

Guidelines for Parent(s) / Caregiver(s): Supporting Wellbeing during Summer

Introduction

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 Pandemic we have been living through exceptional times and this has impacted the wellbeing of everyone in different ways, at different times. People have been naturally worried about the risk to their physical health and that of their loved ones and have been challenged to varying degrees by the public health measures that were put in place to control the spread of the virus, such as staying at home and school closures.

Pupils will have had different experiences of these measures. Some children and young people have benefitted from the unprecedented change in their lives which may have provided opportunities for spending more time with family, having a slower pace of life, experiencing a greater sense of community, accessing more outdoor exercise and being exposed to different learning experiences at home. Others, however, will have experienced significant stressors in their lives during this time, such as bereavement, family stress, feeling lonely and isolated or living with others struggling with mental health difficulties or addiction. Reduced access to support systems and services, due to public health restrictions, may have, in some cases, led to increased vulnerability.

Now with the summer holidays approaching and the likelihood that public health measures will be eased, hopefully we can look forward to an enjoyable summer. Again it is important to note that for many young people and families, summer can also be a challenging time for a variety of reasons. Therefore, it is essential that we continue to prioritise wellbeing in order to enhance the quality of our lives and to respond positively to the challenges life presents.

This document is designed to provide practical information, activities and resources to support you and your families in integrating wellbeing promotion over the summer months.

Section 1: Practical Information and Recommendations

Planning a relatively consistent summer routine which fits your family: A healthy and consistent daily routine can provide a strong foundation for wellbeing during the summer. Although it may not be possible to re-create the structure which schooldays provide a consistent summer routine goes a long way to helping. Each family has their own unique circumstances and therefore, no two routines are alike. To devise and maintain a healthy summer routine it is important to spend some time planning and seeing what works best for you and your family. Below are elements which you could consider when planning the summer routines.

Sleep: It is recommended that adolescents get between 8-10 hours' sleep each night. Sleep is crucial for maintaining positive mental and physical health and helps us cope better with life's stresses. Understandably, during the summer months sleep routines change and this is okay. However, it is important that the summer sleep routine remains consistent to enable children and young people to establish a healthy sleep routine. Some strategies to support a healthy sleep routine include:

- Maintaining regular a regular wake-up and sleep schedule 7 days/week. It is recommended that even at weekends there should not be more than 1 hours difference between a child/young person's regular wake-up and sleep times.
- Getting outdoors in the sun (or rain). Daylight keeps our circadian rhythm in order
- Exercising daily – see below for more details
- Encouraging a healthy relationship with technology – see below
- Limiting caffeine and sugar. Consuming high levels of caffeine and sugar during the day can negatively impact sleep. Trying the limit caffeine intake and sugary foods to earlier in the day can help sleep. Also consider caffeine-free and sugar-free alternatives. Foods high in caffeine and sugar include – coffee, tea, green tea, energy drinks, fizzy drinks (including Coke Zero, Pepsi Max etc.), fruit juices, cake, chocolate, sugary cereals.
- Try to avoid eating late in the evening. Eating before bed impedes sleep as your body is continuing to work to digest food as you are trying to sleep. For a good night's sleep it is best to have your last substantial meal at least 3-4 hours before bed.
- Ensure the bedroom is not too warm. A cooler temperature in the bedroom is more conducive to a good night's sleep. Consider opening the window to cool the room before going to bed or investing in a lighter duvet.

Diet: Like an expensive car, our brains function best when it gets only quality fuel. A healthy and varied diet has been clinically proven to contribute to maintaining and improving wellbeing. Some strategies to support a healthy diet over the summer include:

- Eating 3 meals/day - breakfast, lunch and dinner
- Healthy snacking – nuts, fruits etc.
- Eating meals together as a family
- Eating at the dinner table
- Encouraging children to prepare meals for the family – be experimental
- Introducing new foods for fun e.g., smoothies in the morning
- Sugary treats and take-aways should be enjoyed but should not be the norm
- Natural, less processed foods are preferable
- Try and consume at least 2 litres of water/day

Exercise: Keeping active helps protect both your physical and mental health. Regular exercise will help you sleep, relax and feel better. Physical activity can cause chemical changes in the brain. These changes help to improve your mood reduce stress and boost your energy levels. Children and young people should be active for at least 60 minutes every day. This should be at a moderate (average energy) to vigorous (full of energy) level. Strategies to incorporate exercise into the day include:

- Going for a family walk
- Walking the dog
- Walk to the shops
- Going for a cycle
- Home-exercise routines

- Going hiking with family or friends
- Getting out for a run 2-3 times per week
- Attend local sports / youth clubs
- Join the gym

Engaging Activities: It is important for our mental health that we all participate in enjoyable activities which we can completely focus on for a period of time and get lost in. For some this may be art, playing music, singing, playing sports, exercising, sea-swimming, yoga, cooking, hiking, reading, computer games.

