Volunteer Wellbeing

A guide to protecting your wellbeing as a volunteer during COVID-19

"That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." - Neil Armstrong upon landing on the Moon in 1969.

Volunteers similarly take that one significant apparently small step which has immeasurable benefits to mankind. In these difficult times the contribution that volunteers are making to the wellbeing of communities is evident not just in Ireland but worldwide.

The COVID-19 crisis has brought out the very best in Irish people, who are demonstrating their willingness to volunteer and to help in whatever way possible. In order for this collective effort to be sustainable it is extremely important for volunteers to balance such willingness with proper care of their own physical, mental and social wellbeing.

We are all familiar with the safety message from air cabin crews to 'put your own oxygen mask on first' in an emergency. This puts you in a place of control allowing you to safely help the person that may be struggling to get their own mask in place. It is necessary to attach the same importance to your own mental health and wellbeing in any role you undertake as a volunteer.

In these difficult times volunteer burnout is a real risk factor, and if not managed it could lead to feelings of stress, anxiety or of just being overwhelmed.

At this time of rapid adaptation, it is vital that we invest in our self- care, maintain a regular routine, sleep, eat well, and exercise within the advised social constraints.
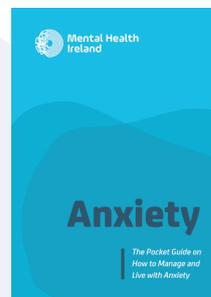
FURTHER SUPPORT

Stress affects us in both physical and emotional ways and to varying degrees.

This booklet explores what stress is, the different types of physical and emotional signs and looks at ways to managing stress.

View Mental Health Ireland's Stress Guide >>

Anxiety is one of the most common mental health issues in nearly every country in the world.

This booklet explores what anxiety is, how it affects us and what to do if you are experiencing anxiety.

View Mental Health Ireland's Anxiety Guide >>

Mental Health Ireland

supporting volunteering in ireland

volunteer centres   volunteer ireland   volunteering information services

Please take care of your health and protect others by keeping in line with the best practice guidelines available at www.hse.ie.

MAINTAIN A BALANCE

Stress is a natural and healthy response to challenging situations or life events, and can sometimes be helpful in motivating us to complete a task. However, at times, stress can become overwhelming and affect our ability to cope. Some of the things that can make you feel stress include experiencing something new or unexpected, something that threatens your feeling of self, or feeling you have little control over a situation. Right now, the biggest stress affecting all of us is the impact of the COVID-19 virus. It in turn is causing other stressors such as worry about health, finances and the wellbeing of family members.

Stress and anxiety impact on our mental health. In promoting positive mental health and wellbeing Mental Health Ireland look at both the risk and protective factors associated with stress and anxiety. Imagine these two concepts, one in each hand. In the right hand are the risk factors involved with volunteering in the current crisis; exhaustion, worry, burnout, concern for a person to whom you are providing support, the possibility of contracting COVID-19 yourself. In the left hand are the protective factors, the most significant of which is the feeling of satisfaction from being able to help someone in need. Being able to provide practical assistance to others at this time will benefit the person receiving support.

It is very important that you protect yourself and keep the right and left hands balanced.

FIVE WAYS TO WELLBEING

One method of achieving this balance is to consider the Five Ways to Wellbeing. Think about how to use these in your role as a volunteer as well as in your daily life.

Connect - maintain connection with the organisation with whom you are volunteering and debrief with them about your experience. Also connect in with your family and friends through phone calls and social media e.g. Facebook, What's Apps, Face time, Instagram etc.

Be Active - identify a physical activity you enjoy and build in a level of activity that you can maintain; even a short stroll adhering to social distancing guidelines can be beneficial.

Take Notice - take a few moments out to check in on your own thoughts and feelings.

Keep Learning - taking up a new interest can be an excellent distraction while at the same time enhancing self- esteem and confidence. So in restricted conditions this could be trying out a new recipe, or researching a free online course or tutorial.

Give - as a volunteer you are already giving and enhancing the wellbeing of the person or community you are supporting. So now it is important that you give to yourself. Take time out to relax, listen to some favourite music, sit down and watch your favourite series. Do whatever works for you!

Learn more at mentalhealthireland.ie >>

volunteer.ie