repeated message throughout this newsletter. Never have we needed to try and show more compassion for all our parts than now; to listen and learn with them and not just try to ignore or control. The uncertainty is real, the fear is real and will be compounded if not listened to, engaged with and where possible ways found for those who need to have time to do what they need made possible.

Getting through the day

As always, I know we each have our own way for managing and that includes grounding techniques. Our lives follow many paths, our commitments are numerous and varied and we are all at a different stage of our lifelong journey. I also know that crisis knocks out the thinking and connecting to others part of the brain. Without any intention of this happening, all our old survival skills kick in full-time and because they are still all too often familiar, take over,

removing the ability to reflect and think things through.

For me this very quickly leads to us isolating ourselves, not wanting to talk to others, definitely not able to cook a balanced meal, exercise disappears out the window and I feel heavy, sad and overwhelmed. Life is just bleak with the inability to know we have felt like this many times before and things can and do change.

However, I also know that the ability to dissociate at the level we are able to is an absolute gift and definitely not to be sneered at. It really is how we can use it well and helpfully and at this moment, for me, it is to not keep reading news updates, really retraumatising myself in every waking moment. I can compartmentalise knowing I have the ability to return to it all and I am finding naturally we are doing this a lot less. That does not mean I do not care, I care so much for all of our members, my family, friends and colleagues but me totally immersing myself in the ongoing sad things that are happening is not actually helping me or anyone else.

I have been pondering, something I have a lot of time to do right now, how to use what Kathryn and I have learnt over the many years of being with others with DID and from spending a lot of time with clinicians who share their thoughts of how a client might manage something. Our training is very interactive because we passionately believe everyone has so much knowledge to share and it is a real privilege that this sharing happens time and time again.

This is not a definitive list but what I am doing and why, which might enable you to say I could not do that but maybe this might work for me. Again, hearing others speak about how they manage has helped me so much to do exactly that. What I am sharing is the place I have got to after being quite immobilised by everything and spending a couple of weeks basically doing nothing or very

little every day.

I have decided to get up at my normal time and treat myself to an extra hour's lie in at the weekend.

It feels very important to build in a structure that differentiates between week-day work whatever we each consider this to be and weekend fun as it was all tending to blur into one and I need to have something to look forward to rather than everyday being a muddle.

I had been running for the last six months; the first time in my life I have enough internal co-operation to follow a schedule and we all want to do some 10k runs. There is a sense of a bit of a final fling as we turn 70 next year.

Everything literally ground to a standstill as I need to stay at home totally. We were all very sad and there seemed no way out until a friend said her children are doing a workout every morning. So, our 16 year old is doing this and I am doing some very calming yoga, again all online. I know the physical benefits, but we also think those 10k runs will be possible sometime in the future, a hope we are hanging onto.

I have never got my head around mindfulness but over the last couple of weeks I have realised that I tend to be doing two jobs at once, an example is when I am cleaning my teeth I also empty the airing cupboard, sort the washing and other jobs that require one hand.

Once I realised this, I am mindfully making myself stand still while I do my teeth, and many other things where I am aware my body is fulfilling a task while the brain is doing something else. I think the time is right for me to change things, probably we could not have done this much earlier. It is really having a good effect of me being so much more aware of staying in my body.

I am taking a dinner hour. Usually this meal is something I do while getting ready for the next thing, that always felt so important. So, at one o'clock Terry, my husband and I stop, and we eat lunch and sit and read until 2 o'clock.

This all sounds so structured and disciplined but it is actually helping quite a lot. We have many weeks ahead probably where we need to have things to do about our home and I am learning to spread it out.

I am learning what fits into the fun things and what I see as work. My garden and anything to do with growing things are definitely for the weekend fun. The rest are jobs that get labelled work.

This helps me to keep track of what day we are on and I go to do something in the garden and stop myself as I am 'saving' it as a treat. I suspect for many to do something every day works better but even then maybe you can think about what is a proper treat to be saved.

It is so important for me to make contact with family and friends and I am learning to pace even this. Some friends I know I need to respond to quickly as they tend to make contact when they are struggling but for most people I either agree a time that works for both of us or ring back when it works for me.

I was responding instantly to every text, e-mail or phone call. It reinforces exactly how my brain used to like to work, leaping all over the place and never completing a task. This was making me exhausted, much more liable to forget what actually does need doing and not getting any sense of satisfaction or only totally in the moment, passing through like an express train and then gone.

I am a little embarrassed with this one as it reminds me of my old aunties back in the 50s. During the late afternoon Terry and I stop, and we have a cup of tea

and a piece of cake.

