

De La Salle College, Waterford



Advice for parents for the coming weeks...

by Beatrice Dooley, President of [the Institute of Guidance Counsellors \(IGC\)](#)

How are young people coping this week?

Very well, most students are coping very well and have managed to access the online school work. Teachers are uploading work, presentations, videos, schools have set up online platforms like: Google class room, Microsoft Office 365, Microsoft teams and Edmodo and other platforms to Skype/ video classes. Students have been issued with their individual school email address, this means that teachers can send students work by email, work that they can complete and return to their teacher for correction. Both teachers and guidance counsellors can now communicate with students directly online. School staff are reassuring their students that they are all in the same boat. Some students are disappointed because shows, concerts, matches, school trips that they were looking forward to are now postponed. Others are delighted that the orals have been cancelled. All are adjusting to a new norm and will continue to do so until 29th March when the situation will be reviewed.

Young people with their families are making plans, some will have a lot of time on their hands, others will be making a huge contribution to childminding and keeping the household ticking over as crèches and schools are closed but parents continue to work. Young people may worry if their family's income is threatened by the virus.

Advice for parents at home with exam students?

Parents can access the online work in a *guardian capacity*, to learn how this works consult with your school website for instructions or reach out to other parents. Students who struggle with spellings or special needs will need extra support to connect with online work.

It is essential to establish a new routine – encourage your children to get up and go to bed at regular hours, this is not a holiday. They need to build on the routine they already have, their class timetable. By sticking with that they will keep up school work. This is the time of year when most students, post mocks, start making out a revision programme. Check also with teachers who will do a skeleton one for their students and your offspring can tailor it to their individual needs. All students need to exercise personal responsibility and keep up with their school and homework during this time. Students should reach out to their friends and classmates if they are struggling with school work, there is lots of research to show they learn better from their peers. Some students can form study groups with a small group of like-minded

students on line. However, it is important that parents should keep an eye that they don't become chat groups.

Parents have a pivotal role to play to stem the spread of Coronavirus/Covid 19

It is important that parents ensure young people are not meeting in groups, going to the cinema, hanging around shopping centres etc. This will defeat the purpose of school closures. Students meeting up with friends need to practice social distance and wash their hands regularly especially when they return home to protect their family members. It is also important to keep mobile phones/keyboards clean and not to pass them around to their friends. Parents will have a tough job monitoring social distancing for their kids. We are all getting a huge lesson in resilience building, dealing with a crisis not of our making but which we must learn to cope with.

[The Department of Education and Skills](#) has resources on its website too. If accessing sufficient hardware for all of your children is a problem, then contact the school to see if a tablet or chrome book etc is available for you to borrow, don't be afraid to ask for help.

Students also need regular breaks, as they are largely confined to their houses and their regular group activities cancelled. A break can simply be cooking the evening meal together.

All the usual advice still applies, listen to their worries, talk to them, give them bucket loads of encouragement, catch them doing something right ever now and then! Plan healthy regular meals, a good night's sleep, daily exercise and keep the communication lines open.

How about helping young people manage stress, how can parents help with that?

Stay calm, face the new challenges as they present. Maintain a sense of routine: shower, dress, create a separate work/study space, take regular breaks, talk to others use social media to stay connected with peer group. Important that students do not wind each other up on social media, everything in moderation.

Have a Plan

Students should have a study plan and share it with their parents. Having a plan helps reduce anxiety for both the student and their parents. So, communication of that plan is key. By sharing what the plan is, and letting parents know if it goes pear-shaped, everyone can think about it, make a better plan and address the challenge together.

Self-discipline is the key!

Students should follow whatever advice and instructions they have been given by their school, teachers and guidance counsellors. As students will be using their phones and electronic devices more, families need to decide when downtime will be.

This is a critical agreement, no electronics after an agreed time at night. Strict rules re devices are more important than ever now. Students should reduce their social media use to a specific time in the day and then use that time to touch in with their friends and catch up. They should not be on live face social contact all day with one eye on social media and one eye on their school work.

