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Welcome

Welcome to the first journal of the SPHE Support Service (Post Primary). I hope you enjoy reading it.

We value the relationship we have with schools – Principals, SPHE Co-ordinators, SPHE teachers, staff, students and parents and hope that this journal reflects and supports that relationship. In it you will find a range of perspectives and insights into how SPHE is implemented and valued.

SPHE promotes personal and social development and contributes to the health and well-being of students, teachers and the wider school community. It can be challenging and rewarding and we hope that you experience both. It can also be hard work that requires on-going maintenance and support. This is the role of the Support Service so please contact us if we can assist you in any way.

John Lahiff

National Co-ordinator SPHE (Post-Primary)



Sean Power, Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children, Mary Hanafin, Minister for Education and Science and John Lahiff, National Co-ordinator, SPHE Post Primary at the Launch of the SPHE Story

SPHE – Support Service

Social, Personal and Health Education became a required part of the core curriculum at Junior Cycle for all schools in 2003. However commitment to the holistic development of students is not new to Irish education. There have always been enlightened institutions and individual teachers who believe that the school's responsibility to the student does not end with the academic. Many schools were already implementing aspects of Social, Personal and Health

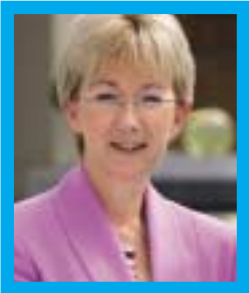
Education prior to 2003. To help schools establish and maintain a meaningful and sustainable SPHE Programme relevant to the needs of their students, the SPHE Support Service, Post-Primary, was established.

This Support Service is a partnership between the Department of Education and Science, the Department of Health and Children and the Health Service Executive and consists of regional support teams

corresponding to the former health board areas. Teacher in-service training anchors the work of the Support Service. School based support includes assistance with programme planning, policy development, visits to SPHE teams and principals, workshops for whole staff groups, help with choosing and using resources, the development of the Health Promoting School process and promoting parent involvement.

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SPHE Post-Primary,
Marino Institute of Education,
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www.sphe.ie



Minister Mary Hanafin

As Minister for Education and Science I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the first SPHE Post Primary Journal. Social Personal and Health Education has been a required part of the core curriculum at Junior Cycle for all Post Primary schools since September 2003. It is a welcome addition to the richness and breadth of the education experience in addressing the development of the whole person.

Society in Ireland has experienced many changes over the past number of years. The SPHE Programme endeavours to equip students to deal with the many challenges they will encounter on life's journey.

While schools have always had a commitment to the development of the whole person, the SPHE Programme, I believe, provides students with a dedicated time and space to develop skills and competencies to learn about themselves, to care for themselves and others and to make informed decisions about their health, personal lives and social development.

It is my view that SPHE is an important area of the curriculum. Indeed personal and social development is a prerequisite for successful learning. A young person who has a high degree of self-worth, a sense of security and a positive self image, will be more predisposed to school life and the variety of learning situations it offers.

The effectiveness of any SPHE Programme is dependent on whole school support which incorporates the principles of equity, respect, tolerance and reward for effort which must permeate the whole school climate. Progress has been made and I would like to acknowledge the commitment of school management, and SPHE teachers in particular, to the implementation of SPHE. I believe further work is needed to embed SPHE in accordance with 'best practice'.

The SPHE Support Service Post Primary is a partnership between the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Health and children, the Health Service Executive and in association with Marino Institute of Education, with funding from the National Development Plan. I believe this partnership approach to be innovative, enriching and challenging.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish all of you involved in the SPHE process continued success.

Ní neart go cur le cheile.

Mary Hanafin

Mary Hanafin, TD
Minister for Education and Science.



Minister Sean Power

As Minister for State at the Department of Health and Children with responsibility for Health Promotion, I am delighted to be part of the first SPHE Post-Primary Journal.

The partnership approach adopted in developing and supporting the SPHE programme within the context of the Health Promoting School in our post primary schools is very welcome and continues to be a very fruitful experience. Education is well documented as being one of the key determinants of health so it is apt that the health and education sectors of government should collaborate for this important work.

The holistic aim of education as embedded in the SPHE ethos is complimented by a similarly holistic view of health within the context of the Health Promoting School. The tendency to understand health as simply the absence of illness and disease has been replaced by a multi-dimensional and more dynamic view which incorporates physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, social and sexual health. Emotional health is the ability to recognise, express and manage feelings appropriately. Mental health is our ability to think and make decisions. Spiritual health is our ability to put moral and/or religious beliefs and values into practice. Social health is our ability to make and maintain positive supportive friendships and networks of support and sexual health is acceptance of and expression of our sexuality.

The SPHE programme, which incorporates all these elements of health, thus forms a vital link in the chain of our children's education and holistic development and indeed the chain would be the weaker for its absence. The programme helps our young people to develop skills for self-fulfilment, promotes self-esteem, provides opportunities for reflection and discussion and helps to develop decision-making skills all of which enhance the potential of our young people to participate fully, creatively and in a healthy way in their communities.

The SPHE programme would not be possible without the hard work, vision and commitment of all those involved in this most valuable process. I wish to take this opportunity to compliment all of you and wish you well in your future work.

Sean Power

Sean Power, TD
Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children



AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND CHILDREN
AN ROINN SLÁINTE AGUS LEANAÍ

Junior Cycle SPHE Programme

AIMS

- To enable the students to develop skills for self-fulfilment and living in communities
- To promote self-esteem and self-confidence
- To enable students to develop a framework for responsible decision-making
- To provide opportunities for reflection and discussion
- To promote physical, mental and emotional health and well-being

MODULES

The curriculum for SPHE in junior cycle is presented in ten modules each of which appears in each year of the three-year cycle.

