



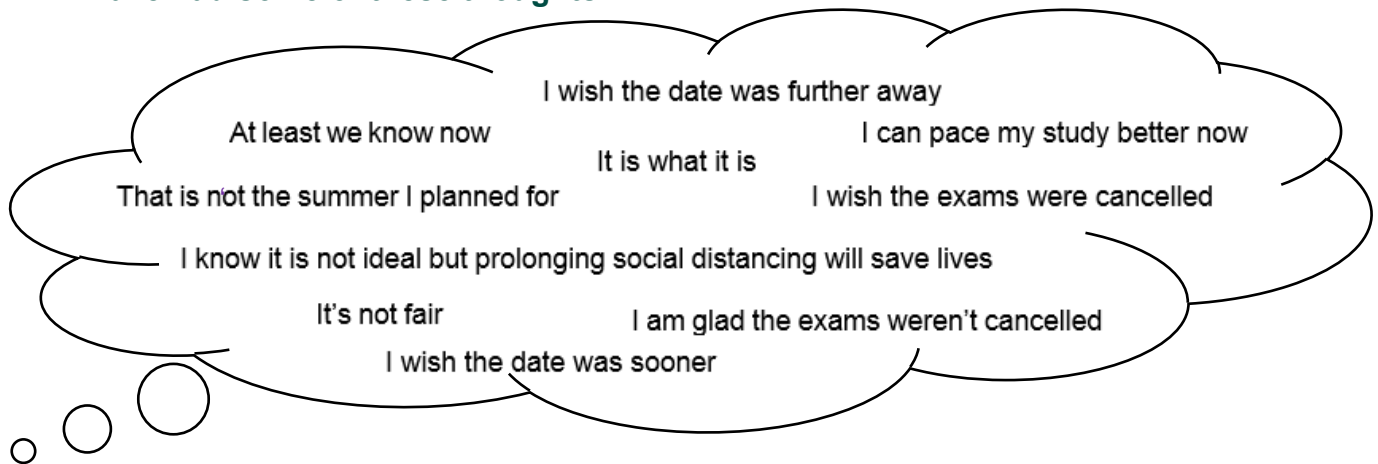
## Leaving Certificate Preparation – Managing your thoughts and feelings

Leaving Cert students are in a period of adjustment and significant change right now due to the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on exam dates. While many students may be coping well with the adjustment needed, others may find it stressful at times.

These is a challenging time and it is normal to feel worried and stressed about the next few months and the exams. Not all students will respond to this challenging situation in the same way, each will have their own unique coping mechanisms.

During this time it is especially important that you pay attention to and take proactive steps to promote your own wellbeing. Some useful suggestions to help you with this can be found [here](#).

### When you heard the news of the rescheduling of the Leaving Certificate you may have had some of these thoughts...



### When you heard the news, you may have felt some of the following emotions or feelings...

Frustrated	Discouraged	Angry	Nervous	Stressed
Worried	Excited	Nothing	Relieved	



## When you heard the news you may have experienced some of the following sensations in your body ...



- Tension
- Butterflies in your tummy
- Tiredness
- Headaches
- Change in appetite
- Tearful
- Poor sleep
- Agitation

It is natural to have a range of thoughts, feelings and sensations like those outlined above. Or you may not have experienced any of these and that's ok, too. We all have our own way of reacting to situations like this.

## So what can you do if this is distressing for you?

- Give yourself time to absorb the news.
- Talk to your family, friends, or teachers.
- Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings. Don't try to push them away. Your reactions are normal reactions to an abnormal situation. You will not always feel this way.
- Decide which is most distressing for you. Is it the unhelpful thoughts, distressing feelings or emotions, or the unwelcome sensations in your body? Just pick the one that bothers you the most and work on that first, using the strategies listed below.

### Unhelpful Thoughts

Unhelpful thoughts are one-sided, negative thoughts which can dominate our thinking and lead us to feel bad. By learning to manage these unhelpful thoughts, we can enhance our wellbeing and make the journey to the Leaving Cert more productive and positive.

Some examples of unhelpful thoughts are:

- That's my study plan gone
- Such a long year
- That's my summer gone
- I can't keep this going until July

### What To Do

- Acknowledge your thoughts
- Talk to an adult or friend



- Remember that your thoughts are normal
- Remind yourself that thoughts are only thoughts, they are not facts
- Try to challenge unhelpful thoughts. You can do this by asking:
  - 'Is that really true?'
  - 'What evidence do I have for thinking that?'
  - 'How else could I look at this?'
  - 'What would I tell my best friend if they thought this?'
- Try to replace unhelpful thoughts with realistic positive self-talk such as:
  - 'I can do this'
  - 'I can ask for help'
  - 'I have people who can support me'
  - 'I know this is a difficult time but I can try my best'
  - 'I know I would like things to be different, but I will adjust and things will work out'
  - 'If I am unsure of anything, I will ask someone for help.'

**Tip: Positive self-talk statements work even if you don't believe them at the time. Fake it to make it!**

### Unpleasant Feelings or Emotions

Unpleasant feelings or emotions can follow on from unhelpful thoughts. It is normal to feel these in challenging times. These might include:

- Anger
- Frustration
- Disappointment
- Feeling fed up

### What To Do

- Acknowledge your feelings and remind yourself that your feelings are normal given the circumstances.
- Talk to an adult or friend.
- Name the feeling and find where it is in the body. Breathe into that area and imagine the area softening.
- What thought goes with the feeling? Challenge the thought. Ask, is this really true? Or use a positive self-talk statement (see above).
- Pick a dedicated time to explore, discuss or think about this feeling. For example, 'I will worry about this at 5pm.' Tell the feeling if it returns that you will pay attention to it at the dedicated time.
- Develop a coping strategy such as
  - Thinking of and doing something that makes you feel better



- Challenging the thought
- Asking for help
- Developing a routine, see our suggested Daily Plan or Blank Plan Template.
- Using a positive self-statement
- Talking to family or friends

### Unpleasant Body Sensations

These may happen because you are experiencing unhelpful thoughts and unpleasant emotions or feelings. They might include:

- Tense neck and shoulders
- Tiredness
- Change in appetite
- Difficulty settling
- Headaches
- Tummy ache
- Butterflies in tummy

### What To Do

- Acknowledge the sensations and remember it is normal to have these at times of stress
- Talk to an adult or friend about this
- If you or your parents are concerned consult your G.P.
- Name the body sensation and find where it is in your body. Breathe into the area and imagine the area softening
- Practice calming strategies regularly such as breathing, visualisations, and mindfulness. See NEPS relaxation documents here and podcast [here](#).
- Include exercise in your daily routine.
- Have a bath or shower, these can calm the body and help you relax
- Have a massage (sibling, parent can give a neck rub) or use a gym ball or roller to massage tense parts of your body
- Practice positive self-talk statements
- Sleep is really important so have a good bedtime routine. Things that help include avoiding technology for an hour before bedtime. Don't exercise too near bedtime, this is better done during the daytime. Avoid eating too much before you go to bed.
- Keep in touch with your friends.