I would urge students to practice social distancing and reduce their physical contact with each other to help avoid the spread of Coronavirus/Covid-19 That is the whole purpose of the schools being closed.

- minimise social contact,
- avoid meeting up in large groups
- observe the government's advice on social distancing

Students who have evening/weekend jobs should discuss this with their parents, with a view to giving them up until such time as it is safe to continue. However, for their own mental health, students must get out of the house on a daily basis and go for a walk/run/cycle on their own, with one or two friends, or as a small family group, while again maintaining social distancing.

Anxiety

School guidance counsellors are available to give support for stress management, anxiety, how to prepare for exams, how to normalise this new reality, have a timetable, be disciplined etc. We will refer more serious issues to the appropriate referral agencies. Students can contact us by email during normal school hours, we will not be available 24/7.

Reduce anxiety by reducing your risk

I would say to students, don't feel silly or embarrassed about taking reasonable precautions, such as frequent hand-washing; stay home and following your school routine; your self-discipline with social media; getting enough fresh air and sleep and taking good care of your immune system. Preparing a daily plan for managing your studies and mental health makes absolute sense and can help keep your anxiety at a normal levels.

What about exams themselves, orals have been cancelled. Will written exams be next?

We cannot predict the future, advice is to take this day to day and follow the advice of your teachers. Whatever happens will be the same for every Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate student in the country and the State Examinations Commission (SEC) are working very hard to make contingency plans. We saw how the SEC rose to the challenge last autumn to get Leaving Certificate results processed in a shorter time-span than usual.

In general all students are in same boat, all are equally impacted by this issue. The advice from SEC is to consult with Department of Education and Skills website, they will issue regular press releases to the media and to educational partners as appropriate. It is too early to predict future events and not constructive to speculate as we do not want to raise anxiety levels.

For non-exam classes, is it still very important for kids to keep doing their work?

We take the resilience approach, we work on things we can work on and don't worry about those things we can't. Students have their class timetable and will now be doing their work at home instead of at school. So, the answer is **Yes**. All students need to keep in daily contact with the school/teachers and do the assignments sent to them. It would be a good time to do some revision or work on projects that might not have to be completed immediately.

Encourage children to read up on topics of interest. Remember that not all learning happens in school. Cooking, up modelling, learning how to use household appliances, engaging with hobbies like playing a musical instrument, drawing/painting, creative writing, sport, dance, gardening, and DIY are all important life skills which can be learned while confined to the house. It is important to encourage the holistic development of our young and not merely their academic abilities.

How about helping young people manage stress, how can parents help with that?

Naturally children will have questions and I would ask parents to use all the Government recommended resources, such as [HSE website](#), the [Department of Education and Skills website](#), and their school's website, to help you talk to your children and help them manage their anxiety – not just about the virus but about their exams.

It's very tempting to check for updates on the virus in particular but checking several times a day can maintain an escalated state of anxiety, which can easily transmit from parents to their children. The priority is to not focus on catastrophic thoughts and predictions, especially reading and talking about some of the examples on social media. Instead, just sticking to reliable sources of Coronavirus/Covid-19 and examination information.

However, as we work through this situation, some students may become stressed about the virus itself or exams. Talking and listening to your child is very important, dispelling 'fake news' they may pick up on the internet. We may not be able to control external events, but we can control what information we access and when.

The one good adult in a young person's life will help hugely here. Parents will be aware that grandparents are often the go to person for a young person and this contact is currently being physically curtailed for everyone's safety, so it's important to offer practical help to grandparents so that they can continue to communicate with their grandchildren electronically or by phone. Guidance counsellors will have

given their students details of how to contact them during this time. We may not be able to have face to face contact, but we can still be in contact.

Caring for your Well-Being

By AWARE.ie

Connecting with loved ones

At a time where social distancing is important, it has never been more important to connect with our community; whether family, friends, colleagues or neighbours. Take time to check-in by phone, text or video chat. Advances in technology mean it is now easier than ever to connect. You could try setting aside some time each day to get in touch with someone.

Looking after your physical health



When we look after our physical health, our mental health can feel the benefits too.

