

Guide for MU Students

Engaging with Uncertainty during COVID-19

At this time we are all experiencing levels of uncertainty due to the COVID-19 virus.

You may be feeling a sense of concern right now in response to the virus and to the measures that have been taken in an effort to contain the spread of the virus. Day to day life has changed suddenly and considerably for many. Please bear in mind change can bring with it growth as well as stress and challenge.

Each of us has different styles of coping with these levels of change and uncertainty.

Don't dwell on things beyond your control

You may wish to dedicate a specific amount of time to consider the future, your concerns and possible solutions, perhaps 30 minutes, and then decide after that time to move on and focus on other things. It is important to limit this time to avoid continued obsessing.

Distinguish between the things you have control over and the things you don't. It is often anxiety provoking to mull over aspects of life that you cannot control. The mind loves telling stories, it hardly stops. It is important to remember thoughts are not facts.

Research shows us that dwelling on our thoughts, known as rumination, does exactly the opposite of its intended purpose to somehow prepare us or aid us in our ability to solve problems. These skills deteriorate markedly during rumination (Watkins, E., & Moulds, M. (2005)).

Focus on the Present

Conversely it can be calming and productive to focus on the present moment and on the elements in our lives that are within our control. Focus on what supports you to put steps in place to help you accomplish your goals. At this time it may be helpful to build a sense of routine or schedule to support you in achieving these objectives.

Reflect on what is within and outside of your control. Let go of the "What ifs..." Support yourself to tolerate the discomfort of not knowing. Though you don't know the future you are okay in not knowing it. Time will pass. Life will unfold. Not knowing becomes easier once we adapt to it, accept it, and be supportive and compassionate to ourselves and others, especially at this trying time. Like a new pair of shoes which feel really painful at first, you can break them in and they can begin to feel more comfortable over time.

This too shall pass

States of experience, thought, and feeling are seldom static. They are states that are changing all the time. **Thich Nhat Hanh**, a world renowned Mindfulness teacher and Buddhist monk, shares the image of thinking of emotions like clouds in the sky.

Passing over, sometimes fast, sometimes slow, but they do pass, and the sky does change.

Focus on the things you can do right now. Phone your friends, keep up contact. Exercise, use online supports. Engage with college work. Set a timetable. Eat well. Keep in touch with what the authorities are recommending but don't overdo the news or social media. Do a mood test after phone usage – if its dipping, cut down. Relax and rest.

Make time to rest and relax

According to Thich Nhat Hanh; *“It is very important we re-learn the art of resting and relaxing. Not only does it help prevent the onset of many illnesses that develop through chronic tension and worrying; it allows us to clear our minds, focus, and find creative solutions to problems”*

How do you rest and relax? Mindfulness, exercise, yoga, sport, games, spending time with a pet, or loved ones who you feel at ease around (respecting the social distancing at this time), doing art, listening or playing music, dance, being in nature, gardening, cooking something nutritious, taking a bath, writing, meditation, breathing exercises...

Body and Breath Meditation

When difficulties arise, you may wish to take a moment to do this short Body and Breath Meditation: *Soften, allow, and soothe* – bring your attention to your breath, you may want to place a hand up to your heart area, you may wish to close your eyes, and say to yourself with each in breath -

1. This is a moment of suffering...
2. Suffering is a part of life...
3. May I be kind to myself or
 May I give myself the compassion that I need
 May I accept myself as I am
 May I forgive myself

You may want to repeat this.

Both clear thinking and compassion are gravely affected when you are frightened. This is the experience of anxiety. Your capacity to step back and think becomes limited and compassion goes off line. Hence it is imperative to be nurturing, be attentive to developing a sense of calm and compassion towards yourself and others.

Eckhart Tolle, author of *The Power of Now* which achieved great acclaim, stated that “The moment that judgement stops through acceptance of what is, you are of the mind. You have made room for love, joy and peace.”

Best wishes during this time.

Current Maynooth University advice and notifications are available on <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/coronavirus>. You will be notified when there is any further information available to you.

Maynooth University Counselling Service