- Belonging and Integrating
- Self-management: a sense of purpose
- Communication Skills
- Physical Health
- Friendship
- Relationships and Sexuality
- Emotional Health
- Influences and Decisions
- Substance Use
- Personal Safety

(Department of Education and Science SPHE Curriculum)

Resources and SPHE

When you are planning your SPHE Programme resources can become a concern. There is sometimes a lot of needless panic around the issue and often the best advice is to 'think small'. There is a huge amount of materials in the general area of social and personal development and this can be confusing if you are starting off as a teacher new to SPHE.

Think of it as if it were cooking. There are thousands of cookbooks available. As a beginner you are better off with one book that covers the basics however attractive a volume on 'Fondant Icing for Festive Occasions' may appear. When you have taught SPHE for some time you will be able to differentiate between what suits you, what will work with the class group you have and what is just plain useless in the first place!

It is a good idea to begin with planning what your school wants included in their SPHE programme, deciding on the order you want these topics covered and then choosing materials to help you do this as painlessly as possible.

The SPHE Curriculum (Blue Book) gives you the modules for Junior Cycle and the aims and learning outcomes for each topic.



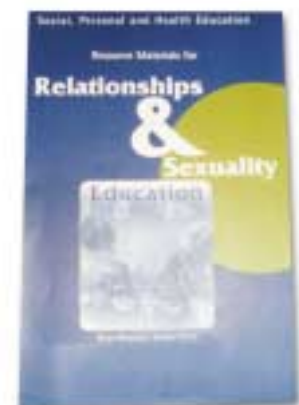
Many schools have opted to use the **Healthy Times**, **Healthy Living**, **Healthy Choices** series of Teacher Manuals and Student workbooks as their core resource along with the **RSE Resource Materials** and **On My Own Two Feet**. The SPHE Teacher Guidelines are very good at helping you marry the topics you are teaching with lesson plans in these topics from the core resources above. When you get more adventurous you may wish to include material from other resources.

When that time comes you can visit your local Education Centre and curl up with almost fifty more exotic and sophisticated workbooks. The National SPHE Office has arranged for each full-time Education Centre to receive these books for you to read and evaluate at your leisure.

"As a beginner you are better off with one book that covers the basics however attractive a volume on 'Fondant Icing for Festive Occasions' may appear"

The SPHE website; www.sphe.ie, advertisements, poetry, agony columns, videos and visitors can be useful resources but make sure that what you choose is age appropriate, relevant and in harmony with the ethos of the school. When planning a SPHE class around one of these resources using the Experiential Learning Cycle (see page six) is a good way to structure the class and helps you to clarify what the learning is to be.

Above all remember that the most important resource is the teacher. Handle with care!



Personal and Social Development Among Second-level Students

Dr. Emer Smyth

Senior Research Officer,
Education and Labour Market Research

Second-level schools play a significant role not only in promoting academic progress among young people but also in facilitating their personal and social development.

A recent study of the transition into second-level education (Moving Up) indicated marked differences between schools in how they helped students adjust to the new school setting. The vast majority of schools hold an induction day for students and have designated personnel (such as class tutors) to assist first years. Over half of schools also have a Student Mentoring System with older students acting as a 'buddy' for their younger peers. As might be expected, students settle in more quickly in schools with more developed student integration programmes.

However, the informal climate of the school, that is, the social relations between teachers and students and among students themselves, also plays a very crucial role in student adjustment. Students are more likely to experience transition difficulties where they have had negative interaction with their peers (in the form of bullying) and with their

teachers (by being given out to frequently).

"The impact of the school on students' personal and social development is also evident among exam year classes"

The impact of the school on students' personal and social development is also evident among exam year classes. A study of Junior and Leaving Certificate students (Do Schools Differ?) indicated that schools differ in relation to the levels of stress experienced by students and the way in which students view themselves (in terms of academic ability, sense of control over their lives and body-image). Where students have experienced positive interaction (in the form of praise and positive feedback) from their teachers, they tend to have lower stress levels, a greater sense of control over their lives, more positive views of their academic abilities and a more positive body-image.

In contrast, where students have experienced negative interaction with their teachers and fellow students, they have higher stress levels, feel more helpless about their lives and

hold more negative views of themselves. Obviously there is a good deal of variation within schools in student development because of differences in young people's personalities and lives outside school. However, certain key aspects of the schooling process emerge as important influences at this significant stage of young people's lives.

"Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) has a potentially very crucial part to play in promoting positive developmental outcomes among second-level students"

In sum, schools can play a key role in fostering social and personal development among young people. Formal school structures are, of course, important in this respect. However, they will only be successful to the extent that they are underpinned by a positive informal climate within the school, that is, by positive relations between teachers and students and among students themselves.

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) has a potentially very crucial part to play in promoting positive developmental outcomes among

second-level students, for example, by addressing important issues around the emerging adolescent identity and by exploring difficulties such as bullying.

"The potential benefits of SPHE are likely to be fully realised when it is fully integrated into a whole-school approach to student support, an approach which is strengthened by a positive school climate."



SPHE - A Teacher's Experience

Therese Bowen

SPHE teacher at Christ King Girls'
Secondary School Cork

As a teacher SPHE means an exciting challenge. It is a lively reminder to me of why I first decided to teach. My aspirations to make a difference may have become completely stifled in our airtight point system if it had not been for the breath of fresh air SPHE is.