Nutrition

Try to eat a balanced and nutritious diet. A healthy diet produces a healthy body and a healthy mind. Sugary foods lead to a sharp drop in blood sugars later on and this leads to energy and mood slumps. Caffeine also has a negative impact, causing increased heart rate and interfering with sleep. In addition, alcohol is a depressant and can prove a potent trigger to low mood, especially in individuals prone to depression or bipolar disorder.

Exercise

Exercise can be very beneficial. Exercise releases endorphins in your body which are known to improve your mood. Go for a walk outside, while practicing social distancing. Even if you are in isolation, you could sit in your garden or out on your balcony, fresh air can be helpful. Engaging with nature can make a difference. Make some space on the floor to do stretches, try to keep your body moving.

Sleep

Try to get adequate rest and sleep. Sleep problems can sometimes occur from the food we consume (caffeine or rich foods late in the evening can prevent sleep). It may wish to try keeping technology out of the bedroom, as screen time before bed can make it difficult to sleep. Light exercise and fresh air later in the day can often be helpful.

Healthy routines

The way you are living your life is likely changing amidst attempts to limit the spread of Covid-19. With that in mind, it could be helpful for you to create a daily routine for yourself. Include time to prepare food, get in some exercise and adequate sleep. If you don't already, you could try incorporating some additional routines to help you care for your mental well-being.

Breathing

Breathing exercises can be very helpful for your mental health. You can follow your favourite breathing exercises or if you would like a simple exercise - breathe in for four seconds and then breathe out for 8 seconds. Breathing out for longer than you breathe in can help reduce anxiety.

Practice Relaxation

Perhaps you like yoga or meditating; or this could be an opportunity to try a new hobby. There are plenty of videos and guides to follow online, the main thing is to give yourself the time and space you need to allow you try out a new technique.

Useful Apps for Wellbeing

. Mindshift

Price: Free

Available for: Android, iOS



Mindshift is designed to help teens and young adults cope with anxiety. The app includes strategies to deal with everyday anxiety as well as specific tools to deal with sleep, perfectionism, social anxiety, panic, and conflict.

. Calm

Price: Free

Available for: Android, iOS



Calm is an app that focuses on meditation and sleep to reduce symptoms of anxiety and stress. This app provides guided meditations, sleep stories, breathing programmes, informational classes and relaxing music to aid in the reduction of stress and anxiety.

Guided meditations come in a range of lengths (from 3 to 25 minutes), so users can choose what practice fits in best with their schedule. Meditation topics include self-esteem, relationships, breaking bad habits, happiness and more. You can even track your progress by logging daily streaks and time spent meditating.

. Mindfulness

Price: Free

Available for: Android, iOS



Mindfulness specializes in bringing you back to the present. The app includes a 5-day guided introduction to the course, timed and guided meditations, customizable meditations, push notifications reminding you to be mindful during the day and statistics to keep track of your meditation journey.

. Happify

Price: Free

Available for: Android, iOS



Happify's science-based games and activities are designed to help you manage stress, control negative thoughts, build resilience and improve your overall emotional well-being. Users can choose from activities that centre around conquering negative thoughts, coping with stress, building self-confidence, fueling career success, achieving mindfulness through meditation and more.

. Mood Tools

Price: Free

Available for: Android, iOS



Mood Tools is designed to help you combat depression by providing a thought diary to “improve your mood by analyzing your thoughts and identifying negative / distorted thinking patterns based on principles from Cognitive Therapy,” energizing activities and mood tracking based on Behavioural Activation Therapy, a suicide safety plan to help you utilize emergency resources during a suicidal crisis, testing to help you track your symptom severity and more.

. Head Space

Price: Free

Available for: Android, iOS



HEADSPACE®

HeadSpace is designed to help you focus on your breath, keep calm and practice mindfulness and meditation. The app also strives to give you a better night’s sleep through relaxation skills.

The app itself offers guided meditations to train and calm your mind for a few minutes each day, courses on classic meditation and relaxation techniques to help manage stress and anxiety, push notifications to remind you throughout the day to be present and breathe, sleep sounds to create a restful night, and the ability to track your mindfulness progress with others.

