

COVID-19: Psychological Wellbeing for HSE Staff

Understanding and Managing my Emotions

*Prepared by Daniel Flynn, Principal Psychology Manager, Cork Kerry Mental Health Services,
Head of Psychology Services Ireland (HPSI)
15.03.2020*

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.

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.

The following 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.

Emotions and feelings aren't good or bad, they just are what they are. The behaviour people engage in, as an expression of their emotions may be helpful or unhelpful. This skill is about helping you know your emotions so that you can deal with them effectively and avoid engaging in problematic behaviour.

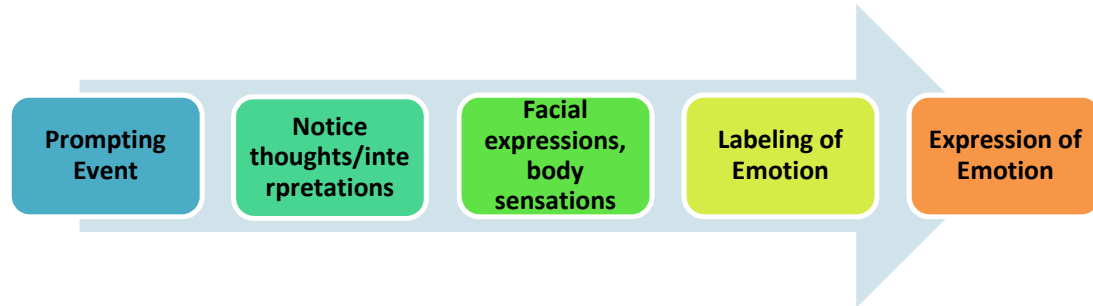
Functions of emotions

- **To communicate to ourselves-** What is going on for me right now?
- **To communicate and influence others-** I am showing others that I am impacted by what is happening and may need support
- **To organise and prepare one for action-** I may need to do something to change how I think or feel or may need to step away from this situation for a while

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What happens when I experience emotions?

- Emotions are very complex and consist of many parts or different reactions happening at the same time. Sometimes the problem is that you do not tune into or sense your body and body changes. Failure to do so can mean you don't hear your emotions and therefore we often do not respond in a regulated way. To regulate emotions, you have to be pretty good at sensing your body.



- External events as well as internal thoughts, emotions and sensations can trigger our emotional response.

Emotions involve:

- **Body changes**
 - Facial muscles
 - Body movements and gestures
- **Brain changes**
 - Neuro-chemical changes such as those in the limbic system
- **Sensing**
 - “emotional experience”- the noticing and experience of the changes in body and brain
- **Action urges**
 - The bodies physical urge to respond to the felt emotion

Emotions are expressed through:

- **Body language** – e.g. postural and facial changes eg. Frowning, finger wagging, gritting your teeth, clenching your fists
- **Words** – e.g. “I love you”, “I am angry”, “I am sad” or “I am sorry”
- **Actions** – e.g. kissing, hitting, running toward someone, withdrawing passively, avoiding, shouting.

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Steps to letting go emotional distress

- Observe your emotion - acknowledge it, step back
- Try to experience your emotion as a wave, coming and going
- Do not judge it
- Do not cling to it
- Open yourself to the flow of the emotion
- Be aware that you are not your emotion
- Do not act on it
- Do not build a wall around or block your emotion - it just keeps it around longer
- Practice accepting your emotions - be willing to have them, they have a purpose and are justified

Steps for increasing positive emotions

- **Attend to relationships**
 - Balanced relationships may increase our sense of happiness
 - It is important to note here that we should not place all our happiness on one person or one relationship, stay connected with family and friend even if using phone and multimedia at present.
- **Avoid avoiding**
 - Don't give up! No one can build a positive life if one avoids problem solving or doing things that are necessary
- **Mindfulness of positive experiences**
 - Be mindful of positive events that occur. Do the following:
 - Focus your attention on positive events that occur, even the small daily stuff
 - Refocus on positive parts of events when your mind wanders to the negative
- **Becoming un-mindfulness of worries**
 - Do not destroy positive experiences. Be unmindful of the following:
 - Thinking about when a positive experience will end
 - Thinking about whether you deserve it
 - Thinking about how much is expected of you now

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Recap: Getting to know and managing my emotions

- Determine what is happening in the environment. Figure out **what happened** in your surroundings just prior to your current emotional state.
- Identify and **describe your emotions** and feelings in concrete language that is non-judgemental.
- Be grounded in your body. **Notice how you experience your emotions** and feelings physically.
- **Pay attention to your thoughts**. Become aware of what thoughts you have when experiencing your emotions and feelings.
- **How are my emotions and feelings influencing my behaviour?** Evaluate if your behaviour is as effective as it could be. If not, ask yourself what behaviour would be more effective here?
- **Think about the potential consequence** of thinking, feeling and behaving in a particular way. If there is a likely negative consequence, are there alternative feelings, thoughts and behaviours that would reduce or eliminate negative outcomes.