



ISSU
IRISH SECOND-LEVEL
STUDENTS' UNION

HOW'S YOUR HEAD?

**A GUIDE TO STAYING
AFLOAT POST-COVID-19**



ombudsman
do leanaí
for children



Education & Training Board Schools
National Parents' Association

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INTRODUCTION

On March 13th 2020, every school in Ireland closed their doors in order to stop the spread of Covid-19. This and the pandemic in general have had a profound effect on students, both physically and mentally.

Finally, we have returned back to school and are coming to terms with a new 'normal'. For some, this has been simple but for others, this transition has been extremely challenging. To provide information and support for those that are struggling, a Mental Health Manual has been put together.

The book is aimed at second-level students and gives information on depression, bereavement and many other issues that the students of today are faced with. We hope that this manual provides you with the information and support you need and helps you in your transition to a new normal.



**THERE IS NO HEALTH
WITHOUT MENTAL HEALTH.**

**MOST PEOPLE WILL NOT BE
SAD ALL THE TIME, BUT
MAY STRUGGLE WHEN
HARD TIMES COME.**

**NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE,
YOU WILL HAVE A POOR
MENTAL HEALTH
EXPERIENCE IN YOUR
LIFETIME, BUT IT IS THE
SKILLS YOU LEARN THAT
WILL HELP YOU TO COPE
WITH IT.**

STRESS AND ANXIETY FOR STUDENTS

In school we are often told that the stress we are feeling is normal and will positively affect our work; however this is not always the case. If your stress becomes too much to handle, you will burn out and this will be detrimental to your mental health.

Everyone experiences stress and anxiety differently and for different reasons, but the most important thing is that you reach out for help. COVID-19 has been a very challenging time for everyone, affecting some more than others in a variety of ways.

Throughout this pandemic there has been an increase in anxiety amongst young people and for many this will continue as you return back to school. The thought of such uncertainty and lack of clarity can be scary, you must be supportive to those around you even if you are not feeling the same way.

STRESS AND ANXIETY FOR EXAM STUDENTS

Stress and anxiety amongst students in exam years is extremely common every year, but even more so this year when Covid-19 has placed uncertainty around the sitting of exams. Missed time in school has also affected student's ability to finish their course, adding pressure to these year groups.

Stress due to exams is at its highest in 3rd, 5th and 6th year, with 78%-81% reporting that exams make them quite or very stressed. 84% admitted that exams contribute to feelings of stress in school.

It is normal to experience these feelings, which may be heightened during these uncertain times. Just remember that you are not alone!

REDUCING YOUR ANXIETY SURROUNDING COVID-19

Treat this like any other time you have anxiety, and follow some of these guidelines;

Understand what guidelines your school has put in place:

Ensure you know all the guidelines your school has set out. Knowing and following these will help you feel more control of the situation. If you don't feel safe, say it to a teacher, management or trusted adult to sort out, in the meantime do what you can to make yourself feel comfortable.

Reduce your news intake:

While it is extremely important to keep up to date with the news and guidelines coming from the HSE and the Government, obsessing over and constantly checking it is not healthy for you.

RELIEVING ANXIETY AND STRESS

There are many things that you can do to help relieve the stress and anxiety you are feeling. For example;

Make sure you are taking sufficient time for breaks.

Talking to someone who you trust is always a good place to start.

Make sure you are resting properly, exercising and following a diet that is right for you.

Speak to your doctor about treatments and medication that can help

Surround yourself with people who help calm your stress and anxiety rather than contribute to it.

Smoking and alcohol have serious health implications and can increase anxiety. These should be avoided

BEREAVEMENT

When a loved one or someone close to you dies, it can be a very difficult time. There is no right or wrong way to grieve and everyone goes through it differently. You can experience a wide range of feelings and emotions; this is completely normal. With time and support, you will start to be able to navigate your own grief.

We all experience bereavement in some way or another, it has especially hit everyone hard during the pandemic. It is important to remember that you are not alone. We may never truly get over the death of a loved one, but time and space to grieve can ease the pain.

Losing a friend can be an extremely hard loss to cope with and it can have a big impact on your school day. It is so important to speak out about how you are feeling and if you feel like you need time out of class that is completely understandable.

DEALING WITH YOUR GRIEF

Everyone copes with their grief in different ways; it is about finding what helps you the most. Here are a few things that are so important to remember

Don't bottle up how you are feeling.

It is good to let your feelings out and it is nothing to be embarrassed or afraid of. It's okay to cry, to be upset, to feel angry, or to feel guilt. Never be afraid to tell someone how you are feeling in fear of upsetting them, grieving does not have to happen alone. Chat to your friends, family and support services, whoever you feel most comfortable speaking to.

Surround yourself with positive people.

Spend time with those who love and care about you, they are here to support you through tricky times. There is always someone around to help you and listen to you as long as you let them in on how you're feeling.

