

# **SPHE Resources**

To support 5th and 6th year students as they return to school

2020

# Introduction

As students return to school, their extended absence will have impacted on their learning, wellbeing and overall connection to school. All aspects of wellbeing have been affected by recent events. For many young people, the unforeseen and rapid change in life has presented opportunities. Some will have enjoyed closer family bonds, rich learning experiences, and a greater sense of community. For others, the prolonged time at home, with the associated separation from peers, teachers and other supports, will have created significant challenges. While some students engaged well with remote learning, others will have had limited engagement for a variety of reasons, such as inadequate access to IT or Wi-Fi, minding younger siblings as parents worked, difficulty managing the loss of normal routines, lack of access to a quiet space to work.

All students have experienced Covid-19 differently. That said, all students have been away from school for a long time and will need time and support as they settle into learning.

This year's 5th and 6th years will be arriving back with the usual range of emotions that students feel as they begin to prepare for the Leaving Certificate – nervousness, dread, anticipation – alongside worries associated with having missed out on learning and uncertainties about possible further disruption to learning and assessment in the coming school year.

The purpose of these resources is to create a safe space in which young people can reconnect with each other and with school, have conversations about the impact of recent and current experiences of living with Covid-19, and build on their coping strategies so that they can re-engage in learning and manage day-to-day life in the months ahead. These resources are designed for use within the SPHE class. Alternatively, they can be used to plan stand-alone workshops during the first days back to school, perhaps facilitated by the guidance counsellor, class tutor or school chaplain.

In schools where SPHE is timetabled, these lessons will support and complement the <u>senior cycle SPHE</u> <u>curriculum framework (NCCA,</u> 2011).

Overall aim of these lessons:

- to enable students to **reflect** upon the impact of Covid-19 on their wellbeing
- to help students **re-connect** with school and with each other
  - to **foster** some of the skills, attitudes and dispositions needed for re-engaging successfully in learning.

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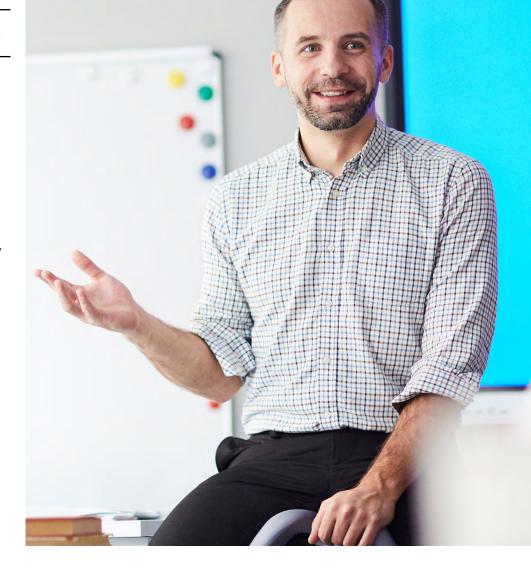
# NOTES FOR THE TEACHER

### **5 KEY WELLBEING MESSAGES**

In transitioning back to school, there are 5 key wellbeing messages that the Department of Education recommend embedding within the school community:

- 1. a sense of safety
- 2. calming
- 3. self and community efficacy
- 4. social connectedness
- 5. hope

These messages are embedded within this resource.



### THE FOCUS OF THESE LESSONS IS TO

- promote a sense of safety (by sharing public health guidelines, explaining changes to the school environment, etc.)
- acknowledge and affirm different emotions and experiences that students may have as they return to school
- re-establish and build connections, relationships and a sense of belonging with peers, teachers and the school
- support students in identifying ways of managing their transition back to school
- build a sense of empowerment, hope and efficacy
- promote a sense of calm by introducing students to ways to relax and regulate emotions
- support students in planning and looking forward to the next phase of their learning.

