

COVID-19: Guidance for Volunteers

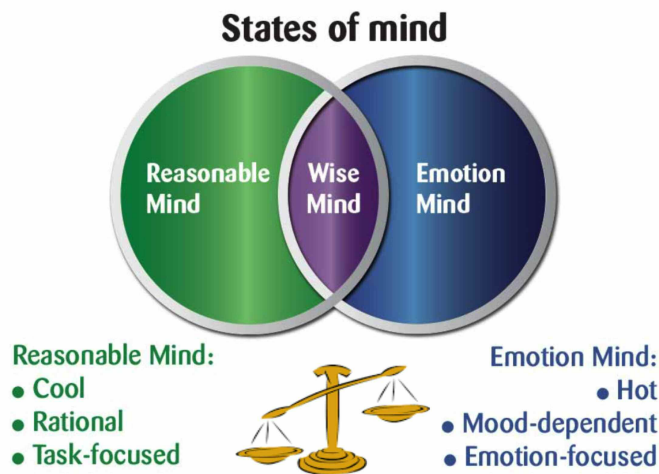
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Help and Support

Thank you for offering your support to both the HSE and your community. The following is a general guidance for volunteers. It is understandable that you and the people you maybe volunteering with may be experiencing heightened levels of worry in the context of current COVID-19 pandemic.

When people are fearful, they are more likely to spiral into an emotional mind state where their fight/flight response will be activated. When the volume goes up on our emotions we may become more reactive, more tense and quick to anger. We are all different and unique and will have ways that work best for us to regulate or turn down the volume our emotions and ultimately our anxiety and fear in the context of COVID-19. We call this our **Wise mind**, where our emotion is balanced by logic and reason.



As a volunteer you will need to be mindful of your own ability to manage your emotions, but you may also need to be mindful of the emotions of others you are meeting in the context of your work. It will be important to work in **Wise mind**.

The following might be useful guidance to manage yourself and your responses to others. The word **GIVES** reminds us the giving our time needs to be positive for us and for those we work working with.



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Gentle

Be gentle with the person. It can be difficult for people when there is uncertainty in their environment. Individuals may experience a range of emotions that will impact on their thoughts and behaviour. Some people might be keen to engage with you and vocalise their worries. Others may not wish to speak about this at all. We need match our response to the individual. Some people will want social contact and others will just want practical support with daily living tasks. Be open to all of these possibilities.

Remember to use a gentle tone, and be mindful of your volume and pace of speaking. Offer help and assistance where you can, but being mindful of keeping yourself and the other person safe and knowing our personal limits as a volunteer.

It is also important that we are gentle with ourselves. It will be easier for you to have a gentle manner and be calm and supportive of others if you are managing your own levels of stress and wellbeing. Look after yourself.

Check:

- ✓ Are you getting enough rest?
- ✓ Are you taking regular breaks?
- ✓ Are you getting fresh air?
- ✓ Are you taking some time in between tasks to process your own emotions?
- ✓ Who do you speak with if you have a difficult or upsetting interaction?
- ✓ What helps you to keep your emotions in check- how do you wind down?

Watch **Staying CALM**  YouTube

A video with practical tips to manage emotional response to unprecedented circumstances
youtube.com/watch?v=oLSbA-_ehnM

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Interested

Be interested in what the person has to say and how they are getting on. It may well be that you might be one of the few contacts that this person has with the outside world, particularly if engaging with an older person living alone who is self-isolating. Remember you can be interested and communicate with the persons without putting yourself or them at risk. Be mindful of guidelines on social distancing.

Validate

Validation is a powerful tool that can help people feel better even in very difficult situations. To validate is to communicate that you acknowledge and understand why they are thinking and feeling the way they do. It is important that we validate the person's thoughts and emotional responses. We are all experiencing uncertainty at present but we are all in this together.

Why is validation important?

- It's a core part of communication
- It helps soothes our emotions
- It builds trust and sense of being connected
- It helps us to be less emotional and more rational and ready to solve problems

How we validate?

- Actively listening, paying attention and being open to hearing others
- Acknowledging the other's point of view or experience or emotions
- Showing interest in how the person is
- Normalizing responses (emotion, desires, experiences) when they make sense

Key phases:

- I understand/I know..... this is hard, it's scary, was unexpected
- Of course.....you would think that, worry about that, feel this way given the circumstances
- That makes sense.....me too, I get where you are coming from

It is also important that you notice and validate your own thoughts and emotions. Things are uncertain, we can all be worried but we can also feel happy that we are able to help and make a difference. Being aware of our own reactions - no assumptions and be non-judgmental.

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Educate

It is important that you are well informed and follow official guidance from HSE websites regarding COVID-19. You need to be aware of guidance on hand hygiene, coughing and sneezing etiquette and guidelines on social distancing so that you minimise the spread of the virus. Make sure you wash or sanitize your hands multiple times a day in the context of your volunteering work. Also, be aware that you may encounter situations in the course of your work that impact on you emotionally. Make sure that you check for up to date information on: www2.hse.ie/coronavirus www.yourmentalhealth.ie

Seek support

Giving of your time will make a huge difference to someone else, but it is important that you look after yourself too. If you are concerned about your own wellbeing or of a person whom you have been in contact with during the course of volunteering please do reach out and ask for help. Your key contact is:

Name: _____ Tel: _____

They can help you with appropriate support for yourself or ensure that the person you are concerned about will get the required additional support or assistance. Your job is to make someone aware and not to take on responsibility for fixing everything yourself

Finally here are some key do's and don'ts when you are volunteering:

✓ DO'S	X DON'TS
Be clear you have time to do this	Commit if unsure
Be clear on the task/role	Commit if don't have time
Keep yourself and the other person safe	Commit if unwell (physically or emotionally)
Respect the persons privacy/maintain confidentiality	Work outside of the agreed role or your levels of competence
Report any concerns	Try to fix everything
Look for help and support if unsure	Ignore your gut if you feel something is not right
Have your own emotional support	Ignore or discount your feelings and emotions