Meaning: Engaging in activities which are meaningful to us and give us a sense of purpose nourish our wellbeing. Activities which can cultivate meaning include:

- Helping others at home or in the community
- Volunteering and giving to others
- Helping with housework
- Having a summer project
- Getting a part-time job and earning their own money

Connecting with your child: Summer can be a great opportunity to reconnect with your child following a difficult year where there may have been significant stresses. It is important to make time to speak with your child about their interests and experiences, even if they are not giving much back in return. This communicates to them the message that you're thinking about them and you are there for them as a support if and when they need it.

Connecting with Others: For many this has been the most challenging aspect of the pandemic. Children and young people develop socially and emotionally by interacting with others and learn from these successful and unsuccessful experiences along the way. Therefore, it is important they are facilitated to reconnect with peers and meet new people safely over the summer. This can be achieved by:

- Joining a new club
- Learning a new skill
- Doing a summer course
- Facilitating meet-ups with friends

Promoting a healthy relationship with technology: It is important that we help children and young people to use technology safely to ensure their use of technology does not place them in harm's way and does not harm others. Some strategies include:

- Agreeing an appropriate amount of time to use technology each day
- Agreeing times when technology is not used (e.g., in bed, at the dinner table)
- Removing technology from the bedroom
- Talking to your child about the appropriate use of technology
- Refraining from interacting online with those they do not know

- Not sharing any personal or financial information

Section 2: Resources, Useful links & Additional Supports

- The **National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)** have developed several practical wellbeing guidance documents and resources for parents and students which are available [here](#). Resources include:
 - [Managing Stress and Anxiety: A Guide for Parents and Guardians](#)
 - [How to Calm and Support your Child: Advice for Parents and Guardians](#)
 - [Managing Thoughts and Feelings](#)
 - [Panic Attacks](#)
 - [Relaxation Techniques](#)
- The **‘LetsTalkDLR’** website provides the facts about the mental health services in your area, lets you hear about other young people’s experiences, and helps you to connect to get the help and support you need! - <https://www.letstalkdlr.ie/>
- The **HSE** have developed an information and support service website www.yourmentalhealth.ie to provide advice on how to mind your mental health. Topics covered include:
 - Information on common mental health issues such as depression and anxiety
 - Advice on how to cope with difficult situations that can impact your mental health
 - Mental health supports and services during COVID-19
 - Help for a mental health emergency or crisis. Free call Samaritans 116123 or Text YMH to 50808
 - Things you can do to support your mental wellbeing
 - Practical advice on how you can help someone experiencing mental health issues
- **Healthy Ireland** is a collective initiative working for improved health and wellbeing in Ireland which offers practical advice and support. See <http://www.gov.ie/healthyireland>
- **SpunOut** provides health information for young people on mental health, sexual health, exam stress and general lifestyle. SpunOut also has an extensive online directory of supports and services in local areas. See <https://spunout.ie/>
- **Jigsaw:** Jigsaw offer a listening ear, and give expert advice and support to young people aged 12 – 25 years-old. They give families, teachers, and those who support young people’s mental health ways to cope and skills to be there for young people. <https://jigsaw.ie/>
- Turn2Me provides peer support forums with a moderator, online support groups, access to Thought Catcher (a mood measuring tool) and one-to-one online counselling. <https://turn2me.ie/>

- **Your family doctor (GP):** A GP can give you information about the supports available in your area.
- **Samaritans:** Samaritans is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and provides confidential, non-judgemental, emotional support for people who are experiencing feelings of distress, despair or suicidal thoughts. Free helpline: 116 123. www.samaritans.ie
- **Pieta House** provides a free, therapeutic counselling service to people who are experiencing thoughts of suicide and those who engage in self-harm. Tel: (01) They also have a 24-hour suicide prevention and bereavement service for anyone experiencing thoughts of suicide or bereaved through suicide. Free helpline: 1800 247 247. www.pieta.ie
- **AWARE** is a national voluntary organisation providing support for depression. Aware provides face-to-face, phone and online support for people experiencing mild to moderate depression, as well as friends and families who are concerned for a loved one. See <https://www.aware.ie>. Helpline: 1890 303 302 (Monday to Sunday, 10am to 10pm). Support email: wecanhelp@aware.ie

Online Training

- **Stress Control** - a six session online, evidence based workshop aimed at adults. This is available at the following site: www.stresscontrol.ie
- **Minding Your Wellbeing Programme:** New online Minding Your Wellbeing – A new mental health and wellbeing programme launched 03/11. It consists of 5 video sessions (20 min) which can be accessed by visiting www.yourmentalhealth.ie
- The **‘Minding your Mental Health During Coronavirus’** section of the HSE website is updated on a regular basis and provides information on a range of supports and tips to aid people’s mental health during the pandemic. To view this site, please click on the following link: <https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/mental-health/covid-19/minding-your-mental-health-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak.html>
- **START** – A new 90 minute online programme which enables participants to recognise someone’s thoughts of suicide and take action to ensure they receive help. For further information and to register, please email admin@breakingthrough.org