For me, it is forty minutes to see the child not the subject. All sorts of things have emerged as a result of the listening I do in this class. I am finding it very challenging to become the listener not the preacher, the facilitator not the teacher. But I have found that this is a skill within all of us, but a skill that requires confidence. It takes confidence to teach SPHE because you are depending on the students to go

with you on this journey. In one way the SPHE teacher is at the mercy of her class because the class is never about what the teacher thinks, but what her students think – this can be a vulnerable place to be.

"...it is forty minutes to see the child not the subject. All sorts of things have emerged as a result of the listening I do in this class. I am finding it very challenging to become the listener not the preacher, the facilitator not the teacher"

Yet it is this vulnerability that provides SPHE with the potential to be wonderful. When your class leave the safety of their textbook behind them, no longer look to you for answers, turn their gaze inward, role play, brainstorm, debate, play, draw, create, speak,

don't speak, listen, when this happens it is wonderful. When this happens even the ecstatic Leaving Cert student waving her "A" at you cannot hold a candle to it.

To conclude I view SPHE as an exciting challenge – challenging in that I have had to reconstruct, redefine and re-evaluate my role in the classroom, exciting in what it has uncovered, not only among the students but also within myself. SPHE is a journey I need to embark on as much as any of my students.

Already it has reminded me of why I decided to become a teacher. I wanted to do something real, to change lives, to make a difference. SPHE allows me to feel I am doing this in some way.

A Principal's Perspective on SPHE

Anne Morden

Retired Principal, Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ, Limerick, 1994 - 2005

SPHE enjoys a very positive profile in our school, Laurel Hill Coláiste FCJ. A number of factors contribute to this. We are a relatively small, all-girls school (360-400 pupils) where genuine pastoral care is paramount. Good quality relationships are cultivated between pupils and teachers and the prevailing dynamic in the school is one in which trust is built between pupil and teacher.

This positive ambience facilitated the introduction and continuance of the SPHE programme in the school – in fact we introduced SPHE into our school long before it became compulsory. The modus operandi of the school has always been to be pro-active: it is easier to do the thing before the gun is to your head! Also, thanks to the inspired persistence of our Guidance Counsellor, our first years have had a time-tabled class of Personal Development – the precursor to Health Education, for decades. Finding a class period for the other years in an already overloaded timetable, was not easy however. Delegating the SPHE team to make a presentation to staff on the broad aims, objectives, content and likely outcomes of the programme coaxed a few staff members to (grudgingly) sacrifice one of their weekly academic subject periods.

“A dynamic and enthusiastic programme co-ordinator plays a central role in our school”

The nightmare of finding staff willing and able to keep up the momentum of teaching the programme did not materialise in our school. The early attendees of the “On My Own Two Feet” training course brought back such positive feedback about their own personal development through the course, that there was never a problem enthralling others to follow on! One third of the staff has now trained in the methodologies taught in this course and they form the Health Education team in the school. This is a very positive development I feel and rules out the loneliness – not to mention the burnout potential - of the Lone Health Ed. Teacher Syndrome. The school has to be willing to free up teachers for in-service training. Attending a number of SPHE in-services coppersfastened my commitment to facilitating the programme within the school.

A dynamic and enthusiastic programme co-ordinator plays a central role in our school. Meetings of SPHE teachers are held, programmes are drawn up, resources are researched, purchased and centrally located, guest speakers are invited in and the team is kept informed of relevant in-service. Most of all, space is created around the subject that keeps its profile high. The potential for repetition of material or overlap of material from RE or CSPE doesn't arise now due to the astute refining and streamlining of the programme, by the co-ordinator.

“A pro-active, dynamic programme, well thought out and well taught, has the capacity to pay handsome dividends in terms of the confidence building of pupils”

Since it is not always possible to provide continuity of teacher to a class, over the entire cycle, a clearly articulated yearly programme is invaluable. The availability of an ever-increasing pool of resources, most notably from our own regional SPHE Support Service in the form of training and materials, and from both the Mid-Western and North-Western Health Boards and North Tipperary VEC health programme materials, is core to the success of our initiative. A budget for the purchase of new, worthwhile material, is always forthcoming from the school – this ensures a freshness of approach. Where possible, classes are scheduled in the RE room or in an assembly hall, where the furniture arrangements facilitate discussion and group work. All in all, I felt the merits of the programme well warranted the active, positive and sometimes time-consuming, support I gave it as Principal.

By its nature SPHE deals with personal issues and so there are and always will be, challenges in delivering the programme well. It relies heavily on mature and astute handling by the teacher. Not every teacher is comfortable with the material and therefore using the SPHE class as a timetable filler, does an injustice to all. On the contrary, a pro-active, dynamic programme, well thought out and well taught, has the capacity to pay handsome dividends in terms of the confidence building of pupils. It plays an integral part in the development of each pupil and I believe that it equips them with a range of decision-making skills and competencies that eases their passage through complex lives. The type of in-service provided to teachers endeavours to model what should be happening in the delivery of the SPHE Programme back in the classroom.



How to Kill off SPHE!

- **Have nobody in charge of SPHE.** Under no circumstances appoint a co-ordinator.
- **Have no yearly SPHE programme or class plans.** It is best to ‘make it up as you go along’.
- **Assign different teachers to SPHE every year.** Don't worry about suitability or training - just whoever needs an extra class to bring them up to full hours.
- **Whenever students are needed for anything-** picking up litter, putting out chairs in the hall - take them out of SPHE
- **Perhaps third year honours students could have extra tuition during SPHE class.** Imagine the negative message that would send!
- **Whenever the SPHE class has a substitute teacher** make sure he/she knows that there is no need to do any work with them - just let them study for their exams.
- **Use the same material,** worksheets, and activities as R.E. and LCA. Bore them to death.
- **Show a lot of videos.** Even better if they are not remotely connected to what the class is currently studying.
- **Invite in speakers regularly.** Do no preparatory or follow up work. Under no circumstances check the content of their presentations. Use the opportunity to photocopy material for your Leaving Certs.
- **Avoid in-service training as much as possible.** Ignore the curriculum and aims of SPHE. You know best what young adolescents need.
- **Never, ever, allow time for SPHE team meetings.** At beginning-of-year planning sessions most of the SPHE teachers would be attending meetings of their *real* subjects anyway.
- **Openly refer to SPHE as ‘touchy-feely nonsense’.**
- **Have no policy on how SPHE is to be taught** and issues managed in the classroom.
- **Do not resource the subject.** Can't the teachers just ‘talk’ to the students about things?

