



# #MindYourSelfie



## Secondary Teacher Mental Health Awareness

## Introduction:

On a week-to-week basis young people often spend more time in school than they do anywhere else. The school environment provides an ideal opportunity for students to become aware of positive mental health and mental health difficulties. Teachers are uniquely placed to use this opportunity to offer education around such topics. Teachers have an opportunity through their own role modelling, knowledge and teaching to make a positive difference in the lifestyle choices of students.



### HOW CAN I HELP/ WHAT CAN I DO:

- Become informed about mental health and illness
- Model a positive attitude towards mental health
- Promote a safe environment
- Connect with students' families
- Establish care teams

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Feelings of alienation or not belonging may make a young person more vulnerable to mental ill health. The quality of a young person's relationship with teachers and peers may affect their sense of belonging. A protective effect and positive environment can be provided by:

- supportive relationships based on mutual respect
- positive interpersonal relationships
- classes that foster and reward the practice of helping and supporting each other
- being available to students
- putting in place a strong pupil led anti bullying policy
- making links with local mental health services and identifying someone you can call upon if you need advice



“Factors that may contribute to the development of mental illness: stressful life events, social isolation, chemical imbalance, substance mis-use.”



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# DOS & DON'TS

## DON'T

- Use negative language
- Refer to people by their illness in a negative way
- Talk about people
- Be judgemental
- Assume someone else is dealing with the issue
- Underestimate the young person's abilities
- Keep the information

## DO

- Use respectful language
- Put the young person first
- Talk with young people about their mental health concerns
- Become informed about mental health and illness
- Be supportive and understanding
- Spend time with the person
- Listen to him or her
- Get support, don't try to support a student on your own



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Adolescence signifies a shift away from childhood and a move towards adulthood and independence. As such this period can provide some challenges or difficulties for students/young people. Some mental health difficulties experienced by adolescents are on-going, while others may be contextual or related to specific times or occasions. Mental health and mental illness exist across a continuum. By this we mean that many mental health concerns can be transient and resolve themselves with time and others are more enduring and therefore are more likely to cause distress.

### What's the difference between mental distress and mental disorder?

#### **Mental Distress:**

Commonly caused by a problem or event; usually not severe (can be severe), usually short lasting; does not affect a young person's overall level of functioning, professional help not usually needed.

#### **Mental Disorder:**

Less common, may happen without any stress; often with severity, can be long lasting; level of functioning is impacted, professional help needed.

So in fact it is not always the severity of the symptom that defines the need to intervene but often the enduring nature of the problem. Teachers observe students over long periods of time on a regular basis and are therefore ideally positioned to note the onset of mental health difficulties and to keep a record of the duration of the behaviour. Such information can help in establishing the severity or enduring nature of the problem.

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## WHAT DO I NEED TO WATCH OUT FOR?

Many young people with mental health difficulties will demonstrate a gradual onset of the illness. Early signs include: social withdrawal; odd behaviours; lack of self care; significant mood changes; deterioration of academic performance; appetite and weight changes; lack of motivation or concentration.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO?