Users can benefit from the dozens of meditation courses on the app including: managing anxiety, restlessness, navigating change, sleep, relationships, self-esteem, balance, productivity, creativity, transforming anger, handling

sadness, dealing with regret, self-esteem, grieving, mindful eating, coping with cancer and many more.

. **Pacifica**

Price: Free

Available for: Android, iOS



Pacifica provides psychologist-designed tools to help you cope with stress, anxiety and depression through Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, mindfulness meditation, relaxation and mood/health tracking.

The app has relaxation and mindfulness meditation audio tools, psychologist-designed “Paths” that include audio lessons and helpful activities to help you with stress, a mood tracker, a journal to record and analyze distorted thinking patterns that contribute to anxiety, daily challenges to complete, a health tracker, and the ability to share and receive stories and advice from peers on the app.

PRACTICAL WAYS STUDENTS CAN LOOK AFTER THEIR MENTAL HEALTH EACH DAY

 Wake up and practise some deep breathing

 Write down 3 things you are grateful for

 Speak to someone about how you are feeling

 Engage in a thought diary

 Write down a list of your worries

 Challenge unhelpful thoughts

 Schedule in some fun activities in your week

 @BELIEVEPHQ

 Let people know how you are feeling

 Engage in something you are good at

 Surround yourself with people who make you happy

 Eat a well balanced diet

 Do something that makes you feel proud

 Keep yourself active throughout the day

 Get a good nights sleep

 Close your eyes and imagine being in a safe place

 Disconnect from social media

 Disconnect from technology

 Catch up with a friend

 Practise some meditation

 Use all your senses to engage with an activity

 Practise some progressive muscle relaxation

 Listen to music that relaxes you

 Practise postponing your worries

 Problem solve to overcome a worry

 Identify your thinking errors

 Remind yourself of your achievements

 Identify a list of all your strengths

 Identify how you can use your strengths in your day

 Go for a long relaxing walk

 Volunteer at a local charity

 Engage in some exercise

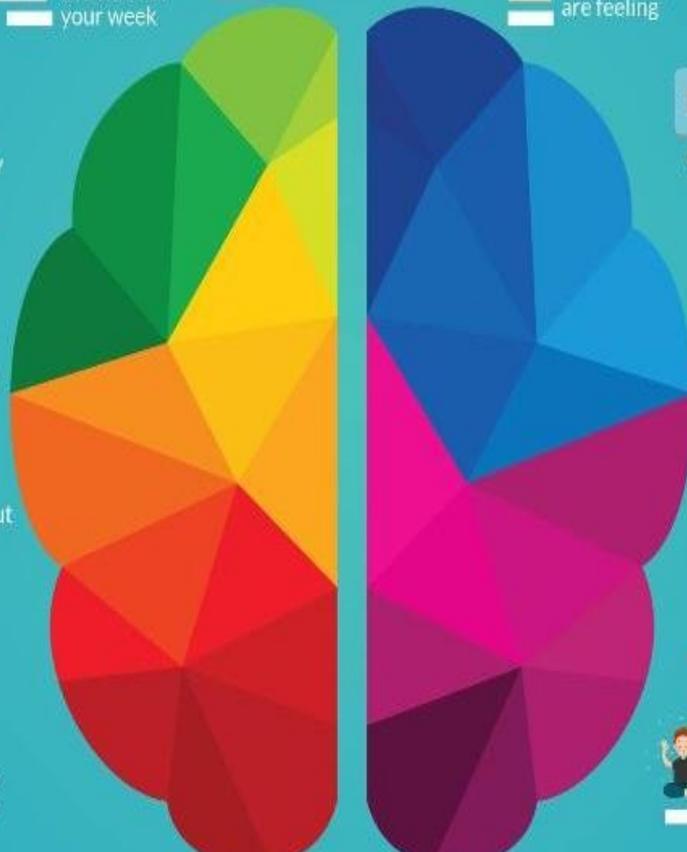
 Join an exercise group

 Take a break from what you are doing

 Focus on the present. Stay in the here and now

 Practise self care (E.g. have a bath)