Assertive Communication/Saying "No"

A Practical Application of the Experiential Learning Cycle

The structured experiential method is widely recognised as the most appropriate method for use in all forms of SPHE. The use of this method in the SPHE class ensures that students actively participate in their own learning. They are not simply the passive recipients of information.

The method has four stages:

1. Experiencing
2. Processing
3. Generalising
4. Applying

Aim of the lesson:

To explore and practice ways of saying "No" when it is appropriate to do so.

Learning outcomes:

- That participants will have explored the benefits of saying "No"
- That participants will have practiced saying "No" assertively

Introduction:

Assertiveness is a central skill to healthy living and good relationships. Having a sense of my own boundaries is necessary in order to be true to myself, my values and my needs. The following exercise will provide us with an opportunity to reflect on the challenges and benefits of saying no.

Procedure:

1. Experiencing

This is usually the activity stage. The experience is generated in the classroom through the use of a structured exercise such as role-play, drama, games, case studies and brainstorm.

Ask participants in pairs to share an experience where they found it difficult to say "No" and identify some of the reasons why they found it difficult. Recover in large group.

Large Group Discussion:

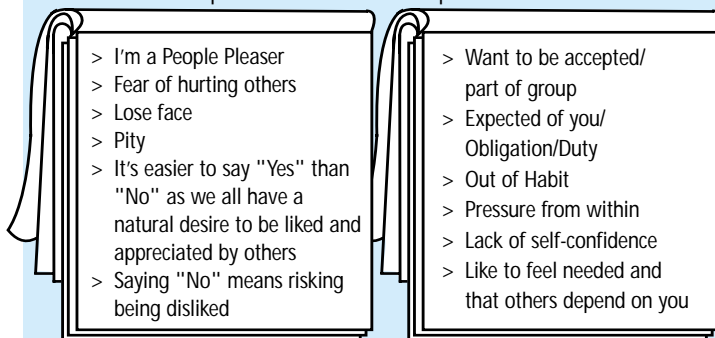
What were the types of situations where people found it difficult to say "No"? What were the factors that made it difficult to say "No"?

2. Processing

Students share and reflect on their experience here. This involves assisting students to make sense of the experience. Some important processing skills include asking open-ended questions that encourage more discussion, listening carefully to what the student is saying and clarifying what you are hearing. This may be done by repeating back to the student what you have heard, drawing out learning from points made.

What makes it difficult to say "No"?

Take feedback on flipchart/blackboard - examples below:

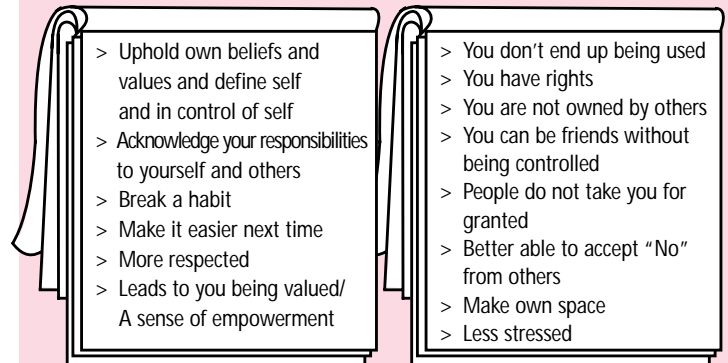


In groups of 4 discuss: Why is it important to be able to say "No"? (Appoint reporter to feedback for each group) Recover in large group. Take feedback from each group and discuss.

3. Generalising

Here generalisations are extracted from the first two stages.

Benefits of Saying "No" on flipchart/ blackboard - examples below:



Summarise:

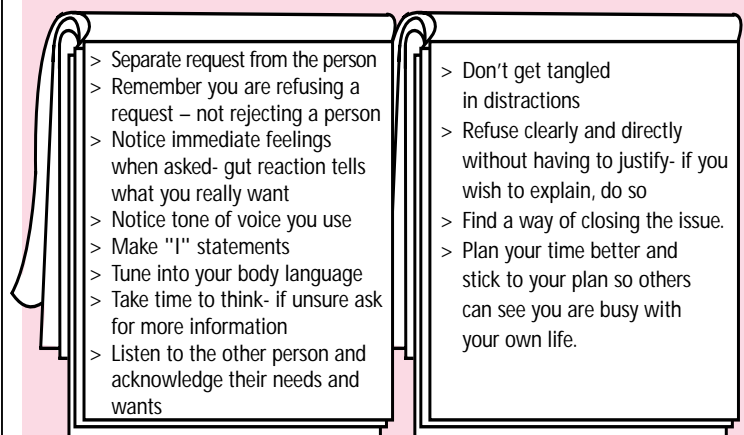
Saying "No" important because:

- You are better able to accept "No"
- Not taken for granted or walked over
- Your own needs are of equal importance

Brainstorm:

How to say "No"

Take feedback on flipchart/blackboard - examples below:



4. Applying

This involves the application of the learning to relevant situations or reviewing and consolidating what was learnt. Looking at whether attitudes have changed or modified or new skills have been acquired.