Before meeting with your students, it is important to be aware of your own wellbeing and possible anxieties that you might be bringing back to school. Acknowledge your own concerns and support yourself or seek support to manage these concerns. While it is important to keep your own worries in check when facilitating dialogue with the students, it is also helpful to share a little of your own experience, if you are comfortable doing so. In facilitating these learning activities, it is important to convey a calm and positive tone and express hope and confidence in young people's resilience and capacity to cope. (See guidance for facilitating classroom conversations)

It will also be helpful to meet with other teachers to plan how you will use or adapt these lessons and how to pace and pitch them to suit your students. Some lessons may need to be revisited with a small cohort of students in smaller groups, e.g. with the SEN staff/care team/guidance counsellor. While the majority of students will bounce back from any negative impacts of Covid-19 in time, a small percentage may have experienced particularly distressing events or show signs of long-term or serious distress and need targeted specialist support.

Schools can share these lessons with parents/guardians to enable them to understand what is being addressed in school and to continue the conversation at home with their children.

# GUIDANCE FOR FACILITATING CLASSROOM CONVERSATIONS

All students need time to process the experiences of the past few months and to adjust to the new 'normal'. So what can you do to help?

### **BE A GOOD LISTENER**

Think about yourself as a child or young adult. Did anyone make you feel truly listened to? If so, what did they do? Copy this! Be open and interested. Imagine what life has been like for children and young people in many different circumstances. Show empathy but avoid intensely questioning or probing personal stories. Don't put anyone on the spot. Just listen attentively, be interested and show you care.

### VALIDATE THEIR FEELINGS

Voice the feelings you pick up without targeting a specific student (e.g. 'It sounds like a number of you are worried about that.'). Remind them that worrying is normal and some stress can even be helpful – motivating us to be alert, focus or take actions to care for ourselves (e.g. it can help us to follow public health guidelines).

### FOCUS ON THEIR STRENGTHS AND CAPABILITIES

Help them to recognise the strengths they have developed and how these can help in challenging situations. Remind them of how they coped during the lock-down and the ways they showed resilience.

### UNDERSTAND FEELINGS

All emotions, pleasant and unpleasant are like waves, they come and go. They are not a permanent state. Being able to acknowledge our emotions and talk to someone about them can make it easier to cope with unpleasant emotions. Encourage them to talk to their parents/carers or other trusted adults about their concerns.

### **OFFER REASSURANCE**

Reassure students that there are many people looking after them, in school, at home and in the wider society. Keep the reassurance low key. Over-reassuring can make us think we need to be worrying more than we are! Also remind them that there'll be good days ahead and things to look forward to.

### SOLUTIONS AND COPING MECHANISMS

Help students find solutions and coping mechanisms together. Brainstorm solutions and ways of coping together, resisting the urge to interrupt or jump in with prescribed solutions. Then encourage them to pick the best solution that might work for them. Allowing them to find mechanisms themselves or in groups will help them repeat this in the future and build efficacy.

### DEALING WITH UPSET

If a student becomes upset, let them know that this is very normal and understandable. They may need a private space to avoid feeling embarrassed in front of their peers. Once calmed down, s/he might feel supported by reassurances that others are probably feeling like this too. If appropriate, it might be useful to ask the rest of the group -Who else feels a bit like this - a show of hands, or even a few head nods, can be reassuring. It can also be helpful to ask - How can we look after each other today or what could make today a little better?

As always, seek support from the school's structures such as the Student Support Team, if you have ongoing concerns about a particular student. If you have child protection concerns report to the designated liaison person (usually the principal) in the school.

# **GROUND RULES**

Ground rules are most effective when they are negotiated and agreed with students, rather than imposed by the teacher. So when agreeing ground rules with the class it is important that:

- Students are actively involved in deciding the ground rules
- The ground rules are understood and accepted as an agreed basis for working together
- Students understand how keeping these rules will help everyone feel safe and respected in the classroom
- The ground rules are referred to regularly in order to positively reinforce them and revised, or if necessary, renegotiated.

### **GETTING STARTED**

Explain to the students that you want this class to be a space where everyone feels comfortable and safe and can talk about things that really matter. So before getting started it might be helpful for the class to agree some ground rules. To prompt this process, first ask these questions

'What would help to make you feel comfortable and safe participating in this class?' The ideas generated through this brainstorm can help feed into an agreed set of ground rules.

### Openness while respecting boundaries

We will be open and honest, but not discuss directly our own or others' personal/private lives. We will discuss general situations as examples but will not use names or descriptions which could identify anyone. We will not put anyone 'on the spot'. Neither will the teacher!

