

Near

Supporting mental health in post-primary schools

JIGSAW
Young people's
health in mind



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Information Pack for School Staff





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Welcome to Neart – Jigsaw’s mental health supports for post-primary schools

Jigsaw, in partnership with the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)/Department of Education, provides a comprehensive suite of mental health and wellbeing resources, training and programmes for post-primary schools. Over the next 3 years, Neart will support schools to provide learning opportunities for students to promote mental health and wellbeing, as well as mental health webinars and eLearning courses for school staff and parents. Our work will complement the supports already available in schools which include the provision of guidance counselling, the work of NEPS, as well as the SPHE curriculum and other existing wellbeing programmes and initiatives, including the Student Support Team structure.

The role of school staff in promoting and supporting mental health and wellbeing in schools:

We know that schools in Ireland play a vital role in the promotion of wellbeing through a range of activities and approaches to support the academic, physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual development of all children and young people. We also know that the wellbeing of our children and young people is critical to their success in education and in life. Schools are important settings for preparing children and young people to develop wellbeing and positive mental health, where emotional wellbeing is understood as an educational end in and of itself. See Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice: <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/24725/07cc07626f6a426eb6eab4c523fb2ee2.pdf#page=null> The Wellbeing Policy has identified a range of risk and protective factors relating to wellbeing promotion that are specific to the school/educational setting. Protective factors include:

- positive relationships with peers and teachers - including positive teacher classroom management strategies and a sharing of positive behaviour management practices with parents
- a sense of belonging, security and connectedness to school through a positive school climate and participation in school and community activities
- opportunities for social and emotional learning including the development of attention and planning, self-awareness, self-management, relationship and responsible decision-making skills (CASEL 2015)
- opportunities for the development of knowledge and skills providing a sense of mastery and self-efficacy (Shonkoff et al, 2015)
- fostering expectations, recognising contributions, effort and achievement and providing opportunities for success
- wellbeing of school personnel
- protocols and support systems that proactively support children and their families should difficulties arise
- opportunities to develop the necessary skills to cope with using online technology in a safe and appropriate way
- opportunities to develop skills to manage stress that may be linked to schoolwork.

In the school setting, wellbeing risk factors include:

- disengagement, absenteeism, isolation and alienation
- violence/aggression, bullying and relationship difficulties
- low achievement/learning difficulties/special educational needs including social, emotional and behavioural needs
- cultural differences
- school transitions
- poor connection between family and school
- harsh and inconsistent discipline
- lack of opportunity to develop social and emotional learning, including problem solving and coping skills.

Research tells us that a multi-component, preventative, whole-school approach is the most beneficial approach to wellbeing promotion (Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023). A whole-school approach involves all members of the school community engaging to improve specific areas of school life that impact on wellbeing (Weare and Gray 2003). The Neart programme contributes multi-component whole school supports for wellbeing promotion, aligned with the Continuum of Support set out in the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (pg14).

Continuum of Support

School Support Plus for Few:

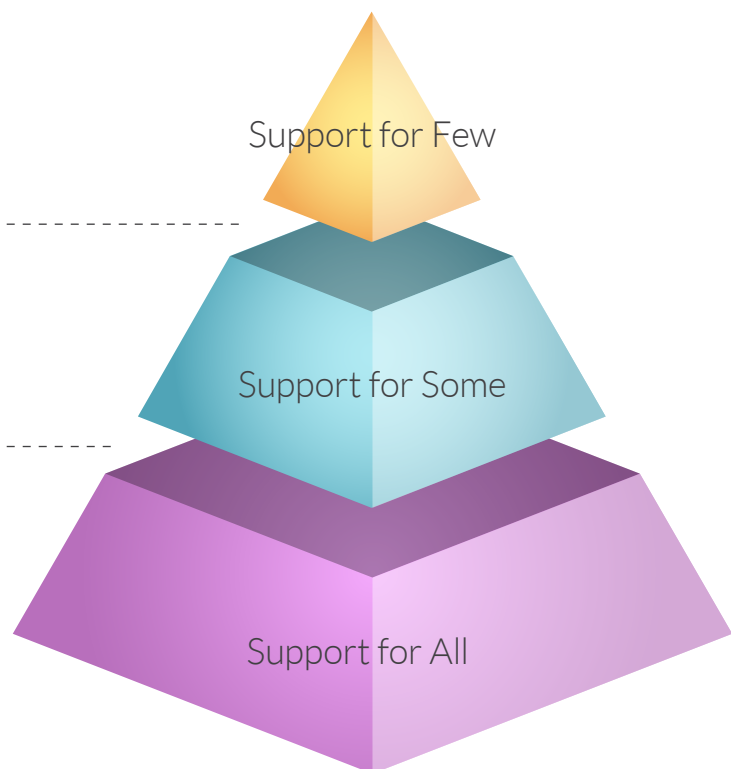
Individualised, targeted intervention for children and young people with more complex and enduring needs.