In pairs A and B. A requests loan of €50.00 (using any means s/he chooses) while B assertively refuses the request.

Process:

- How was the exercise for you?
- Did B succeed in saying "No"?
- What method did A use?
- What did you both learn?

Closure

Each person says one thing s/he learned from this exercise that s/he would bring with them and practice/hold on to this week.

NB This exercise is central to all Modules e.g. Self Management (Study Skills), Personal Safety, R.S.E. and Friendship etc.

The Value of SPHE In-Service

The teacher is the greatest resource in the classroom and SPHE places the student at the centre of the learning process. Would we appoint a person who lacks personal competence in languages as a modern linguist to develop a pupil's competence in language? Likewise with SPHE it is important that the teachers assigned to teach the subject have the skills, resources and competencies to do so in a successful way both for their own and their students' sake. The teaching of SPHE therefore cannot be left to chance.

Because health education involves influencing attitudes, values and skills, as well as knowledge to promote healthy behaviours and conditions, teachers must be trained to use a wide variety of teaching methods. Some teachers rely on one or two educational methods, such as lectures and worksheets. Although these methods may reach a large number of people and convey vast amounts of information that might otherwise not be disseminated, lectures are not very effective in helping to build prevention skills" (WHO 1999).

"SPHE in-service provides teachers with opportunities to refine and further develop a whole range of skills including group work, communication, and interpersonal skills. It challenges teachers to be reflective practitioners"

The in-service offered to SPHE teachers by the SPHE Support Service endeavours to encourage, support and empower teachers to move from didactic teaching methodologies to facilitative approaches. SPHE in-service provides teachers with opportunities to refine and further develop a whole range of skills including group work, communication, and interpersonal skills. It challenges teachers to be reflective practitioners, reflecting on how they relate to the world, the people close to them and their students. In-service provides the space for teachers to reflect on personal attitudes, values, motivations and how these are reflected in their engagement with students.

It raises such queries as "What do I need to pay attention to if I am to contribute professionally to the personal and social development of my students? Are there issues about me, parts of my intra-personal and inter-personal style that reduce my claims to be socially and personally developed?"

The benefits of SPHE in-service

- Teachers are offered introductory training and also training on the ten SPHE Modules. Various health professionals are often involved in the delivery of the in-service thus modelling a partnership approach and engagement with outside personnel.
- Teachers get specific training in experiential methodologies that lead them to become confident using the methodologies in the classroom.
- The resource materials are more likely to be used if there is in-service training.
- Teachers are more likely to be sustained if given support through in-service. It is important that this support is ongoing and related to current practice.
- To be effective as a SPHE teacher I need to be a reflective practitioner and in-service supports this reflective process. Working in SPHE involves working in the area of personal development of students. My personal development as a teacher is important. I can only teach what I myself have learnt. To teach Self-Esteem to students I need to have reflected on my own Self-Esteem.
- Teachers share good practice at in-service workshops and also difficulties experienced and get support from each other.
- In-service energises participants to return to school with new vigour.

The type of in-service provided to teachers endeavours to model what should be happening in the delivery of the SPHE Programme back in the classroom.

A Teacher's Experience of SPHE In-Service:

Reflections on Participating in Assertive Communication/Saying No Workshop (as outlined on page 6)

"No" is such a small word, yet it seems one of the hardest words for us to say. Most of us said "No!" quite well when we were two, but as some of us grow up, the word "No" drops out of our vocabulary. As people pleasers, we decline to say no in order to be agreeable and keep other people happy. The idea of saying "No" has often filled me with dread, so I welcomed the opportunity to attend a workshop on assertiveness and saying "No".

To begin, we brainstormed on why we find it difficult to say no. I started to examine the reasons why I often said "Yes" when I really meant to say "No." In hindsight I realised it was a habit I caught from an early age. My mother always pleased everybody. She put everybody's needs and wants ahead of her own. While this is true of many women, she made it an art form! She encouraged us to do the same, saying "It's nice to be nice." I admired how selfless she was, and in turn associated saying "No" with rejecting the person rather than refusing a request.

We then progressed to exploring ways to say "No" assertively. This was a most interesting session and I must admit, a turning point for me. In the past my refusals were accompanied by weak excuses and rationalizations to convince the other person I really meant it.

The strategies to make the "Assertive No" easier were:

- Take time to think, your gut reaction will tell you what you really want to do.
- Remember you are refusing the request, not rejecting the person.
- Be specific about what you can/cannot do.
- Refuse clearly and directly without having to justify. If you wish to explain, do so, but do not over apologise. Keep it simple.
- Sometimes you may have to repeat the "No" if put under pressure. Stay calm, listen to the other person and acknowledge their feelings and then repeat your "No."

The good news is practice makes perfect!! To conclude the workshop, we engaged in some role play to practice our new found skills, which I am happy to say I have used regularly since. Overcoming a lack of ability to say no, is as much to do with dealing with the emotions involved as learning a technique. Saying no can be very liberating and a boost to self-esteem. Now I can say **"No"** with conviction, **when I want to, and mean it.**

From a Male Teacher

Comments from Teachers

who attended SPHE in-service:

"It has challenged me to become more active and not take the easy safe route, hiding behind notes and sitting on my chair"

"I felt out of my depth in this subject prior to in-service-I feel I will enjoy teaching it now"

"Everything was put into context, so practical, so relevant, I loved it. Gives me confidence to try it"

"I have been teaching for nearly thirty years. I am just so disappointed that I didn't have training like this years ago"

"The point was emphasised that SPHE applies to every teacher. It was good re how I as a teacher impact on my students"

Comments from Principals

"Very good, informative and helpful"
"The presentation was listener friendly, informative and participative"
"Very focused but relaxed"
"Enjoyed the collective involvement and sharing"

Making Links for Mental Health in Schools

Louise Rowling

Associate Professor, University of Sydney, Australia

President, INTERCAMHS, (International Alliance of Child and Adolescent Mental Health and Schools)

In this brief article I want to use the theme of linking to describe how work in Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Health Promoting Schools (HPS) and mental health promotion (MHP) are linked to each other, to school practices and outcomes and to parents and support services.