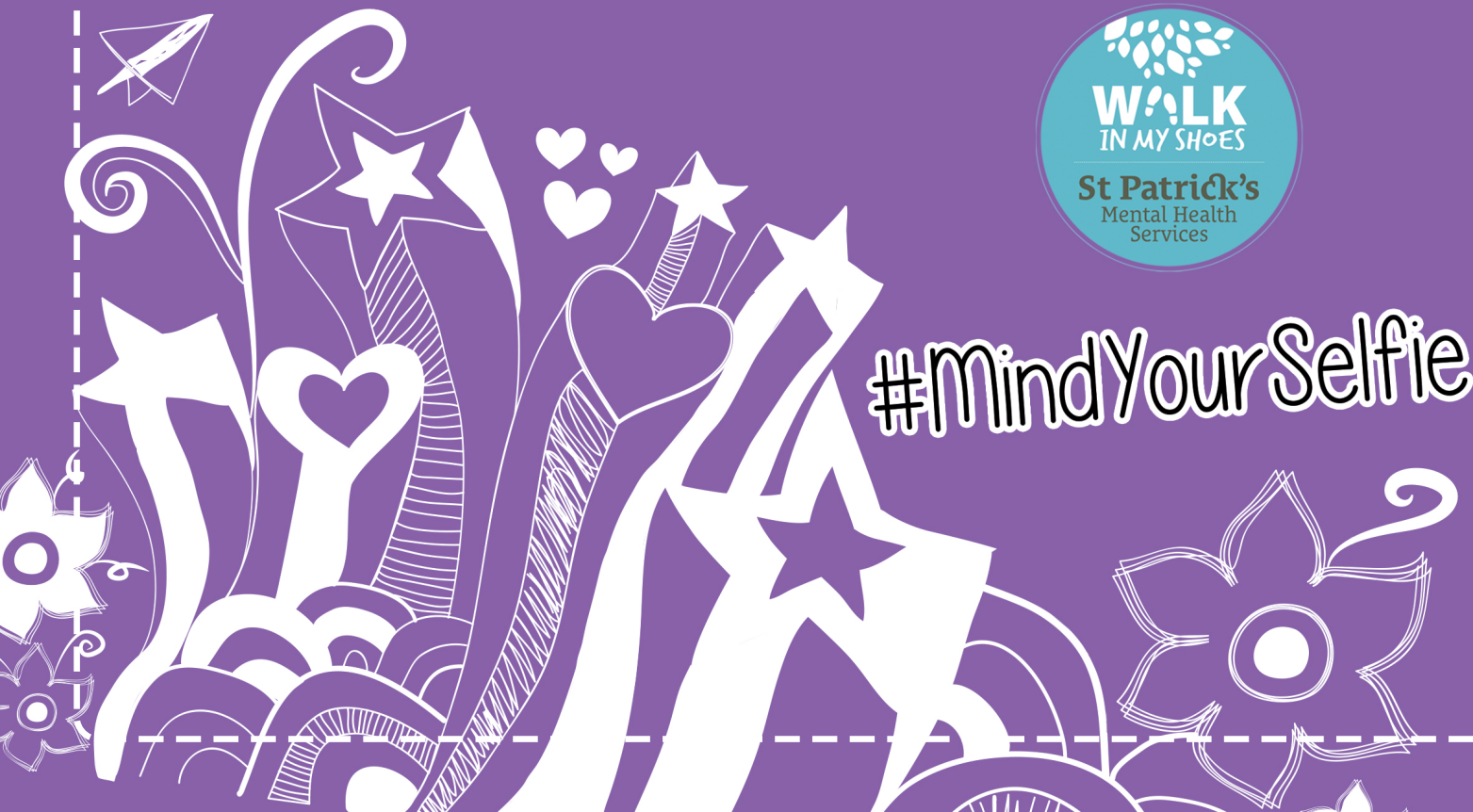
Make a note of your concerns and discuss with other teachers. You should approach colleagues with counselling expertise for advice. Address your concerns with the young person. If not satisfied, contact the parents of the young person if you have concerns (do not wait for parent teacher meetings). Depending on your concerns you can advise that the young person attend their GP for a check-up.

## COPING

Coping is an important aspect of mental health and is individual to each young person. Some young people will experience significant trauma in their lives and display a resilience to manage these life events without many observable adverse effects. This may indeed be an established coping skill set and is to be encouraged. Many of us get concerned with trying to identify and seek out problems and often this is not all that helpful. So accept sometimes that some young people 'just manage very well'.



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# For your Mental Health Awareness Project in School....

## ...CONSIDER

ways of helping others to recognise signs that a young person is struggling with his/her mental health e.g. fact sheet, school talks, posters, school website /magazine etc.

## ...TACKLE

the stigma about mental illness, which is a huge barrier to young people seeking support. Look at how you and your friends think and talk about mental health/illness and how you can start to fight the stigma.

## ...AIM

to improve your own and other's awareness about young people's mental health in your school and your community.

## ...INFORM

yourself and others about ways to sustain good mental health, to recognise the warning signs and to get help for mental health difficulties.

## ...THINK

about issues affecting mental health such as:  
Stress, Family Problems,  
Financial Worries,  
School Pressures, Drugs,  
Alcohol, Bullying,  
Online Bullying

## Next Steps

- Consider how the whole school can promote positive mental health
- Highlight ways to create awareness among friends, family, teachers and others about how you can support someone with mental health problems
- Consider what peer supports at school can help people to deal with problems e.g. lists of self-help supports for students, new student mentoring programme

**Support and help is out there for those affected with mental health problems - You CAN make a difference**

EARLY INTERVENTION AND  
TREATMENT IS KEY TO RECOVERY

## WHAT TO DO?

ASKING FOR HELP IS A SIGN OF STRENGTH  
NOT WEAKNESS

St. Patrick's Mental Health Services  
For Free Support and Information

**Call 01 249 3333**

**info@stpatsmail.com**



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