### Keep the conversation in the room

We feel safe discussing things within this space, and we know that other students and our teacher will not repeat what is said in the classroom - except where the teacher is concerned someone is at risk. In this case they will follow the school's safeguarding policy.

### Non-judgemental approach

It is okay for us to disagree with another person's point of view but we will not judge, make fun of, or put anybody down. We may 'challenge the opinion not the person'.

### **Right to pass**

Taking part is important. However, we have the right to pass on answering a question or participating in an activity.

### Make no assumptions

We will not make assumptions about people's values, attitudes, behaviours, life experiences or feelings.

### Listen to others

We will listen to the other person's point of view and expect to be listened to. Everyone deserves equal space and time to share their experience and emotions.

#### Using language

We will use the respectful language and the correct terms for the things we will be discussing rather than the slang terms, as some people can find that offensive. If we are not sure what the correct term is we can ask our teacher.

### Asking questions

We know that there are no 'stupid' questions. We do not ask questions to deliberately try to embarrass anyone else. (You might also consider making a question box available for anonymous questions).

<sup>1</sup> When covering confidentiality, students should be clear that teachers cannot promise to keep information confidential, and that they will share information with staff members with safeguarding responsibilities if they think students are at risk or in danger.

# LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Please use and adapt these activities to suit your particular students' needs and context.

### Time required:

These activities can be used to design a once-off 2-3 hour workshop or can be used over a series of SPHE classes during the first weeks back to school. It is important not to rush through the activities and to allow for student dialogue and reflection.

# **SESSION 1**

### We're all in this together

Framing the conversation: We are starting back to school after a six months break that none of us planned on happening. It has been different for all of us, for you, your teachers, your families and friends. Some might have coped with the change, discovering strengths and skills that you didn't realise you had. For others, being away from school might have been difficult, lonely. Now that you are back at school you may be feeling lots of mixed emotions. All of your teachers will be working to help you settle back to school and to learning.

In these classes/workshop, you will get a chance to reflect on your time out of school, share your hopes and fears about being back and share strategies that will help you to learn successfully in the year ahead. As your teacher/tutor/guidance counsellor I will be listening carefully to what you are saying and we will agree at the end of each session if there are any ideas/suggestions that you think would be useful for other teachers or the Principal to hear about in order to be able to help and support you and your learning in school.

### STEPS

Step 1: Icebreakers and ground rules Icebreaker -Line up in the order of your names or birthdays without talking (while maintaining social distancing)

You might add some fun and challenge by blindfolding half the group and those with blindfolds can talk and those without can't. Draw out discussion on how they helped each other, what it feels like to be seen and not heard, etc.

Then agree the ground rules that will help make the classroom a safe place for everyone to participate in these lessons/workshop. Step 2: All that we share? Show this 3 minute video – <u>All that</u> <u>we share</u> (Credit: TV2 Danmark) and ask the students to comment on the main message that they took away from watching it.

Invite students to reflect on all the ways that they, as a class and as a year group, are different and the things they all share. It is the things we share that create a bond. During the coming months they will be relying on the support of each other.

In these lessons/workshops we'll be looking at ways to strengthen their connections and relationships with each other as well as looking at ways they can develop and build upon their coping strategies.

**'Blobs'** is a fun way to reinforce the things we share in common and can help build a sense of solidarity.

Invite students to create a 'blob', i.e. stand together (following social distancing guidelines), or simply stand up if any of the following sample statements are true for them:

- I can speak more than one language
- I'm vegetarian
- I can play a musical instrument
- I play on a team
- I have a brother/sister in the school
- I enjoyed learning at home when schools were shut
- I am happy to be back at school
- I know what I want to do when I finish school
- I haven't any idea what I want to do when I finish school.

### Step 3: What's it like being back at school?

Each student is given a copy of the worksheet on the following page (or if that's not possible display an image of the worksheet onto the whiteboard). First ask students to complete the questions alone and then form pairs or small groups (physically distanced) and invite students to share their responses. If there is anything they would prefer not to share that's okay too.