School Support for Some:

Identification, targeted prevention and early intervention for those at risk

Whole School and Classroom Support for All:

Whole school support for wellbeing promotion that includes prevention and development of social and emotional competence & coping skills for all.



¹ Clarke, A., Sorgenfrei, M., Mulcahy, J., Davie, P., Friedrich, C. & McBride, T. (2021). Adolescent mental health: A systematic review on the effectiveness of school-based interventions. Early Intervention Foundation. file:///C:/Users/siobhan.mcgrory/Downloads/adolescent-mental-health-summary.pdf
² Barry, M. M., Clarke, A. M., Petersen, I., & Jenkins, R. (2019). Implementing mental health promotion. Springer.

School staff as One Good Adults:

One of the key findings of the My World Survey research (2012 & 2019) was the importance of the presence of a supportive adult in the life of a young person – a One Good Adult (OGA). Be it a parent, teacher, football coach or school bus driver, the presence of at least One Good Adult in a young person's life had a positive influence on their mental health. School staff are uniquely placed to be that One Good Adult in the lives of the students in your school. The impact of this cannot be underestimated. The research shows that young people who have the presence of a One Good Adult in their lives are more connected with others, more self-confident, future looking, engaged less with risky behaviour and experienced less suicidal thoughts and feelings. They were also better able to cope with difficulties than those young people who did not have the support of a One Good Adult.

School staff teaching for wellbeing and about wellbeing in the classroom:

The Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice outlines the importance of a needs-led, whole-school approach to wellbeing and places emphasis on the centrality of teachers in this. The evidence tells us that what works in schools is a universal approach, led by teachers, teaching about mental health and wellbeing within the wider context of a school culture that supports and promotes youth mental health (Clarke et al, 2021)¹. This evidence points to the importance of teacher-led approaches for a number of reasons:

- The school setting provides an opportunity to reach large numbers of young people simultaneously
- School staff spend significant time with young people which provides them with an opportunity to develop a trusting and supportive relationship
- The successful delivery of universal mental health promotion interventions by teachers is important in terms of embedding these interventions within routine educational practice and teachers being able to reinforce skills development through everyday interaction with pupils, both within the classroom and in the wider curriculum and school environment

- Teacher-led approaches are likely to be most successful when accompanied with high-quality teacher training and the provision of ongoing support to teachers to ensure high-quality implementation and sustainability
- Additionally, school staff are well placed to notice changes in young people and to intervene early in relation to mental health or behavioural concerns (Barry et al, 2019)²

What will Neart provide for school staff in 2025?

To support you in your role, Neart provides a range of learning opportunities to further increase your knowledge and build your confidence and capacity to promote mental health and wellbeing across the whole school community. This includes the provision of self-directed eLearning courses, interactive multi-media toolkits and webinars. Neart programme areas will be made available for school staff on a phased basis throughout the next 3 years.

There are two different levels of support available for school staff as follows:

Supports for all school staff are relevant for those who have subject-teaching responsibilities, and also for those who have additional responsibilities outside of the classroom, for example, chaplains, HSCL, behaviour support teachers, wellbeing coordinators, Year Heads, SEN teachers, SEN leads, guidance counsellors, middle leaders in the school and the senior leadership team. 'All school staff' also refers to non-teaching staff such as SNAs, SCP staff, clerical officers, caretaking and maintenance staff, cleaners, caterers, librarians, and other ancillary staff that support the work of the school.

How to register your interest in Neart: Please complete this short typeform [here](#) which will register your interest in receiving further information about the programme components of most interest to you, as they become available. A more detailed outline of each of the programme components can be found [here](#). Please also pass on this information to your staff colleagues in your school.