Broadly this action needs to value and enhance knowledge and skills of teachers; acknowledge, strengthen and build on existing relevant practices and collaborative activities in school communities; and help teachers to see how change would benefit student outcomes, both educational and health.

SPHE and HPS are not new, there have been varying degrees of practice for an extended period of time. But from this action we have synthesised what quality practice is and identified where these sometimes separate areas can be 'joined up'. In Australia we have linked up this practice with MHP. Nearly ten years of research, development and dissemination in MindMatters National mental health promotion in secondary schools project (<http://cms.curriculum.edu.au/mindmatters>) have distilled some key findings that build on previous action in HPS.

These include:

- The need for attention to professional development for teachers because of stigma and fear; and the uncertainty about what constitutes good teaching practice in relation to mental health promotion
- Careful use of language because of misinterpretation of mental health as mental illness and because of the importance of forming links to the school's core business around student welfare and pastoral care
- The development of materials and processes that match school practice conditions that are realistic and sustainable
- Collaborative practices within the schools and between schools, agencies and parents
- The importance of developing and enhancing leadership for mental health at various levels within the school community

- Contact with other schools engaged in similar work and allocation of a budget
- The acknowledgement of the critical role of the local school context including, building on initiatives already underway in the school or linking with other school priorities

A key action in implementing MindMatters was to build on existing educational practices like pastoral care systems and curriculum provisions and to make connections between these and academic achievements and students' engagement with schooling. Of critical importance in a 'joined up' approach is coherence. The sense of coherence – the glue, exists in a supportive school environment that includes:

Places in school settings: the classroom, the school buildings and environs, the school climate and the local area

People: the students, teachers, other school staff, families, health and community workers

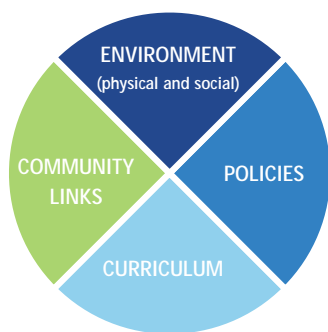
Processes and practices: decision-making, participation, caring, information exchange

Policies involving the guidelines for action and for resource allocation; and **Programs** for the co-ordinated learning in classrooms and across the school activities that occur.

It is not just the existence of all these elements but the inter-relationships, co-operation, compatibility and coherence that contribute to creating supportive environments. From a mental health promotion perspective a critical mass of school personnel need to become familiar with and confident in nurturing positive environments, using interactive teaching approaches and working with parents and mental health personnel within and linked to the school setting

Action to create links is of necessity participatory. Active involvement of teachers, parents, support services and the wider community is essential. But a crucial component is the participation of young people which requires them to take initiative and make decisions. This helps build their confidence and connection to the school. Building a sense of community or identification with school through empowerment processes is an important mental health promotion action for all school community members.

The Health Promoting School



The Health Promoting School supports the core business of education the general aim of which is "to contribute towards the development of all aspects of the individual... for personal and family life, for living in the community and for leisure." Humanity in a school community is essential in order to achieve this aim and is central to the concept of The Health Promoting School.

The physical, social, spiritual, mental and emotional needs of staff and students are taken into consideration in the Health Promoting School and it endeavours to provide for a holistic vision taking these into account. Health is seen primarily as a resource for living, not just an end in itself and not just the absence of disease or illness.

The many factors which promote and sustain the holistic approach to health within a school community are recognised by the Health Promoting School. It acknowledges the fact that the health of students and staff is influenced not only by their individual life choices but also by the social environment that prevails in the school (often referred to as the "hidden curriculum"), the physical environment, the policies that support good practices in the school, the supportive links that exist between the school and the outside community and the richness of the school curriculum and how it provides for the promotion of health in a holistic way.

"There are a great many reasons why schools should engage with mental, emotional and social health. And the good news is that if they do, it works. There is overwhelming evidence that people can learn the knowledge, skills and attitudes that help them to get on with each other better, to be physically, mentally, emotionally and socially healthier and to be happier"
(Weare 2000)

"It is vital that those who seek to promote high academic standards and those who seek to promote mental, emotional and social health realise that they are on the same side, and that social and affective education can support academic learning, not simply take time away from it. There is overwhelming evidence that pupils learn more effectively, including their academic subjects, if they are happy in their work, believe in themselves, like their teachers and feel school is supporting them"
(Weare 2000)

"The World Bank in its 1992 report identified that poor health inhibits learning (World Bank 1993) and this finding has been confirmed by other studies. This is the main reason why schools should embrace health related initiatives - enhance their core business of maximising learning outcomes for students"
(St Ledger 2004)

National Parents' Council (Post Primary) Endorses SPHE



Jim Jackman

President, National Parent Council (Post Primary)

The National Parent Council (Post Primary) heartily endorses the SPHE programme in Junior Cycle and very much looks forward to the introduction of the new Senior Cycle programme. From speaking to parents across the country, one detects approval and maybe slight envy that such a course was not on the curriculum in their day. In an era where many of life's activities are measured in one way or another, there is a concern by many that our young people are now programmed to see education as a goal rather than an ongoing life enhancing experience. Considering the fact that students spend just 15% of their time in a school environment, SPHE recognises the important role parents have to play as educators. The ever evolving parent movement would encourage all in the school community to embrace and grow with the programme, be imaginative and adopt ways of involving the wider community.