This again is giving us a structure to work within. We do like our cake; so many of us look forward to this and it has got me looking up easy, fail proof recipes that require few ingredients and sharing the making with many of us.

I am finding that we are getting so much more selective as to what we watch on television of an evening - again we are not putting this on until an agreed time during the week but might watch an old film during Saturday or Sunday afternoon.

We are finding we do not have the tolerance for anything that is scary or more challenging. If I ignore this we do not sleep, feel miserable and disappointed in ourselves.

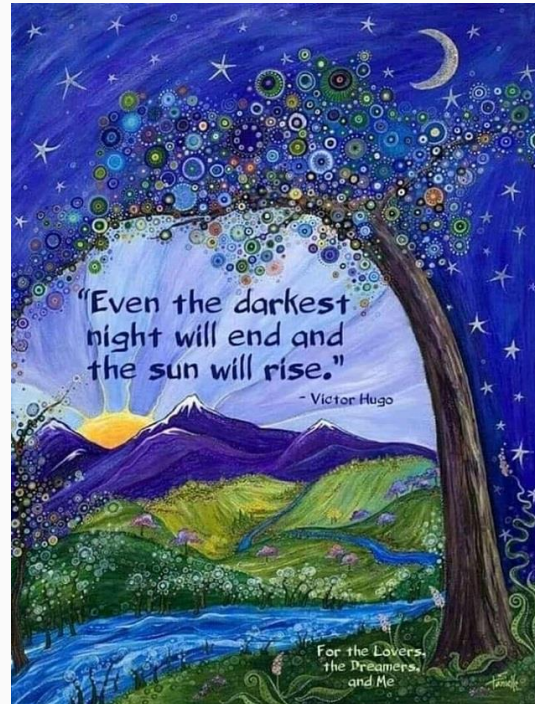
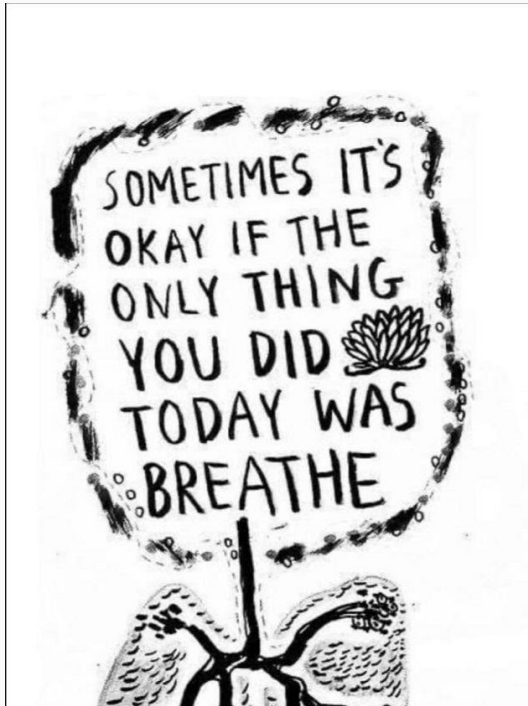
I am very able to fall asleep of an evening so have something in place to avoid this; a jigsaw, a game of scrabble, with real people in my home or online, crosswords or anything else that many can join in.

I quite quickly realised that if I did not put things in place the much better nights' sleep that we have enjoyed for quite a while now were fast going to become a problem again. The overall depression was pulling me towards no action but luckily we were able to slowly redress this balance.

As I write this, I see recurring themes, the importance that when in crisis we go back to our personal 'basics'. The need to have something to look forward to, have a shape to the day, be mindful of focussing in on the task being done, connect with others through the medium that is safest for you and most importantly have a glimmer of hope.

For many you will have others who share the day very differently, this will be such an individual thing, but a shape to the day might allow time for those

parts to do what they need more easily. I so quickly go back to thinking I fly solo and then everything becomes so much harder as I ignore all our needs and become awash with a myriad of feelings.



Coming into my own!

Now, I have never been a 'good cook'. I have through necessity, four children and a builder husband, done an awful lot of cooking but never really mastered the art. I think in my defence and on reflection this was partly the ground hog day experience I tended to take to another level, that so many of us with DID experience. I also lost my sense of taste, or at best a very intermittent sense of taste, at a very young age, nothing physically wrong but as a necessary part of our survival strategy. Food and eating are necessities, an engine requires fuel. So, it gives me some amusement to be sharing a of recipe that is just about fail proof, requires very few ingredients and is good to eat. I know you are all completely capable of looking it up on the internet but one of the things I find disappear when under even relatively mild stress is my ability to think of anything to make. I can look through all my cookery books and I have a shelf full and end up unable to identify anything I could possibly do, so just maybe if this is your problem you might think 'I could do that'. Also, I would like to think that somewhere out there someone is following a recipe I have shared.



