



## Teacher Wellbeing & Self-Care during the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) School Closures

### Introduction

The Government made a decision to close all schools in Ireland in order to slow down the spread of the Covid-19 virus and keep as many people as possible safe and well. This decision impacted on teachers' working lives and fundamentally changed the way in which school communities supported the learning and education of children and young people at this time. Teachers and school communities had to adapt and change in the face of these significant challenges.

While many teachers and school communities coped well with the adjustment needed, some may have found it stressful at times. Not all individuals will respond to stress in the same way and each person will have their own unique coping mechanisms. During this time it is especially important that teachers pay attention to and take proactive steps to promote their own wellbeing and self-care. The aim of this advice pamphlet is to provide some useful pointers to teachers that can be used during this unprecedented time and to highlight other supports that are available.

### Becoming more Self-Aware

The spread of COVID-19 and subsequent school closures may have impacted on you in terms of your feelings, your thoughts and your behaviour. You may/may not feel strong reactions at different times during this period of adjustment. If your feelings and reactions seem different from those of others, remember everyone responds differently, and that's normal. At times, during this period of adjustment and change, you may notice that you are feeling/experiencing differences in:

- **How you think:** such as an inability to stop thinking about what is happening and trying to make sense of it.
- **How you feel physically:** You may feel extreme tiredness, or have gastrointestinal problems, headaches and other aches and pains, loss of appetite, and/or difficulty sleeping.
- **How you feel emotionally:** You may feel anxious or worried; irritable, cross or angry; you might sometimes feel numb.



- **What you do:** You may notice that you are withdrawing from contact with loved ones; you may be exercising less or not taking as much care as you might have previously with what you eat; you may drink more alcohol.

### Steps to Promote Wellbeing & Self-Care

Be kind and understanding of your own needs at this time. In times of stress it is especially important to focus and draw comfort from the people and things around you:

- **Relationships:** During this time it is important to focus on alternative ways to foster a sense of belonging and connectedness at a time of isolation and remote working (Duffield & O'Hare, 2020). Continuing to stay in touch with colleagues and friends is essential to support wellbeing at this time. Teachers consistently report that relationships with colleagues are essential to their wellbeing and self-care. It is also important to prioritise relationships outside of school to connect with family and friends.
- **Relaxation:** Take time each day to pay attention to your body and what it is telling you. Try to recognise when your body and mind are stressed. If you are feeling stressed or anxious, take a few deep breaths and concentrate on letting go of your worries even for a short time. When you take deep breaths from the abdomen, rather than shallow breaths from your upper chest, you inhale more oxygen. The more oxygen you get, the less tense, short of breath, and anxious you feel. Further ideas and resources on relaxation can be found [here & here](#).
- **Maintain Work/Life Balance:** During this time it will be essential to develop new routines and structures throughout your day. This promotes feelings of safety and control. It is important to have clear boundaries between work and leisure time whilst working remotely. Be cognisant of limiting the amount of time you spend checking e-mails or other online applications to ensure that you have adequate down time. Be realistic about what you can and cannot do at the present time given your unique work and personal circumstances.
- **Creativity:** Do things that challenge your creativity and make you feel productive like gardening, drawing, writing, playing an instrument, or building something (Psychological Society of Ireland, 2011). *Creative Ireland* is an all-of-government culture and wellbeing programme that inspires and transforms people, places and communities through



creativity. Consider how you might get creative with your students to support your own and their wellbeing at the present time.

- The **Getting Through COVID-19 Together** campaign was launched by the Government to provide support and resources to help deal with the stress, anxiety and isolation currently experienced by many people. The website provides tips and advice on topics such as **physical activity, parenting, coping with daily routines, supporting the ‘cocooned’ and getting involved in the community solidarity efforts**. It can be accessed [here](#). Research consistently shows that volunteering or other altruistic activities promotes wellbeing across the community.
- **Personal & Professional Development:** Teachers have had to adapt their suite of teaching methodologies in a very short period of time. This can generate understandable feelings of worry and uncertainty. School communities should recognise these feelings openly and encourage a professional culture which learns from both successes and failures. Teachers should be encouraged to ask for help from a colleague when needed and should be supported in developing the new skills necessary to face the challenges of working remotely.

### Seeking Help

If you are feeling overwhelmed at the present time the **Employee Assistance Service**, provided by Spectrum.Life, can be contacted at **1800 411 057**. The service offers a free confidential service 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, providing counselling on a range of personal health and wellbeing issues.

### Useful Resources

- Many of the **Teaching Unions** have guidance and support relating to teacher wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic available on their websites.
- The **Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)** has a range of resources to support teacher wellbeing available [here](#).
- The **Centre for School Leadership (CSL)** has ideas and supports available for school principals and teachers [here](#)

### References

Duffield, S., & O’Hare, D. (2020). *Teacher resilience during coronavirus school closures*.



British Psychological Society: Leicester. Retrieved on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2020 from [www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Member%20Networks/Divisions/DECP/Teacher%20resilience%20during%20coronavirus%20school%20closures.pdf](http://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Member%20Networks/Divisions/DECP/Teacher%20resilience%20during%20coronavirus%20school%20closures.pdf)

Psychological Society of Ireland. (2011). *40 (practical tips) for mental health, well-being and prosperity*. Psychological Society of Ireland: Dublin. Retrieved on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2012 from [www.psihq.ie/2011%40%Practical%Tips.pdf](http://www.psihq.ie/2011%40%Practical%Tips.pdf)

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