

COVID-19: Psychological Wellbeing

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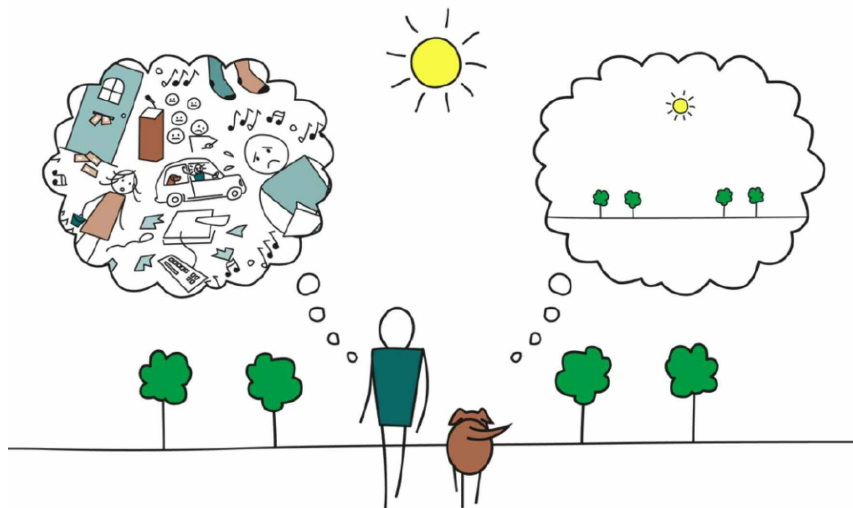


Help and Support

- COVID-19 is bringing unrivalled challenges for us as individuals, and as part of a wider Irish society. It is important that we all as individuals do what we can to look after ourselves and also each other as we try to effectively manage this evolving situation.
- If we want to check the facts then the best place to get information is from the HSE Website www2.hse.ie/coronavirus or www.HPSC.ie where there are regular updates relating to COVID-19 in Ireland.
- We are all facing practical and emotional challenges right now and in an effort to assist with grounding ourselves in responding as effectively as we can, we have put together a series of help sheets to provide information and steps that might be helpful.



Mindfulness



Mind Full, or Mindful?

With constant news updates and discussions about COVID-19 on multiple forms of media and social media, it is difficult to remain mindful and not become overwhelmed. Staying focused in the moment, and not thinking ahead and imagining 'worst case scenarios' is very difficult for the human mind at this time. It is a challenge for all of us. This guideline outlines three skills for what to do to stay Mindful and also three skills for how to do it.

COVID-19: Psychological Wellbeing

Mindfulness skills: What to do



Skill 1: Observe

Observe means just noticing. We observe the world through our five senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. We also observe the world inside ourselves through sensing our thoughts, emotions and internal bodily sensations.

The following are some ideas for practicing observing during this difficult time.

- **Notice your bodily sensations (sight, sound, touch, taste and smell).**
- **Pay attention** on purpose, to the present moment and refocus your attention when it drifts.
- **Practice wordless watching:** Watch thoughts come into your mind and let them slip right by like clouds in the sky or a leaf on a stream.
- **Have a 'Teflon mind' letting experiences come into your mind and slip right out (not pushing them away or holding on to them).**
- Practice observing as you undertake **everyday activities** e.g. observe the taste and texture of your food as you eat, we can also choose to mindfully observe the experience of handwashing. If our minds wander to worry thoughts, we can bring them back to the experience of handwashing.



Skill 2: Describe

This means putting words on what you notice or experience. This is generally fairly easy to do when all is well and we are comfortable and relaxed. However, it is particularly difficult to just describe our experiences during a crisis.

Here are some ideas for how to do this:

- **Put words on the experience.** When a feeling or thought arises, or you do something, acknowledge it. For example, say in your mind, "I feel sad", or "I feel my heart racing" or "A thought 'I can't do this' has come into my mind."
- **Label what you observe.** Put a name on your feelings. Label a thought as just a thought, a feeling just a feeling, an action just an action.
- **Unglue your interpretations and opinions** from the facts. Describe the "who, what, when, and where" that you observe. Just the facts.