Summing up, a lot of living is about being able to communicate with one's self and others. It is also about the nurturing of relationships, the growth of physical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual wellbeing and solving life's problems. We need more of this in our schools!

SPHE and the Challenge for Parents

Gerry Farrell

Counsellor



Teenagers don't listen to their parents they experience them. They don't listen to advice about moderation they experience their parents' capacity to be moderate or not as the case may be. They do not learn how to resist peer pressure from lectures. They experience their parents' capacity to resist or conform to their own peer pressures. So how often would your teenagers experience you saying yes to others when you really want to say no? How often do your children experience you procrastinating while advising them to do their homework? How often do your teenagers hear you blame others rather than take responsibility? The SPHE programme can be taught in school. But it can be experienced at home.

It would be useful to apply the programme in your own lives. Soon you are likely to learn that asking your teenagers to be assertive, moderate, responsible, conforming where appropriate and non-conforming where appropriate is not that easy. So engage in this parallel process. Use the SPHE programme in your life. You have nothing to lose. Even if you do not change you will have at least improved your capacity to be empathic with your teenager.

Says a Teenager to his Parents

Give me scope,

But be just and fair,

I need to know that you always care

Give me guidance, but don't mislead me

And in my hour of doubt,

Be there beside me.

Think with me, but don't steal my thoughts,

Walk with me but don't take my footsteps

Laugh and joke with me

But please don't mock me,

Stand a while with me,

But do not trip me.

It really hurts when we have a fight,

Maybe I am wrong,

But then are you right?

I really glow when I am praised

I am not always spaced and dazed.

You are you, and this is me,

We're not carbon copies don't you see?

You have learnt with age and time,

If I do the same,

Won't I be fine?

Show example, that I will follow,

Through windy roads,

Both wide and narrow,

Be in my shadow with a view,

Where you'll see me, and I'll see you.

Una Seoighe Rúnai

Scoil Chuimsitheach Chiarain,

An Cheathru Rua,

Co. na Gaillimhe



Assessment and SPHE

Assessment is part of the activity of teaching and learning. As part of the school curriculum with stated aims and outcomes SPHE must be open to assessment and evaluation. However, SPHE is not formally examined in the Junior Certificate examination as at presently configured.

In recent years new understandings of assessment are emerging which go beyond measuring knowledge (cognitive learning) and achievement. This new understanding moves from seeing assessment as the measurement of learning to seeing its role in the promotion of learning. Assessment for learning is at the heart of the learning process and provides feedback to learners on how to improve their learning.

As teachers of SPHE it is important to be reflective practitioners - to look at where we are going, how we got there and whether our aims and objectives have been achieved.

Assessment for learning as outlined in the SPHE Teachers Guidelines has three elements

- 1 **Review/reflection** on the learning experience.
- 2 **Feedback** to participants.
- 3 **Reporting to parents**, to the school and to inform programme development.

Assessment for learning requires careful planning and is characterised by

- Sharing learning goals with students.
- Helping students recognise the standards they are aiming for.
- Involving students in assessing their own learning
- Students receive meaningful feedback
- Communicating confidence and belief that each student can improve.
- Adjusting teaching to take account of the results of assessment.
- Assessment informs the process of reporting to parents and to students.

Further information on Assessment is available in the SPHE Teachers Guidelines and the SPHE School Handbook.

The aims of assessment for learning are reflective of the aims of SPHE. They endeavour to create in the student a sense of responsibility and a sense of fulfilment. This is about good teaching. Effective teaching and learning cannot be achieved without assessment. Assessment strategies can enhance the personal development of students. Learning centred assessment is one of the key ways of raising achievement in schools.

In order to support good assessment practice in SPHE class, teachers require an "Assessment Tool Kit" consisting of a variety of approaches including classroom tasks, homework and more structured assessments for end of year.

In selecting an assessment strategy the following need to be considered:

- The learning being assessed.
- Needs and abilities of students.
- Practical and organisational factors.

The tool kit might consist of any or all of the following:

- Written
- Aural
- A reflective journal
- Poetry
- Practical including team work/ project/art/collage
- Oral
- Drama/roleplay
- Portfolio

It is important that the strategy used reflects the development of attitudes, skills and knowledge.

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SCHOOL
HANDBOOK

Theme Week in SPHE

A Theme Week, where a topic is developed throughout the whole school for a number of days, can add an enjoyable and valuable dimension to SPHE.

A well-planned and integrated Theme Week has a number of advantages:

- It highlights an important topic
- It brings a whole school focus on an issue
- It allows for cross-curricular approach
- It provides a forum for school, community and voluntary bodies to work together
- It facilitates different types of learning to occur
- It adds excitement and fun to learning

It is important to remember that a Theme Week supports the SPHE Programme and should not replace it.

Remember the three golden rules of 'event management':

Delegate, delegate, delegate!

Ideas for a Theme Week on Mental Health

Aspects of this theme that can be developed throughout the school might include areas such as:

- Yoga for staff and students
- Posters on the theme of positive mental health
- Photography exhibition
- Inter class debates on mental health topics
- Lunchtime music on the school intercom
- Piece in the school newsletter or website
- Art, metalwork or woodwork classes might work on a sculpture that symbolises mental health
- TYO or LCA might do a short drama on self-esteem
- Lunchtime physical activity or comedy clubs
- Guest speakers
- Stress-buster sessions
- Explore cross-curricular links



Policy Development and SPHE

Policy formation is central to good practice and makes clear to all partners in the education process their roles, rights and responsibilities. "Under the Education Act, 1998, the school has a statutory obligation to formulate policy on certain issues and the Board of Management has a statutory obligation to publish the school's policy on those issues" (School Development Planning Unit 4.)