#### Step 4: Class discussion

The 'being back at school' exercise will need some time to allow for feedback and discussion. In facilitating class discussion, it is important to acknowledge and affirm the different feelings, thoughts, hopes and fears that students may have. This will also be a good opportunity to allay some fears or worries and to reassure them that their concerns are being addressed at school level and system level. For 6th years who may be worried about 'catching up' on the curriculum or being prepared for the exams, you can assure them that this has been looked at very carefully by the DES (Department of Education and Skills) and their teachers will be able to share information about changes to the exams, that take into account the recent disruption to their learning.

### Teacher note

It is important to support young people in finding their own coping strategies to help them in managing day-to-day challenges and to convey confidence that they have the resilience and coping skills to manage. Equally, it is also important to let young people know that they are not expected to deal with significant stress or anxiety on their own.

This may be a good opportunity to talk about the Student Support/Pastoral Care team and Guidance Counsellor in the school. If a student shows signs of significant worries or anxiety in the lives, it is important that you seek support from the school support system. Issues regarding child protection should always be referred to the principal or designated liaison person.

# **BEING BACK AT SCHOOL**

	I'm happy about
	I'm worried/concerned about
A	*****
	I'm looking forward/excited about

Time in the bubble – the best of times, the worst of times?

#### Focus for discussion:

In this next activity you will be reflecting upon and sharing the good things and the challenges of life and learning when we were all 'in the bubble'. The focus of discussion is on how you coped with the tricky bits. You will be sharing the strategies that you used so that by listening to each other you can build up a repertoire of coping strategies and further develop your own coping strategies.

### **STEPS**

### Step 1: How was your time in the bubble?

The class is divided into six groups. Each group receives a bundle of postits. They are invited to complete the postits in response to a series of prompt questions which the teacher reads out. When they have answered the questions place them on individual flip chart pages spread around the room. Students can then review the different responses that their peers made to the questions.

- What was good/beneficial about the recent lockdown?
- What was challenging?
- How did you cope with the challenging bits? What did you think or do to help you manage?
- What helped you to learn?
- What made learning difficult?
- What skills did you notice you had or needed to develop? (e.g. goal-setting, self-management and time-management skills, computer skills, etc)

### Step 2: Suggested follow up discussion points

- What can we learn from the Covid experience? Prompt students to think about how they can continue to build upon the positive experiences, habits or skills that they developed over recent months now that they are back at school.
- Write down one coping mechanism you've learnt from the Covid experience that you can use for life? Share with a partner/small group. Some possible suggestions - Create tiny goals, even day-to-day, keep connected with friends and supports, practice gratitude, focus on looking forward, etc.

### **Teacher note**

When facilitating a whole class discussion around these questions, it will be important to remind students about the boundaries and ground rules for discussion that have previously been agreed. For example, in talking about learning at home during school closure, it is important not to name specific teachers. It is also important to acknowledge that the situation wasn't ideal for students and teachers alike and so we want to focus on what we can learn from it. You might share the feedback based on a survey of Australian students who were interviewed about their experience of learning under lock-down (Appendix 1). It might be interesting to compare Irish students' experience with that of Australian students.

### Step 3:

Conclude by sharing a link to a short google survey about what it was like to learn remotely (appendix 2). Ask students to fill it in over the coming days so that you can share the feedback in next week's class.

### This survey can be found at this link.

When this link opens, you will be given an option to duplicate the form for your own use. You will then have an editable version of the survey that you can adapt or use. Responses will be collected to your own MS Forms platform and no data will be collected or stored by NCCA.

A screengrab of the survey can be found on the following pages.

### Step 4:

Conclude with a short breathing or relaxation exercise.

### Learning Remotely Survey

This survey aims to help your teachers have a better understanding about what remote learning was like for you when you could no longer attend school due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Your teachers would like to know what aspects of remote learning worked best for you. It would also be useful to know if there are any approaches used during this time that you would like to see continued now that you are back at school. We will use your feedback from this survey in two ways:

- To discuss the findings in SPHE class and share your ideas with your teachers
- To improve the support we provide for your learning in school.

Thank you for taking the time to do this survey and please take your time completing it.