Barm Brack

¾ pint of cold tea

7oz sugar (soft brown does give it a lovely taste)

12oz mixed dried fruit

10oz self-raising flour

1 egg

- Soak the fruit in the tea overnight.
- Now the recipe says do this and that but if you put it all in a mixing bowl together and stir thoroughly it seems to work.
- Grease or line a 2lb loaf tin or if you want to freeze half 2 x 1lb tins also seems to work.
- Cook on 160° for about an hour if using 1lb loaf tins, nearer 1hr 45mins if in one 2lb tin, but do keep an eye on it as I find it seems to cook a bit more quickly and yet another good thing it does not sink if you need to take a peek.
- A slice with spread is lovely and if it does not come up to expectations custard works wonders!

Containment

I know on top of so many possible triggers some of our members and the wider DID community are really struggling with self-blame, that somehow this must be their fault.

For those who do not understand DID this must seem ridiculous but for us this is a reality and no amount of reassurance can automatically change this deeply ingrained belief. So yet again be kind to yourselves, if possible, say this belief is no longer correct but totally empathise with the impact it is having.

I think it is important to gently and respectfully offer the reality in the here and now, but I know for some systems this can be very unhelpful and spark a response of here we go again.

One of the things, after many years of therapy, I found I could do is to metaphorically, internally put this fear into a box and tie it up. I then placed it where I knew I would be able to find it as and when the time was right. We even tied up a real box externally

for some of the most painful and overwhelming situations.

This way I was not saying it was not real but in the long run was helping us all to stop being overwhelmed by something that was too deep seated and ingrained to be resolved easily.

We so need to call upon all our resources to make this time as less difficult as possible. This might not work at all for you but maybe you can explore what actually might.

Melanie

PLAY

CENTRE

E	T	I	C	H	D	A	B
A	L	S	A	T	O	R	I
B	E	E	T	I	G	E	R
H	S	A	P	T	L	M	A
D	O	L	I	H	O	C	B
U	F	R	G	U	A	R	B
C	L	O	S	M	S	N	I
K	U	E	N	E	P	I	T



