

COVID-19: Psychological Wellbeing for HSE Staff

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COVID-19 is bringing unrivalled challenges for us as individuals, as HSE employees 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.

The following tips might be helpful to provide you and your colleagues with steps that might assist with grounding you in responding as effectively as you can with some of the practical and emotional challenges we are now facing.

A useful way to remember these steps is to use the acronym **CALM**, with each letter of the word prompting us on what we can do to manage our responses.



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Check the facts

- It is really easy in a modern world of technology consume information from multiple social media. Checking our phones and social media frequently increases our threat response and anxiety. It is important to try to limit activities that increase our stress levels. Be mindful of the impact of social media on yours and others mental health.
- If we want to check the facts get information from HSE Website for information <https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/news/coronavirus-news/> or www.HPSC.ie where there are regular updates relating to COVID-19 in Ireland.
- Guidance on how we operate our services and any changes to work practices will be communicated via HSE line management structures.



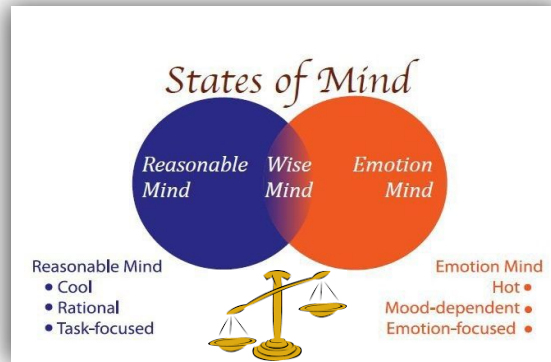
Accept and acknowledge our current emotions

- It is understandable that when dealing with something novel and unprecedented that this will increase our levels of stress.
- It is really important that we notice our emotions and that we validate or accept them when they make sense in a given situation.
- Our primary emotions (joy, fear, disgust, sadness and anger) have a function; they communicate to us, they communicate to others and they urge us to take action.
- Our emotions have done their job when we listen to them, we check the facts and our level of emotion goes down.
- It makes perfect sense that we would feel some degree of fear or anxiety when we perceive threat or danger. We can notice and normalise this response, if there is an imminent threat to our wellbeing. However, following guidelines (hand hygiene, coughing and sneezing etiquette, social distancing etc) on keeping ourselves and others safe helps minimise risk.
- If we minimise risk, high levels of fear might not be justified- we need to turn down the volume on our *Emotional Mind*, and turn up the volume on our



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Reasonable Mind and find a *Wise Mind* or balanced emotional response to the situation.



Ask yourself:

- What mind state am I operating from in this moment?
- Is the emotional intensity justified -check the facts?
- Am I balancing emotion with logic and finding a balanced Wise Mind

Let go of our judgments

- It is really easy when our emotional volume is turned up to get pulled into judgemental thoughts about what others should or should not be doing. This can be at a local level with family or colleagues or at higher levels with management or national government.
- Judgements are concepts, our beliefs about how things **should be**. When we are judgemental, it can turn fear into more intense anger expression (being irritable, snappy and more aggressive in our communication), which is often not helpful for us or others in managing the situation. We call these secondary emotions, or emotions triggered by our primary emotions fuelled by judgements.
- It is really important to remember that we are all doing the best we can in a difficult situation, and choosing to think in this more benign way helps turn down the volume on our secondary emotions.

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Mindfully manage our response to the current situation

- We need to be mindful of our emotions, thoughts and behaviours as we work together to manage our responses to the impact of COVID-19 on both our work and daily lives.
- When we are mindful of ourselves we observe what is going on, acknowledge that this is difficult and we accept we are being as effective as we can be.
- When we are mindful of others, we recognise that they will also have emotional responses to the emerging situation as described above.
- We need to acknowledge how difficult this is for us and for others and make a choice to work as effectively as we can in managing our own emotions and be understanding of others.

Our goal is:

Mindfully **RESPONDING** rather than **REACTING**

Here are some tips to increase our sense of personal control:

- We can use another acronym to help us mindfully reduce our emotional vulnerabilities. We can use **ABC PLEASE** to remind us of the importance of self-care and mindfully managing our emotions and capacity to respond effectively.



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ABC

A ACCUMULATE POSITIVE EMOTIONS
Short Term: Do pleasant things that are possible now.
Long Term: Make changes in your life so that positive events will happen more often in the future.

B Build Mastery
Do things that make you feel competent and effective to combat helplessness and hopelessness.

C COPE AHEAD OF TIME WITH EMOTIONAL SITUATIONS
Rehearse a plan ahead of time so that you are prepared to cope skillfully with emotional situations.

PLEASE

TAKE CARE OF YOUR MIND BY TAKING CARE OF YOUR BODY

treat **P**hysical
Illness
Eat balanced meals
Avoid drug misuse
balance **S**leep
get **E**xercise