Supports for all staff available from January 2025 are as follows:

Target audience	Programme areas	Approach	Available from...
eLearning for school staff	Supporting mental health & wellbeing in the school setting	1hr self-directed eLearning course	Jan 2025
	Leading Learning in mental health & wellbeing	1hr self-directed eLearning course	Jan 2025
	Understanding anxiety in the classroom	1hr self-directed eLearning course	Jan 2025
Webinars for school staff	Supporting the mental health of LGBTIQ+ students ¹	1hr live webinar	Mar 2025
	Trauma-informed approaches for school staff (<i>developed and delivered in partnership with NEPS</i>)	1hr live webinar	Apr 2025
	Self-compassion as a strategy for self-care for school staff	1hr live webinar	May 2025
	Body image and creating a body-confident school environment	1hr live webinar	Sept 2025

¹ Please note that work is underway to develop supports and resources for schools in relation to the mental health and wellbeing of students from other minority groups, in line with Department of Education social inclusion priorities. These supports will be available in year 2 of NEART, 2025/26



Supports for those teaching wellbeing in the classroom:

In addition to the above, Neart also provides a range of programmes and classroom-based workshops which can complement the existing SPHE curriculum and the Transition Year programme. Neart provides training for teachers to implement these programmes and workshops in the classroom. Some of the training is self-directed eLearning and, once completed, teachers can access the classroom materials and resources. Some more comprehensive programmes such as Peer Education and Innovate for Wellbeing require more in-depth teacher training, which is delivered live online, after which teachers access the materials.

Teacher training courses available from January 2025 are as follows:

Target audience	Programme areas	Approach	Available from...
Teacher training to deliver classroom-based programmes for students	Take Action! Programme A 13-week, teacher-led Gaisce programme for Transition Year students	1hr self-directed eLearning course	Jan 2025
	Let's Talk Sure Why Not? 4 classroom-based sessions for 3rd year junior cycle	1hr self-directed eLearning course for teachers to support them to deliver 4 classroom-based sessions	Feb 2025
	Managing Exam Stress 4 classroom-based sessions for junior and senior cycle	1hr self-directed eLearning course for teachers to support them to deliver 4 classroom-based sessions	Feb 2025
	Innovate for Wellbeing A 10-week curriculum-based student voice programme for Transition Year students, led by teachers	2hr self-directed eLearning course + 2hrs live online training for teachers	Mar 2025
	One Good Friend 4 classroom-based sessions for senior cycle, led by teachers	1hr self-directed eLearning course for teachers to support them to deliver 4 classroom-based sessions	Sept 2025
	Peer Education Programme A training programme for transition year peer educators, led by teachers	90minute self-directed eLearning course for teachers + 2x2hr live online training workshops	Sept 2025

Links to existing mental health and wellbeing supports and resources for post-primary schools:

It is important to re-emphasise that the Neart programme of supports, resources and training is designed to complement the existing supports provided to post-primary schools by the other key education stakeholders. Please follow the relevant links below to access these resources and supports.

Department of Education resources:

- [Wellbeing in Education](#) (this site provides access to a wide range of wellbeing information and supports for schools, students and parents.
- TPL directory - [gov.ie - Wellbeing information for school staff – post primary](#)
- Catalogue of resources - [gov.ie - Wellbeing information for school staff – post primary](#)

NEPS resources:

- [National Educational Psychological Service \(NEPS\) Resources and Publications](#)
- [National Educational Psychological Service \(NEPS\) Guidelines, Tips and Handouts for Parents and Teachers](#) which includes the following:
 - [Wellbeing support for Leaving Certificate Students, parents and school staff](#)
 - [Critical Incident resources on gov.ie](#)
 - [Responding to Self-Harm in Schools](#)
 - [Psychological First Aid](#)
 - [Feelings cards](#)
 - [Managing Stress and Anxiety](#)
 - [Panic Attacks](#)
 - [Normalising Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviours: A Guide for School Staff](#)
 - [The Response to Stress: Information for School Staff](#)
 - [Self-regulation for pupils](#)
 - [Student Support Teams Guidelines](#)
- Wellbeing supports for students from the Ukraine ([Primary](#) and [Post Primary](#))
- [Wellbeing information for schools: Ukraine](#)

NEPS eLearning training:

- [Introducing a Trauma Informed Approach: The Stress Factor. Getting the Balance Right A NEPS e-Learning course for schools](#)
- [Critical Incidents e-Learning module for schools](#)

Other relevant wellbeing resources:

- NCCA: Junior and Senior Cycle SPHE curriculum and resources: [Home - National Council for Curriculum and Assessment](#) and [SPHE | Curriculum Online](#) and <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/senior-cycle/sphe-old/sphe-toolkit/>
- Oide wellbeing supports: <https://oide.ie/post-primary/home/wellbeing/>
- Self-care and EAP programme for school staff provided by Spectrum.Life: [gov.ie - Employee Assistance Service for school staff in recognised primary and post-primary schools \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

Other information and resources:

- [HSE Mental Health supports](#)
- Other Jigsaw resources, articles and supports available at [jigsaw.ie](#)



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