1. Please rate the degree to which you strongly agree or strongly disagree with the following statements:

During the school closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I enjoyed learning	$\bigcirc$	$\bigcirc$	0	0	0
I was motivated to learn	0	0	0	0	0
l felt happy with the contact I had with the school	0	0	0	$\bigcirc$	0

#### 2. Did you have access to the following to support learning from home?

	Yes	No	Sometimes
A desktop computer, laptop, or other device to access schoolwork from	0	0	0
Wi-Fi	0	$\bigcirc$	0

3. When learning remotely, please mark whether the following statements were

#### Always true Sometimes true Never true

	Always true	Sometimes true	Never true
l was able to organize myself and make a work plan	0	0	0
l could work at my own pace	•	•	•
I had the skills I needed to be able to work on my own	0	0	0
Teachers gave just the right amount of work		0	
l got helpful feedback on my work	0	0	0
I preferred classes that happened in real time – e.g. Zoom, Google classroom	•	0	0

	Always true	Sometimes true	Never true
l preferred when teachers sent a short recording l could listen to or view at my own pace		0	0
l was more comfortable working at home			
l felt isolated working at home	0	0	0
I felt safe at home		0	0
It was easier to communicate with my teachers	0	0	Ō
It was easier to communicate with my friends/classmates			

4. If you would like to comment on any of the above please use this box:

Enter your answer

5. Are there any parts of learning remotely you would like to continue in face-to-face learning back at school? Please include your suggestions here:

Enter your answer

6. Are there particular skills that would have helped you while working from home? (E.g. planning, prioritising, goal setting, coping skills)

Please include your suggestions here:

Enter your answer

7. To what degree did learning from home help you to develop the Wellbeing Indicators?

	A lot	A little	Not at all
Active	0	Q	0
Connected	0	0	0
Resilient	0	0	0
Responsible			
Aware	0	0	0
Respected	0	0	0

8. Finally - please use this space for anything else you would like to share regarding your experience of learning remotely

Enter your answer

Reviewing the survey of our experience of remote learning

#### Framing the conversation:

Explain that in this lesson they will get a chance to look at the survey findings to see what are the key messages coming through and how the findings can be used to support them and their learning.

### STEPS

**Step 1:** In advance of the class, the results of the Google survey should be downloaded in graph form and photocopied Ask students to form small groups and give each small group the results of one section of the survey (rather than having to digest it all!).

Invite students to work in small groups to review the findings, with these questions on a worksheet to guide their discussion:

- Were you surprised with the results? Why/why not?
- In your opinion, what were the reasons for these responses?
- How do you think this survey might be used by your school to help students' learning?

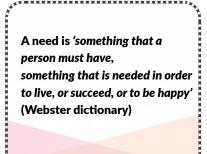
### Step 2: Suggested whole class discussion:

- What are the big messages for students and our school from this survey?
- What skills are coming out as being important to support learning?
- What one thing would this class like to focus on in the coming weeks/months?
- What one or two practical suggestions will go forward from this class to your teachers/ school management?

### Looking forward

#### Framing the conversation:

In this session, you will get a chance to talk about what you need in order to support your wellbeing now that you are back at school and you'll be discussing practical things you can do to support your wellbeing needs and the needs of others.



### STEPS

#### Step 1: What are my needs?

Explain that the famous psychologist, Abraham Mazlow put forward the idea that everyone has the same human needs and they are like a ladder or hierarchy. In other words, we need our basic needs to be met to allow us to fully realise our other higher needs.

Invite students to individually brainstorm their needs in the context of their life right now. Then working in pairs ask students to compile a common list of the many different needs you share and see if you can agree where you would place each one on a ladder (with the most basic needs at the bottom)

Once students have had a go at creating their own ladder of needs then share Mazlow's hierarchy (p.19) and invite them to fill in what they agree is relevant at the different levels – for example, not being bullied fits as a safety need.

BASIC NEEDS

### Suggested follow up discussion points

HIGHER NEEDS

How was your ladder of needs similar to Mazlow's hierarchy? How was it different?

### **Teacher note**

It is important for students not to feel totally responsible for looking after their needs or the needs of their peers. While we all must take individual responsibility for our wellbeing, other adults have a role and responsibility too.