 Assess your feelings each morning when you wake up



12 WAYS TO DE-STRESS

Take a break. Go for a walk

Practice deep breathing to help calm you down

Have a nap to regenerate yourself

Write down your worries

Change a negative thought into a positive

Talk to someone about what is worrying you

Find time to exercise

Unplug yourself from the real world

Don't forget to smile

Treat yourself to something good

Eat healthy. Don't avoid meals

Try to manage your time effectively





COPING CALENDAR: KEEP CALM. STAY WISE. BE KIND



30 actions to look after ourselves and each other as we face this global crisis together. Please use & share 

- 1 Make a plan to help you keep calm and stay in contact.
- 2 Enjoy washing your hands. Remember all they do for you!
- 3 Write down ten things you feel grateful for in life and why
- 4 Stay hydrated, eat healthy food and boost your immune system
- 5 Get active. Even if you're stuck indoors, move & stretch
- 6 Contact a neighbour or friend and offer to help them
- 7 Share what you are feeling and be willing to ask for help
- 8 Take five minutes to sit still and breathe. Repeat regularly
- 9 Call a loved one to catch up and really listen to them
- 10 Get good sleep. No screens before bed or when waking up
- 11 Notice five things that are beautiful in the world around you
- 12 Immerse yourself in a new book, TV show or podcast
- 13 Respond positively to everyone you interact with
- 14 Play a game that you enjoyed when you were younger
- 15 Make some progress on a project that matters to you
- 16 Rediscover your favourite music that really lifts your spirits
- 17 Learn something new or do something creative
- 18 Find a fun way to do an extra 15 minutes of physical activity
- 19 Do three acts of kindness to help others, however small
- 20 Make time for self-care. Do something kind for yourself
- 21 Send a letter or message to someone you can't be with
- 22 Find positive stories in the news and share these with others
- 23 Have a tech-free day. Stop scrolling and turn off the news
- 24 Put your worries into perspective and try to let them go
- 25 Look for the good in others and notice their strengths
- 26 Take a small step towards an important goal
- 27 Thank three people you're grateful to and tell them why
- 28 Make a plan to meet up with others again later in the year
- 29 Connect with nature. Breathe and notice life continuing
- 30 Remember that all feelings and situations pass in time



“Everything can be taken from us but one thing: the freedom to choose our attitude in any given set of circumstances” ~ Viktor Frankl



ACTION FOR HAPPINESS



www.actionforhappiness.org

Find out more about the Ten Keys to Happier Living, including books, guides, posters and more here: www.actionforhappiness.org/10-keys

Useful Contacts by HSE.ie

Online counselling and supports

Turn2Me

- Free online counselling and online support groups for people over 18
- Visit www.turn2me.org

MyMind

- Online counselling service
- Visit www.mymind.org or email hq@mymind.org

Jigsaw

- Mental health information and a Q&A service for young people, their parents and guardians, and those who work with young people. Jigsaw also offer an online group chat service.
- Visit www.jigsawonline.ie

Shine

- Shine are currently providing remote support and an outreach service to people experiencing mental health problems and their families and supporters by phone and email.
- Visit www.shine.ie/covid-19 or email phil@shine.ie

Bodywhys Online Support

- Support for people who are affected by eating disorders including for friends and families. Online support groups are continuing as normal.
- Visit www.bodywhys.ie or email alex@bodywhys.ie

Suicide or Survive (SOS)

- A series of free online wellness workshops and programmes are available from SOS
- Visit [Suicide or Survive](#) for more information

Phone, email and text supports

Alone

- Alone provide a COVID-19 support line for older people
- Telephone **0818 222 024** (from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday)
- Visit www.alone.ie

Samaritans

- Emotional support to anyone in distress or struggling to cope
- Freephone **116 123** (any time, day or night)
- Email jo@samaritans.ie

