

Feeling hopeless? There are things you can do to create and maintain hope in a post-coronavirus world

June 17 2020, by Patrick O'leary, Amy Young, Jennifer Boddy and Jianqiang Liang



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Today is a far cry from what we hoped for and expected from 2020.

After Australia's disastrous summer of bushfires, the unprecedented upheaval of the COVID-19 pandemic has seen serious social and economic effects for us individually and collectively.

Many of us have felt [grief](#). And with grief can emerge feelings of [hopelessness and resignation](#).

We tend to lose hope when [we can't see a pathway](#) to our goals.

At a time like this, it's important we rethink our goals to create and maintain hope.

Why is hope important?

Hope provides a [positive vision](#) for the future about what's possible, motivating us to look forward. While it's an optimistic state of mind, hope can emerge from distressing and even tragic situations.

Research shows both [mental](#) and [physical](#) health deteriorate quickly when we don't have hope.

[Suicide](#) is closely correlated with [feelings of hopelessness](#).

Conversely, people with high levels of hope have [better physical and mental health](#).

A lot of us are probably feeling a lack of hope right now

To have hope, it's vital we feel a sense of [meaning](#) in our lives. Particularly during a crisis, having meaning or purpose can protect our [mental health](#).

In recent months, two things that give our life meaning—work and connections with friends and family—might have been disrupted.

And while necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19, [social distancing measures](#) have meant many of the things we looked forward to—from holidays to going to the theater to simply having dinner at a restaurant—were off, in favor of staying at home.

Coronavirus restrictions have had more serious consequences for vulnerable groups. For example, some victims of domestic violence lost the safe refuge normally found in [school](#) or [the workplace](#).

Meanwhile, we're now in a [recession](#). Many people have lost their [jobs and businesses](#), and [almost 1.5 million Australians](#) are experiencing mortgage stress.

All of this brings uncertainty and throws our plans into jeopardy.

Adjusting our goals

To work through grief and hopelessness, we need to modify our goals to ensure they're realistic within the "new normal," and we have a clear pathway to achieving them.

For example, you might have been saving for a big family trip. But now—due to financial challenges, or travel restrictions, or both—it will be more realistic to plan a holiday in a nearby caravan park.

It's important to focus not only on long-term hopes, but on the short term too. If we focus too much on the future, we can lose sight of what's achievable and important to us now.

We should ask ourselves, what can we reasonably do this week or next

month within current restrictions?

Things that are important to us—such as family, friends and career—are unlikely to change, but we may need to find new ways to connect with loved ones or feel accomplished in our jobs. For example, we might spend more time socializing using digital technologies rather than face-to-face.

We can even think about setting goals daily. How can we do something to enact our values each day? This could be as simple as a kind gesture towards a loved one or work colleague.

Navigating uncertainty

Even as restrictions ease, we worry about the potential for [virus outbreaks](#).

Meanwhile, people in [financial trouble](#) won't simply recover overnight, and may face added stress at the prospect of the government ending its [support programs](#).

And people who have experienced mental health problems during the pandemic will need ongoing support.

Fear [can get in the way](#) of identifying pathways to achieving our hopes. So to nurture hope we must recognize, acknowledge and address our fears.

If this all feels like a lot, setting a goal such as going for walk during the day can give us space to reflect.

Further, research shows engaging in [mindfulness meditation](#) and focusing on the present can reduce our stress and increase our sense of

hope.

Sharing hope

Sharing your hopes [with trusted others](#) means you're supported not only to dream of exciting things, but also to make these things happen.

We're actually programmed to share in each others' hopes and dreams. [Vicarious hope](#) is the desire for something positive to happen to someone else. It switches our attention to how our actions might contribute to other people's hopes as well as our own.

"[Hope interventions](#)", whereby community and social services offer programs with the aim of improving people's hope, can enhance [well-being and reduce depression](#).

Despite the uncertainty associated with COVID-19, over recent months we've seen communities around the world generating hope.

In Europe, people played music [on their balconies](#) and [collectively applauded](#) health-care workers.

Here in Australia, volunteers established [kindness armies](#) to [support vulnerable](#) members of the community.

This speaks to a social world which feels an ongoing responsibility [to focus on hope](#).

Throughout [history](#), hope has risen [from ruins](#). Out of this pandemic, too, we can be hopeful and [even dream of a better world](#).

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