Never feel guilty for getting on with your life.

It is completely understandable to feel guilty for trying to go back to some sense of what life was like before. It is okay to have fun, laugh, go to school or attend your hobbies. Take each day as it comes and allow yourself time to heal.

Spend time doing things you like.

Some people enjoy writing how they feel in a journal or a letter, others like to curl up and watch Netflix eating their favourite food, while others like to escape in a book or spent some time drawing. Do what brings you happiness and comfort during this tricky time.

Grief has no time scale.

Everyone mourns for a loved one differently, some like to get back to routine quickly while others need time to reflect. Don't feel any pressure to grieve in a certain way, do what is best for you. In the future you may get hit by a wave of emotion by a trigger and feel upset, this is a completely natural reaction and shows the value this person had in your life.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP A FRIEND WHO IS GRIEVING?

If a friend of yours is grieving, respect how they are feeling and give them your support. Just letting them know you are there for them does the world of good.

You may feel as though you are intruding or that you will make your friend feel worse than they already are, but don't let your feelings stop you reaching out and helping another.

While many of us worry about what to say or do, the best thing we can do is just listen. Someone grieving needs to feel as though their loss is being acknowledged, that it's okay to talk about how they feel and that their loved one will not be forgotten.

DEPRESSION

Depression is a mental health condition which can affect your thinking, energy, emotions and behavior. It can vary from mild to severe; it all depends on the individual person. If someone is depressed it can impact every aspect of their lives, from their relationships to their family and school life. Everyone occasionally feels down but the difference with depression is that it lasts a much longer period of time.

Depression is a very common condition, you more than likely know someone who is suffering from it. 1 in 10 people experience depression at any one time meaning 450,000 people in Ireland alone (Aware Ireland). Any one, regardless of age, gender, belief or background can be affected by it. Recovery will happen but early recognition, self-care and ongoing support are vital in achieving this.

As a result of the pandemic, many young people experienced their depression worsening or they relapsed. With many resources and support services closed, support could not be easily accessed and the depression might not have been identified. Going back to school will be a challenging time for all students, especially those experiencing depression. Look out for those around you, give them the support and love they may need and most importantly, check in on each other.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I AM DEPRESSED?

If you are feeling in any way different to normal, reach out to someone you trust, it could be a close friend, a family member, a teacher, a trusted adult or one of the many support services. If the feeling continues, speak to your doctor or a mental health expert. Many professionals split depression into 8 main symptoms:

Energy

You may have low energy, lack of motivation, fatigue and tiredness

Sleep

There is a change to your sleep pattern as you may sleep much more or less than normal.

Aches

You may feel physical aches and pains with no reason to.

Feeling

You may feel sad, anxious, upset, and guilty for no particular reason.

Value

You may have low self-esteem and feel very little self-worth.

Life

You may begin thinking about death and have suicidal thoughts

Thinking

You may experience poor concentration, it is hard to remember things or it feels like your thoughts are moving in slow motion.

Interests

You might stop doing your hobbies and not want to see your family or spend time with your friends.

Once identified, there are many different treatment plans for depression but the most important thing is to talk to someone about how you are feeling. Nothing is ever too big or too small.

Treatments include:



Counselling

Where you speak to a trained professional on how to help what you are feeling.

Support Groups

Where you meet other people experiencing similar things to you.



Medical Advice

Doctors may prescribe antidepressant medicine.

Self-care

A key part to recovery and maintaining a positive mental state.



POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Positive mental health is commonly seen as the lack of any negative mental health issues; however this is not the case.

Positive mental health is about living our lives to the full. It is about enjoying each day, reaching our best potential, and feeling like we have the ability to give everything our best. Everyone deserves to have positive mental health.

Self-care is looking after yourself and is a necessity for everyone. As long as we care for ourselves, we can have positive mental health. This is especially important when returning to school after the virus. Our whole world has been turned upside down and going back will be challenging for some. Remember - it is okay to find the transition difficult, we need to look after one another but looking after yourself comes first.

HOW TO MAINTAIN YOUR POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

Put Yourself First

Give yourself the same care and attention you would give to others. It may feel as though you are being selfish putting your needs above others, but you cannot be there for those who you love and care for if you are emotionally drained and your mental health is suffering.

Talk about how you are feeling

Sharing how you are feeling with others, is the most important thing you can do. It lifts the weight of what you are carrying and helps to make your problem feel smaller. Reach out to a family member, a good friend, someone you trust, or one of the many incredible supports out there (we have these listed throughout the manual).

Keep in touch with friends and loved ones

When your mental health begins to suffer, one of the most common things someone does is isolate themselves from those around them. You may feel that you could be a burden on them or that your issue is not important enough, I promise you this is not the case. If you feel like you need some personal time, that is completely understandable but remember keeping in contact is vital.