**Step 2: Looking more deeply** Form small group of 3-4 and assign each group one level of the hierarchy – physiological, psychological or selffulfilment. As a group, consider the following questions and record your responses.

- What aspects of school life and life outside of school are relevant at the level you are considering?
- How can young people support themselves and each other at this level?
- How can the school/your teachers provide support for your needs? (no matter how small these needs/concerns are)

As an extension activity you might show the following clip from Mental Health Ireland on the <u>Five Ways</u> <u>to Wellbeing</u>. (2 mins 40 sec) and discuss how these five ways relate to earlier discussion and the strategies that the students have already suggested.

### The Five Ways to Wellbeing are simple actions to practice each day to maintain or improve our wellbeing.

- Connecting with others
- Keeping active
- Learning new things
- Giving to others (e.g. acts of kindness)
- Noticing the world around us (e.g. practicing mindfulness or gratitude)

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### Step 3: Reflection on learning

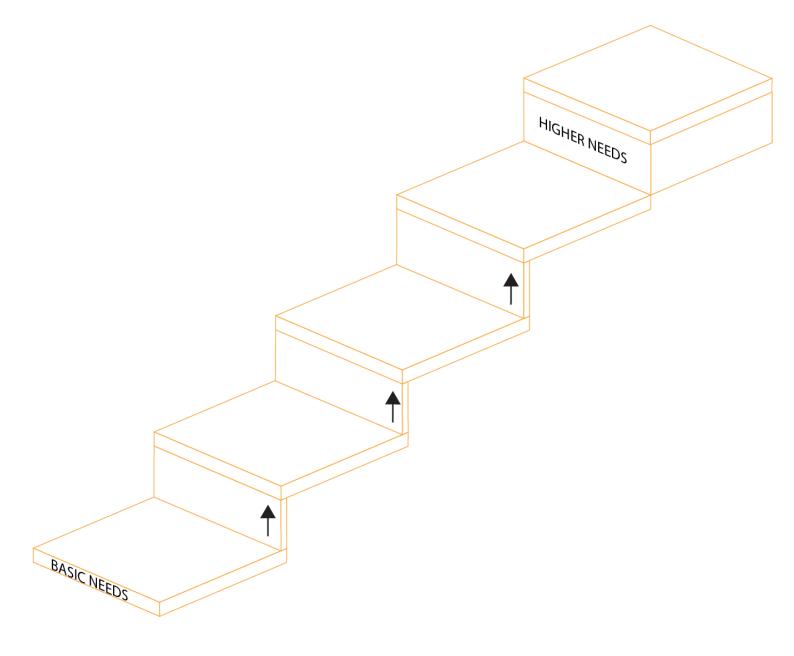
Remind the students that in these classes/workshop we have reflected together on our experiences since we were last in school and what we need to support us now that we are back at school. Invite students to reflect on their learning from today's session using the following

- What have I learned today? What are the important ideas I'm taking away with me?
- 2. So what does this mean for me?
- 3. Now what? What small practical things will I do to support my overall wellbeing?

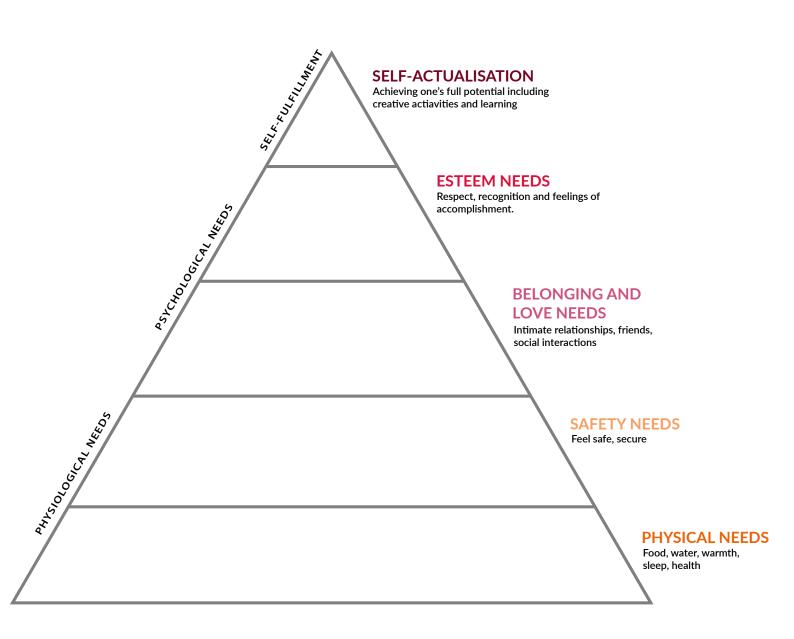
Where your school is planning follow on workshops/SPHE lessons then the following question might also be useful – Are there skills you need to develop or things that you need to learn about in order to be better able to take care of your wellbeing?