Pieta House

- Pieta House provides telephone and text-based support counselling for people who are suicidal or engaging in self-harm
- Freephone **1800 247 247** (any time, day or night)
- Text **HELP** to **51444** (standard message rates apply)
- Telephone appointments will be provided to replace face to face appointments - [contact your local Pieta House](#) for details

Childline (ISPCC)

- Ireland's 24-hour national listening service for young people up to the age of 18
- Freephone **1800 666 666** (any time, day or night)
- Text **50101** (from 10am to 4pm every day)
- Chat online at www.childline.ie (from 10am to 4pm every day)

BeLonG To Text Support

- BeLonG To provide support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI+) young people in Ireland
- Text **LGBTI+** to **086 1800 280** to can chat in confidence with a trained crisis volunteer (anytime day or night, standard SMS rates may apply)
- While face to face services are closed, information, referral and advice will be provided digitally, by email, SMS, phone call or video conference
- Visit www.belongto.org

Aware Support Line

- Information and support to anyone over 18 about issues relating to their own mood or the mood of a friend or family member, or who experiences depression or bipolar.
- Freephone Support Line **1800 80 48 48** (from 10am to 10pm every day)
- Support and self-care groups nationwide, are cancelled until further notice
- [Life Skills Online Programme](#) continuing as normal
- Email supportmail@aware.ie for services information and support

Crisis Text Line Ireland

- A confidential messaging support service
- Text **TALK** to **086 1800 280** (any time day or night, standard SMS rates may apply)

LGBT Ireland

- Online support and through the helpline for LGBT+ people across Ireland
- LGBT Helpline **1890 929 539** (every day)
- Gender Identity Family Support Line **01 907 3707**
- Email info@lgbt.ie for support or information while face to face services are closed
- An instant messaging service is available 7 days a week, from 6:30pm to 10pm Mon – Thur, from 4pm to 10pm Fridays, and from 4pm to 6pm on Sat & Sun

Mental Health Ireland

- Information and support for people who experience mental health difficulties
- Information line **(01) 284 1166** (from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday)
- Visit www.mentalhealthireland.ie or email info@mentalhealthireland.ie for more information

GROW Mental Health Recovery

- Information line **1890 474 474**

- Visit www.grow.ie or email info@grow.ie for more information, or while peer support groups are postponed

Exchange House Ireland National Traveller Mental Health Service

- Telephone and online services and supports are available while face to face and group services have stopped
- Call 01 8721094 (then press 1) for support, help or advice (from 9am to 5pm every day)
- Visit www.exchangehouse.ie for more information

Mobile apps to support your mental health

These mobile apps can help you manage anxiety. They have been reviewed and approved for listing here, by a group in the HSE (Mental Health Apps Review Sub Group). The app developers are solely responsible for their app's advertisement, compliance and fitness for purpose. Unless stated otherwise, apps are not supplied by the HSE, and the HSE is not liable for their use.

Mindshift (by Anxiety Canada)

A user-friendly self-help tool based on proven scientific strategies, [MindShift CBT](#) teaches about anxiety, helping users to engage in healthy thinking and to take action. Users check in each day to track their anxiety and work with tools in the app.

- Get it in the [App Store](#) or on [Google Play](#)

Clear Fear

[Clear Fear](#) is an app developed for teenage mental health charity Stem4 which uses the evidence-based treatment CBT to focus on learning to reduce the physical responses to threat by learning to breathe, relax and be mindful as well as changing thoughts and behaviours and releasing emotions. You can personalise the app if you so wish and you will be able to track your progress and notice change.

- Get it in the [App Store](#) or on [Google Play](#)

Headspace

[Headspace](#) is a well-known mobile app that teaches meditation and easy to use mindfulness skills. Map your journey, track your progress,

and reap rewards in your overall health and wellbeing. You can even 'buddy up' with friends and motivate each other along the way.

- Get it in the [App Store](#) or on [Google Play](#)

More online supports

The [YourMentalHealth.ie](#) website provides information and signposting on all mental health supports and services that are available nationally & locally provided by the HSE and its funded partners. You can also call the freephone YourMentalHealth Information Line to find supports and services **1800 111 888** (any time, day or night).