Do what you love

Make sure to leave time aside for activities you love. It can be anything as long as you enjoy it and it makes you happy.

Accept that you are you

Every single one of us is different and unique in our own way and we all have different talents and skills that are so valuable. You may feel pressure to be like those around you, but your individuality is what makes the world a much more interesting place. Embracing who you are and acknowledging what you bring, will improve your daily life immensely.

Food, alcohol and drug intake

Time and time again research shows that having a balanced diet and eating regularly has a positive impact on both our mental and physical health. As a depressant, drinking alcohol often or excessively affects your mood and daily life. Alcohol should not be consumed, and stopping consumption of alcohol will have endless positives for your mental health. Drug usage also has a negative impact on your mental health, they impact the chemicals in your brain increasing the risk of heightened mental health issues and drug induced mood disorder and psychotic episodes.

Get a good nights sleep

We always hear of how important a good night of sleep is but we don't actually realise how much it affects our mental health. Without sleep, it affects our whole day; we are not able to function properly or efficiently. Lack of sleep causes fatigue, trouble concentrating, grumpiness and irritability, which are all troubling if you are trying to maintain positive mental health. Try to keep a regular sleep pattern where you get as many hours as you feel you need.

Take a well-deserved break

GET TALKING

The hardest step is the first step - telling someone you're not feeling okay, but once it's out in the open, the rest will follow. Breaking the stigma around mental health issues is a continuous fight, but showing vulnerability and a willingness to speak about personal issues and seeking help is also making a difference in wider society.

Ireland has one of the highest mental illness rates in Europe, with 18.5% of the population recorded as having a mental illness in 2016. This is why it is so important to create a culture open to discussing mental health issues.

Thankfully, because of an ongoing change in public attitudes, higher positive mental health rates are more widely reported among 15-24 year olds than those in their 30s. By speaking out and spreading the message that it's okay not to feel okay, we are breaking the stigma in Ireland, one conversation at a time.

WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY SITUATION AND WHO TO GO TO

Do you think your friend or a close relative might be at risk to suicide or self harm? Remember **TASC**

Tune in- listen to what they're saying. Do they seem defeated or disconnected?

Ask- Clearly and calmly ask if they're thinking about suicide or self-harm. Be direct but be sincere.

State- State how serious suicide is and that's it's not the answer.

Connect- connect with them with the correct helplines to get them the support they need.

TASC is taken from the HSE's LivingWorks Start training program.

WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY SITUATION AND WHO TO GO TO

If someone tells you or if you suspect that they are feeling suicidal or at immediate risk of harm, you should contact the emergency services on [999](#) or [112](#)

One of the most important things you can do is ask a person how they are and really listen to what they say.

It is important that you do not advise your friends on what to do.

The best course of action is to listen and then recommend they reach out for professional help.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES



This service provides confidential non-judgmental support, 24 hours a day for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which could lead to suicide.

Website: www.samaritans.org

Emergency Hotline: 116 123

E-mail: jo@samaritans.ie



The service is confidential, non-judgmental and free to contact from anywhere in Ireland. Children and young people up to the age of 18 can contact Childline at any time, about any issue which may be on their mind. Childline's online, phone and text services are all accessible to children and young people 24 hours a day, every day.

Chat online: Childline.ie

Call: 1800 66 66 66

Text: 50101

JIGSAW

Young people's
health in mind

The Jigsaw Support Line provides mental health support and advice to young people aged 12 to 25 years old, and parents or concerned adults who live in the Republic of Ireland. To get in touch:

Freephone: 1800 544729

Text: 086 180 3880

Email: help@jigsaw.ie

Jigsaw Online is an online service offering group chats, articles and AskJigsaw.

text about it

50808

A free 24/7 text service, providing everything from a calming chat to immediate support for people going through a mental health or emotional crisis - big or small.



Pieta provides free therapy to those engaging in self-harm, with suicidal ideation, or bereaved by suicide.

Call: 1800 247 247

Text: Help to 51444



SpunOut.ie is Ireland's youth information website created by young people, for young people.

**Text: SpunOut to
0861800280**



Supporting LGBTI+
Young People To Stay
Alive & Thrive

Call: 016706223

CLOSING

We hope that the transition back to school isn't too difficult for you, but also that this manual has provided you with some form of relief or support.

Best of luck with the year ahead!

An initiative by India Kennedy with support from:

- The ISSU - In particular: Alicia O'Sullivan, Molly Gordon Boles, Rob O'Donnell, Reuban Murray, Emer Neville, Matthew Ryan and Katie Halpin-Hill.
- The Ombudsman for Children
- Geoffrey Browne and The ETBs National Parents Association
- SpunOut
- The Clinical Nurse Specialist Team at West Cork Mental Health Services.



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