An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

wellbeing in education

Managing your thoughts and feelings

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought with it uncertainty around the Leaving Certificate examination this year. Everyone is working hard in the background to make sure that what is decided takes on board what we learned from last year and is fair to everyone. Getting the right solution will take a bit more time and this waiting time may naturally be difficult and challenging for you. At the moment some things are out of your control and you may be finding this waiting time difficult and challenging. It is normal to feel a range of emotions. We all respond to uncertainty and stress in different ways, and we all use different coping strategies

During this time it is especially important that you pay attention to and take proactive steps to promote your own wellbeing.

You may be feeling some of the following emotions or feelings…

Frustrated	Discouraged	Angry	Nervous	Stressed
Worried	Excited	Nothing	Relieved	

You may be experiencing some of the following sensations in your body …

- Tension
- Butterflies in your tummy
- Tiredness
- Headaches
- Change in appetite
- Tearful
- Poor sleep
- Agitation

It is natural to have a range of feelings and physical reactions like those outlined above. Or you may not be experiencing any of these and that's ok, too. We all have our own way of reacting to situations like this.

So what can you do if this is distressing for you?

- Talk to family and friends.
- Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings. Don't try to push them away.

Your reactions are normal reactions to the current situation. You will not always feel this way.

- Decide which is most distressing for you. Is it the unhelpful thoughts, distressing feelings or emotions, or the unwelcome sensations in your body? Just pick the one that bothers you the most and work on that first, using the strategies listed below.

Unhelpful Thoughts
Unhelpful thoughts are one-sided, negative thoughts, which can dominate our thinking and lead us to feel bad. By learning to manage these unhelpful thoughts, we can enhance our wellbeing. Some examples of unhelpful thoughts are: • I can't cope with this • There seems to be no end to Covid-19 in sight • This is so unfair!
What To Do
• Acknowledge your thoughts • Talk to an adult or friend • Remember that your thoughts are normal • Remind yourself that thoughts are only thoughts, they are not facts • Try to challenge unhelpful thoughts. You can do this by asking: ➢ 'Is that really true?' ➢ 'What evidence do I have for thinking that?' ➢ 'How else could I look at this?' ➢ 'What would I tell my best friend if they thought this?' • Try to replace unhelpful thoughts with realistic positive self-talk such as: ➢ 'I can do this' ➢ 'I can ask for help' ➢ 'I have people who can support me' ➢ 'I know this is a difficult time but I am doing my best to cope' ➢ 'I know I would like things to be different, but things will work out' ➢ 'If I am unsure of anything, I will ask someone for help.' **Tip: Positive self-talk statements work even if you don't believe them at the time. Fake it to make it!**

An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

wellbeing in education

Unpleasant Feelings or Emotions

Unpleasant feelings or emotions can follow on from unhelpful thoughts. It is normal to feel these in challenging times These might include:

- Anger
- Frustration
- Disappointment
- Feeling fed up

What To Do

- Acknowledge your feelings and remind yourself that your feelings are normal given the circumstances.
- Talk to an adult or friend.
- Name the feeling and find where it is in the body. Breathe into that area and imagine the area softening.
- What thought goes with the feeling? Challenge the thought. Ask, is this really true? Or use a positive self-talk statement (see above).
- Pick a dedicated time to explore, discuss or think about this feeling. For example, 'I will worry about this at 5pm.' Tell the feeling if it returns that you will pay attention to it at the dedicated time.
- Develop a coping strategy such as
  - Thinking of and doing something that makes you feel better
  - Challenging the thought
  - Using a positive self-statement
  - Asking for help
  - Talking to family or friends

Unpleasant Body Sensations

These may happen because you are experiencing unhelpful thoughts and unpleasant emotions or feelings. They might include:

- Tense neck and shoulders
- Tiredness
- Change in appetite
- Difficulty settling
- Headaches
- Tummy ache
- Butterflies in tummy

What To Do

- Acknowledge the sensations and remember it is normal to have these at times of stress
- Talk to an adult or friend about this
- If you or your parents are concerned, consult your G.P.
- Name the body sensation and find where it is in your body. Breathe into the area and imagine the area softening
- Practice calming strategies regularly such as breathing, visualisations, and mindfulness. See NEPS Relaxation documents and Podcast

- Include exercise in your daily routine.
- Have a bath or shower, these can calm the body and help you relax
- Have a massage (sibling, parent can give a neck rub) or use a gym ball or roller to massage tense parts of your body
- Practice positive self-talk statements
- Keep in touch with your friends.
- Sleep is really important so have a good bedtime routine. See useful links on sleep here
- Avoiding technology for an hour before bedtime. See here for more information
- Have a healthy diet. See here for useful information.