

Time to Think

Open University Journeys in British and Irish prisons during the years of conflict, 1972-2000

**Important**

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This audio appears in the OpenLearn course, *Coping with isolation: Time to Think*: <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/health-sports-psychology/coping-isolation-time-think/content-section-overview>

INTERVIEWER: *Can you describe some of the adjustments you had to make in those first few days of confinement, and any parallels you see with today? Michael, do you want to start?*

MICHAEL:

I've been talking on the phone to friends, relatives. Been shouting up the street to some neighbours. Talking to different people. It's quite amazing the breadth of community acceptance, or non-acceptance of where we're at. People sort of know they have to accept it, but there are varying degrees of not wanting to accept it. So, I can see, to a degree, similarities to the situation.

DAVID:

I think one of the big factors that affects us all at the minute is about this change of routine. Going to prison is quite an abrupt and massive change to routine. So, I left-- and one of the big ones faces so many of us is work. So, when I was arrested, I was working, I was living at home with my parents. I would be seeing my fiancé, going out to play football. That's-- that all went. And at this time, a lot of people's routines have went, especially around work - that people get up and go to their job at 9 o'clock, or shift work or whatever. And that is just gone. And it is taking a lot of people some degree of adjustment to get used to this and to accept this as a new reality.

MICHAEL:

Well, a couple of other things—there’s that aspect of it, that’s the very, in there, human aspect of it. Having to get used very quickly to new routines, new social interactions, interactions with even new smells, new noises, new voices, new ways of doing things. I think, to a degree, I did get a bit of support at the personal, very, very personal level as well as at the broader support level of being with people who were in a similar situation to me. That gave me a fair bit of comfort and that a wee, well, a bit of strength too. I suppose also that there were people there who were there well before me and were able to give me good advice on how to cope with the new unknown. It took away a lot of the unknown for me. And yourself?

DAVID:

Again, quite similar on the Loyalist side, that obviously there was different groupings and you would identify with your own group that was in there. So there basically were two setups in the prison. There obviously was the prison regime, but within that, there was groupings, as you know, who had their own sort of structures, their own way of going about things, and their own ideology. So again, like yourself, there was ones who had been there quite some time. And they were able to basically show you the ropes. Looking back, I felt it was a shock. It was certainly traumatic for me. But one of the things that I held true to was, there was other guys, lots of other guys, hundreds of other fellas, going through exactly what I was going through. And if they could get through it, I’d get through it. Granted we couldn't look away to the future and you sort of had to deal with your day to day reality. And a new routine was kicking in, and you were just knuckling down to it. You were adjusting to it. And at times, it wasn't pleasant, but you knew, sooner or later, that initial shock was going to wear off and you'd get used to it and carry on. Human beings are very adaptable. What about you, Michael?

MICHAEL:

The key thing for me is that the parallel here is that accepting of the situation has to be the main starting point. You can't resist-- you can't control something which you literally aren't able to take control of. This is a virus. There are governmental instructions. The general terms, we all know they're for our own good. Therefore, you can't do anything about it. That is how it is. And to try and resist that there is absolutely futile. If you can't accept it, you're probably going to go stir crazy. And to the acceptance of the situation, the finding new ways of dealing with your new environment, the relating of yourself to others in a positive manner - they're all the things which were absolutely necessary for survival within prison. And I think they're not the only, they're some of the prerequisites for surviving this awful situation that we're in today, as in all our different communities.