

Self-Care Handout for Parents/Carers

Parents and other caregivers play a critical role in helping children and young people at this time. It is extremely important, however, for caregivers to monitor their own reactions and take care of their own needs.

Recent events may have impacted on you in terms of your feelings, your thoughts and your behaviour. You may/may not feel a strong reaction to what has happened. This is normal. It is acceptable to cry. It is acceptable to smile. If your feelings and reactions seem different from those of others, remember everyone reacts differently.

You may have experienced or be experiencing some reactions as follows:

- a. **Cognitive reactions** such as an inability to stop thinking about what has happened and trying to make sense of it.
- b. **Physical reactions** such as extreme tiredness, gastrointestinal problems, headaches and other aches and pains, loss of appetite, and/or difficulty sleeping.
- c. **Emotional reactions** such as excessive worry or anxiety, numbing, irritability, anger or rage, distressing thoughts or dreams.
- d. **Behavioural/Social reactions** such as increase in alcohol consumption, withdrawal from contact with friends/family, an inability to complete/return to normal job responsibilities or normal pastimes/hobbies.

Be kind and understanding of your own needs. The following may help you through this difficult time:

- a. **Physical self-care:** Maintain healthy eating habits and drink plenty of water; limit the use of alcohol or other substances; get adequate sleep and exercise. Treat yourself to a lunch/dinner out, walks, cinema, massage etc.
- b. **Emotional Self-care:** Know your limitations; recognise that your reactions are normal and occur frequently.
- c. **Social care and connection:** Maintain normal daily routines; connect with trusted friends or family; talk

through the events with other caregivers, friends, family or colleagues.

DO:

- express your emotions
- talk about what happened - share feelings and thoughts
- look to friends, family and colleagues for support
- try to keep your life as normal as possible
- try to keep to daily routine/recreation
- find time for physical exercise
- drink plenty of water and remember to eat - avoid junk food
- tune in to when you are Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired (HALT)
- do things you enjoy and things that make you laugh
- write, draw, paint
- practice good sleep routines
- identify one method of relaxation that works for you - engage in a 5 minute relaxation or mindfulness exercise.

DON'T:

- misuse alcohol, nicotine or other drugs to hide your feelings
- allow anger and irritability to mask your feelings
- bottle up feelings/emotions
- be afraid to ask for help
- think your feelings are signs of weakness.

Sometimes a traumatic event is so painful that professional support and/or medical assistance may be necessary. These feelings can be very common and simply indicate that the particular event is just too powerful for you to manage by yourself. Seeking help does not imply weakness or inadequacy. You can always access help by talking to someone - family, friends, GP, counsellors etc.

Useful Self-Care Strategies

Mindfulness is the process of bringing one's attention to the internal and external experiences occurring in the present moment. It may help to take a few minutes out every so often

during the day to take a breath and clear your mind. One way of doing this is a simple mindfulness technique.

- Choose a natural object (your hand, a flower, an insect, the clouds) from within your immediate environment
- Focus on watching it for a minute or two
- Don't do anything except notice the thing you are looking at
- Simply relax into a harmony for as long as your concentration allows
- Look at it as if you are seeing it for the first time
- Visually explore every aspect of its shape
- Allow yourself to connect with its energy and its role and purpose

Relaxation Exercises

Breathing exercises help reduce feelings of arousal and physical tension and, if practiced regularly, can improve sleep, eating, and functioning. The key to deep breathing is to breathe deeply from the abdomen, getting as much fresh air as possible into your lungs. 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. The following are brief relaxation exercises that can be easily practiced during the day.

- Sit in a comfortable position with your arms and legs uncrossed
- Inhale slowly through your nose or mouth (one-thousand one, one thousand, two, one-thousand three), and fill your lungs
- Silently and gently say to yourself, "I'm filling my body with calm"
- Exhale slowly through your mouth (one-thousand one, one-thousand two, one-thousand three), and comfortably empty your lungs

- Silently and gently say to yourself, "I'm letting the tension drain away"
- Repeat five times slowly

- Sit comfortably with your back straight. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach
- Breathe in through your nose. The hand on your stomach should rise. The hand on your chest should move very little
- Exhale through your mouth, pushing out as much air as you can while contracting your abdominal muscles. The hand on your stomach should move in as you exhale, but your other hand should move very little
- Continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to inhale enough so that your lower abdomen rises and falls. Count slowly as you exhale

Progressive muscle relaxation involves a two-step process in which you systematically tense and relax different muscle groups in the body. As your body relaxes, so will your mind. You can combine deep breathing with progressive muscle relaxation for an additional level of stress relief.

Progressive muscle relaxation sequence. Tense-Hold-Relax

- Right foot, then left foot
- Right calf, then left calf
- Right thigh, then left thigh
- Hips and buttocks
- Stomach
- Chest
- Back
- Right arm and hand, then left arm and hand
- Neck and shoulders
- Face

Remember the Little Things

The [Little Things](#) campaign was designed to remind us of the little things that make a big difference to how we feel. It's the little things that can help lift your mood. See below as well as www.HealthPromotion.ie for printed poster and postcard packs.