The students' suggestions can help inform planning of future lessons.





### MAZLOW'S HIERARCHY OF HUMAN NEEDS



## Appendix 1

What Australian students said about learning remotely

### What was the best part about learning from home?

- I can learn at my own pace
- Feels more comfortable at home
- It allows me to sleep more
- I don't have to commute to school
- Learning at home is less stressful
- I don't have to wear a uniform
- Enjoy spending more time with my family
- It's quieter at home
- Easier to communicate with teachers
- Easier to communicate with friends

### This is the summary of a recent survey completed by students in Victoria, Australia about their experience of learning at home due to Covid-19. How would your experience compare to theirs?

### What was the worst part about learning from home?

- More difficult to communicate with teachers
- Miss learning with friends/ classmates
- Too much work
- Feel overwhelmed
- Find it hard to stay motivated
- Too many distractions or too noisy at home
- More time with my family
- No space at home to do my work
- I don't feel safe at home
- No access to internet or device for learning

### 'I'm finding it overwhelming to keep up'.

'At school, I was up to date with almost everything. Now learning from home, I'm behind. The reason why I've fallen behind is because of the environment, the feeling is much different here at home. At school, I'm ordered to do things, but at home, I'm not ordered. I'm too comfortable at home to the point I don't really want to do my classwork. I'm too relaxed. There's also so many distractions here at home compared to school.'

'It's just been a lot more work load, and of course it has been more difficult to communicate with teachers about the work load, so I am falling behind. But this is not because I am slacking, it is because I am trying my absolute best, but still being crushed by workload.'

'I like the way I can message my teacher for help without the class knowing I need help.'

'I feel relaxed and less stress when learning from home.'

'I can do things when I want and I think I have learned to be more organized'.

'Learning at home is way better than at school. I can do everything at my own pace and there are less distractions.'

'I find it easier to learn when I'm not pressuring myself to finish it quickly'.

'l can learn better because l don't feel as shy as l do at school.'

Credit: This is derived from Learning from remote learning, a survey published by Victoria Student Representative Council (VicSCR), 2020

# **USEFUL WEBLINKS**

Relaxation techniques for use with children and young people (DES/NEPS) https://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Announcements/new-relaxation-techniques.pdf

Five Ways to Wellbeing www.mentalhealthireland.ie (scroll under resources)

#### www.yourmentalhealth.ie

Click on "Looking after your mental health". See also the *Little Things* campaign and the *Mind Monsters* campaign, the latter was developed based on research with young people.

<u>www.spunout.ie</u> A website with lots of resources for young people and links to support services.

https://www.stpaulscollege.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/5th-YEAR-STUDY-LEARNING-TO-LEARN-IGC-17.pdf 5th/6th year Study – Learning to Learn guidelines (Institute of Guidance Counsellors)

Which study habits can you improve? -checklist on www.educationplanner.org/students (Go to Self-Assessments)

Sleep is your superpower short video by YouCurious? on Youtube (3 mins 45 seconds)

All that we share (TV2 Danmark) on Youtube (3 minute video)

SPHE online resource portal site https://www.pdst.ie/pp/healthwellbeing/distance-learning

https://www.walkinmyshoes.ie/campaigns/mindyourselfie/mindyourselfie-resources, A website with resources for young people developed by St. Patrick's Mental Health Services.

#### https://schools.au.reachout.com/wellbeing-5s

A website with lots of 5 minute activities to help build relationships, connections and wellbeing