By formulating and publishing policies the school is meeting criteria of openness, transparency and accountability. Implementing policies and getting them to work is influenced by how they are developed. The policy development process must involve wide consultation with parents, school staff, Board of Management and students. This promotes partnership, develops a sense of ownership and leads to better implementation on the ground.

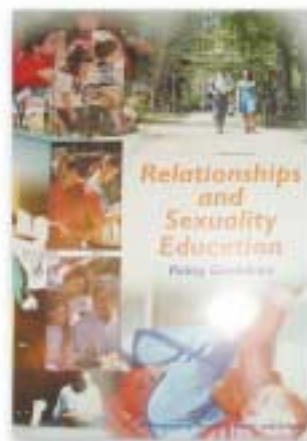
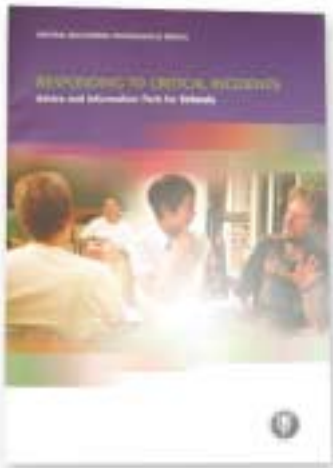
SPHE aims to give students the knowledge, skills and attitudes for self fulfilment and living in communities, to promote self esteem and self confidence, to develop a framework for responsible decision making, to promote physical, mental and emotional health and well-being, and to promote opportunities for reflection and discussion. A SPHE policy endeavours to support these aims with details of the school's mission and ethos and the management and delivery of SPHE. It would also include a clear commitment to the provision of staff training and up-skilling of SPHE teachers, clarity on issues of confidentiality and how parents will be consulted and informed. A policy, if properly implemented, will help create a climate supportive of SPHE. The process of developing a school policy facilitates all the partners in the student's life to come together and discuss what they consider important for the students in the school.

While the Department of Education and Science has developed a SPHE curriculum and guidelines, the SPHE policy should give guidelines on the moral and ethical framework within which the SPHE Programme will be taught. This provides safety for staff, students and parents. All resources used in the teaching of SPHE, including visitors, should be consistent with the ethos of the school.

The SPHE Policy will aim to:

- Frame the SPHE Programme within the ethos of the school.
- Clarify issues related to the programme.
- Outline how a school will deliver the programme.
- Clarify for all the partners involved their roles, rights and responsibilities.
- Outline how the school will provide ongoing support for the programme.
- Outline assessment, reporting and evaluating procedures

Many other policies support the delivery of SPHE including Relationships and Sexuality Education, Substance Use, Bullying, Child Protection, Health and Safety.



Caring for Myself

Teaching in general and teaching SPHE in particular can be both very rewarding and very exhausting. If teachers are to be in a position to care for their students they must first take care of themselves. C.R.Figley coined the term 'compassion fatigue'(1995) to describe stress symptoms resulting from exposure to and empathy with people's traumatic issues. It's never too late to start minding yourself.

- **Learn to laugh** at yourself and not take things too seriously. Don't lose perspective.
- **Count your blessings** - accentuate the positive in your own life and work.
- **Look after your health** and exercise regularly.

- **Talk to people you trust** but be careful of treating alcohol and drugs as your friends in times of trouble or stress.
- **Be kind to yourself** and forgive yourself when you make mistakes. Remember the perfect person doesn't exist.
- **Treat yourself** and make room for the things you enjoy.
- **Be aware of what you can change** and what you cannot change.
- **Take time to reflect** every day. Slow down and see the stars.
- **Happiness is a journey** not a destination so decide there is no better time than right now to be happy.

EVENT DIARY

Date	Event	Contact
15th -21st January	National Healthy Eating Week	Check your local Health Service Executive website for details
4th February	World Cancer Day	Contact www.cancer.ie
16th February	Daffodil Day Launch 2006	
1st March	National No Smoking	Contact www.cancer.ie
24th March	Daffodil Day 2006	
3rd -7th April	Skipathon 2006	Contact www.irishheart.ie
11th-14th May	Happy Heart Weekend	Contact www.irishheart.ie
14th-20th May	National Epilepsy Week	Contact www.epilepsy.ie
22nd May	Sunsmart Campaign Launch	
31st May	World No Smoking Day	Contact www.cancer.ie or your local HSE Health Promotion Dept
5th June	Women's Mini Marathon	
June	Adolescent Summer Camp Weekend	Contact www.diabetes.ie 13-17 years old
11th September	Breast Cancer Awareness Month Launch	
14th September	World Lymphoma Awareness Day	
29th September	Pink Ribbon Day	Contact www.cancer.ie
24th – 30th September (to be confirmed)	Irish Heart Week	Contact www.irishheart.ie
1st -31st October	Breast Cancer Awareness Month	Contact www.cancer.ie
5th October (to be confirmed)	World Teacher Day	
9th October (to be confirmed)	World Mental Health Day	Contact www.mentalhealthireland.ie Or www.aware.ie
6th November	Men's Cancer Awareness Launch	Contact www.cancer.ie
1st December	World Aids Day	Contact your local HSE Health Promotion Dept.

Social, Personal & Health Education

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post primary

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www.sphe.ie

Check the website for

- Regional Support Service Contacts
- In-Service Details
- SPHE Publications