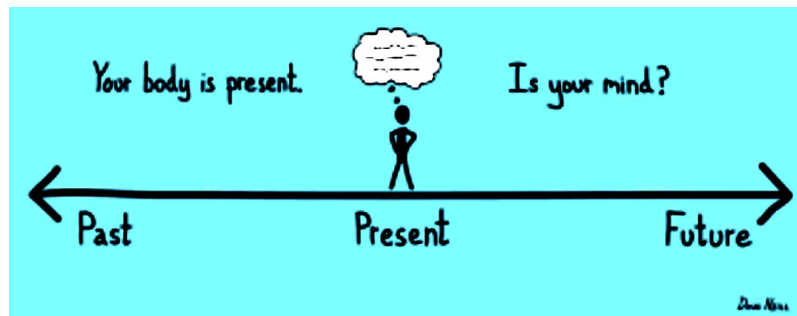
COVID-19: Psychological Wellbeing

Skill 3: Participate

Participate means throwing yourself completely into an experience. It is difficult to participate in activities when we are experiencing lots of worry thoughts and painful emotions. While it is important that we attend to our emotions and thoughts, it is also crucial that we do not stop participating in everyday life (albeit in a different form).

Here are some ideas for how to do this:

- Throw yourself completely into activities of the current moment, not separating yourself from what is going on in the moment (e.g. dancing, cleaning, playing games, gardening).
- Become one with whatever you are doing, completely forgetting yourself.



Mindfulness skills: How to do it

Option -> Non judgmentally

When we are faced with difficult situations, it is difficult not to be judgmental towards ourselves or others. It is the nature of the mind to try to categorize things as good or bad, right or wrong. Our minds can throw up critical and judgemental thoughts almost automatically. During a pandemic, being judgemental is understandable e.g thoughts like "this shouldn't happen". In the very short term, we may feel a catharsis or release. Judgements also turn up the volume on our emotions and impact on our ability to think clearly.

Here are some ideas to support you in being non judgmental:

- When you have a judgement, notice it, observe how it feels in your body, **don't evaluate** as good or bad. Just observe the facts.
- **Acknowledge** the difference between the helpful and the harmful, the safe and the dangerous, but don't judge them.

COVID-19: Psychological Wellbeing

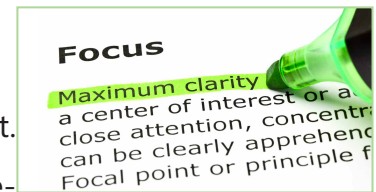
- **Acknowledge** your values, your wishes, your emotional reactions, but don't judge them.
- When you find yourself judging, **recognise it, notice it and stay present to the current experience. Don't judge your judging.**

Option -> One Mindfully

This means doing one thing in the moment. In a stressful and overwhelming environment, this is difficult to do.

Here are some ideas for practising one mindfully:

- **Stay Focused:** Be completely present to this one moment.
- **Do one thing at a time.** Notice the desire to be half-present, to be somewhere else, to go somewhere else in your mind, and come back to one thing at a time. When you are washing your hands, wash your hands. When you are eating, eat. When you are walking, walk.
- **Let go of distractions.** If other actions, or other thoughts, or strong feelings distract you, go back to what you are doing—again, and again, and again.
- **Concentrate your mind.** If you find you are doing two things at once, stop- go back to one thing at a time (the opposite of multi-tasking!)



Option -> Effectively

This means doing what works and not making the situation worse.

Here are some tips for how to stay effective during this difficult time:

- Be mindful of **your goals** in the situation and do what is necessary to achieve them.
- **Focus on what works.** Don't let strong emotions get in the way of being effective.
- **Play by the rules.** Work hard to implement guidelines for safety at this time.
- Act as **skillfully** as you can. Do what is needed for the situation you are in. Not the situation you wish you were in and not the one that is fair. At a difficult time like this, it's normal to have thoughts about wishing that you were not in this situation.



Adapted from DBT (Linehan, 2015)

For some guided daily mindfulness videos and other short talks that you might find helpful, please search for/ click: [Cork Kerry Community Health Care YouTube Channel](#)