BEE



SEAL



DOG



CAT



ELEPHANT



PIG



TIGER



RABBIT



MOUSE

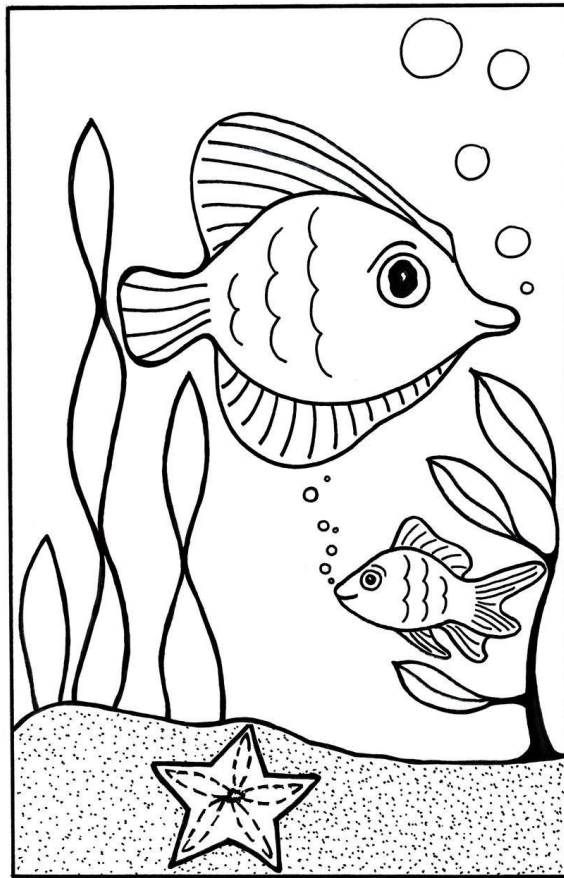


HORSE

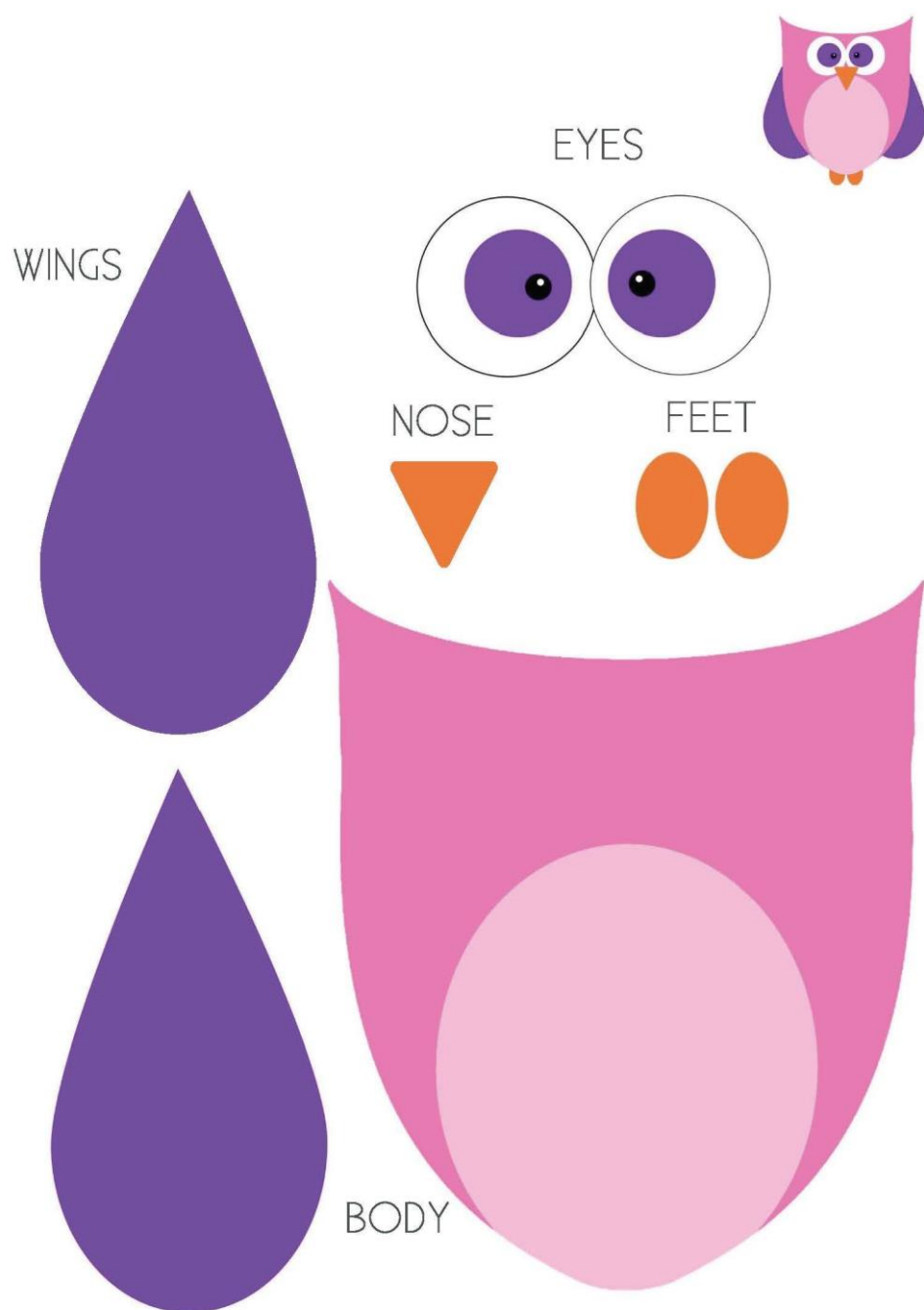


DUCK

**A picture to
print out and
colour - you
may need help
to print it!**



**Use the templates below to cut out and create a lovely owl -
you could use paper, card, or fabrics.
Send us a picture of what you've made!**



So over to you

We would really like you sharing with us the things you find most helpful. please e-

mail them to admin@firstpersonplural.org.uk and we will use them in future mutual support notes to circulate. Please say whether you wish to remain anonymous or if not which name or names to use.

We would welcome your ideas; what you are doing and anything you would like to share with our members. How we use this will depend on how much input we have from you. Another scaled down newsletter is possible but will rely on the amount of material we receive. I know many members say I always intend writing something but never get around to it - might this be the time to put your thoughts into action?

With very best wishes,
Melanie, Kathryn and Lesley

FPP Full Members Mutual Support Forums



End's Rainbow by *Tiger Angela and other little ones*

