



**An Roinn Oideachais  
agus Scileanna**  
Department of  
Education and Skills

## **Supporting the Wellbeing of Students:**

# **Guidance for Post-Primary Schools and Student Support Teams during School Closures and Public Health Restrictions arising from COVID-19**

**May 2020**

**Supporting Leaving Certificate (LC)**



# Supporting the Wellbeing of Students: Guidance for Post-Primary Schools and Student Support Teams

## 1. Introduction

We are living through unprecedented times due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. A crisis like this affects the wellbeing of everyone. People are naturally worried about the risk to their physical health and that of their loved ones. The public health measures that have been put in place in Ireland as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and to stop the spread of the virus, have resulted in additional challenges that may impact on wellbeing. For school communities these include the closing of all schools and the postponement of the Leaving Certificate examinations.

People have an inbuilt capacity to adapt. This is what is at the heart of resilience. Most people will weather this storm and emerge stronger and with new skills. Most will respond really well to information and practical advice on new ways of managing, and staying active and connected. Some will, for a variety of reasons, struggle to adapt and will need greater levels of practical and social support to make the adjustments needed to stay well. A very small number may find the changes brought about by this crisis overwhelming and may need a high level of practical and mental health supports.

School communities have been learning to adjust and adapt to the challenges they face at this time and have valiantly taken up the challenge of staying connected with their students for teaching, learning and maintaining the social connections and supports that are so important for young peoples' wellbeing. Schools have already received guidance from the Department of Education and Skills on the continuity of teaching and learning, including additional guidance for students with special educational needs and/or at risk of educational disadvantage, to address the recent changes for teachers and students and support of the continuity of education during Covid-19 ([here](#)). NEPS has also developed a range of resources to support the wellbeing of all in the school community at this time – students, parents and school staff ([here](#)). In addition, NEPS and the Department, in collaboration with the Department of Health and the HSE, have set up a dedicated webpage with information and links to supports available for Leaving Certificate students at this time ([here](#)).

In ordinary times schools have a pivotal role in supporting and developing the wellbeing of students and the school's Student Support Team leads on this at both the whole school and individual levels. In this time of uncertainty the Student Support Team faces new challenges in responding to the ongoing and additional wellbeing needs of all, some and a few brought about by this current crisis.

The aim of this document, therefore, is to provide additional guidance and resources for Student Support Teams during Covid-19 and to provide signposting to the resources and support services that are available.



## 2. The Role of Student Support Teams during COVID-19

Schools have developed excellent and flexible systems to promote the wellbeing of all students and to support students experiencing distress. Many schools have a designated Student Support Team, while other schools have equivalent systems and structures, but may use different terminology to describe their arrangements such as 'Care Team' or 'Pastoral Care Team'. Either way, the structures schools have in place will continue to play a key role in identifying issues and students for discussion by the Student Support team with appropriate action/follow-up. Usually Student Support Teams have regular face-to-face meetings in a school setting, but while social distancing prevails, teams need to meet remotely using secure technology. In these uncertain times, the familiarity of these school structures and personnel should offer continuity and reassurance to students.

### 2.1 The role of Student Support Teams in supporting student wellbeing

The Department of Education and Skills' publication, [Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice \(2018-2023\)](#) informs how all schools can best promote student wellbeing. Central to this is the Student Support Team. A Student Support Team is the overarching team concerned with providing for the welfare and wellbeing of all students. Detailed guidance about the Student Support Team can be found in the NEPS section of the DES website [here](#). Through implementing a Continuum of Support, the Student Support Team can provide for the educational, social, emotional, behavioural and learning needs of All, Some and Few students to ensure their ongoing wellbeing.

The core memberships of Student Support Teams includes senior management representative(s) (principal/deputy), year head, guidance counsellor and special educational needs co-ordinator. In schools where these posts exist, membership could include home school community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator, school completion project staff, representative from the school's pastoral support (e.g. chaplain) and other support teaching staff. The NEPS psychologist is also available to Student Support Teams. (See details below).

### 2.2 Configuring Services for Students (including Leaving Certificate Students)

Key Student Support Team representatives from school management, guidance, special education departments and critical incident management teams know how to collaborate effectively to identify the needs and appropriate supports for all students. For schools with DEIS status, HSCL coordinators and School Completion project staff may also offer support. Since closure on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020, schools have found creative and innovative ways of supporting students and have utilised telephone contact and a range of technological solutions to reach vulnerable students and their families. This year, more than previously, Student Support Teams may be providing reassurance and support to Leaving Certificate students. Some schools have been effectively organising remote weekly Student Support Team meetings, and have agreed the appropriate methods of communicating concerns and referrals to and from staff. Most teams have successfully identified students in need of targeted supports, including the most vulnerable. Members of the Student Support Team have shared the responsibility for engaging with each student or family, as appropriate. The school guidance counsellor has a key role to play in responding to the needs of Leaving



Certificate students at this time. More information about the role of the guidance counsellor is included at [Appendix 1](#).

## 2.3 A Continuum of Support for Student Wellbeing

Levels of support for students, including for Leaving Certificate 2020 students, are set out below, mapped on to the Continuum of Support Framework, which is, of course, familiar to all schools.

### Level 1: Support for All

This refers to the provision of empathic, practical and pragmatic teacher support for everyone who requires it. We recommend that approaches are used which normalise responses. These may include:

- Education about the current situation
- Strengthening self-help and coping strategies
- Sign-posting to more appropriate services, if required

At Level 1, accepting the challenges of the current situation, teacher support may take the form of reassuring emails, clarity and support given during remote teaching and learning and other routine, practical supports from teachers. Where student levels of engagement are a cause for concern, teachers inform the Student Support Team following the usual school procedure.

### Level 1 Role of the Student Support Team

Set out below are some of the possible roles of members of Student Support Teams. These roles are not intended to be exhaustive or definitive. It is acknowledged that each individual school may configure roles and responsibilities slightly differently, depending on the school context and the personnel available.

#### Principal/Deputy Principal/Year Head

- Ensure an effective two-way communication system is in place for parents and students
- Check student engagement with subject teachers -identifying at risk/disengaged students
- Link with exam secretary/ coordinator and provide updates to the Student Support Team on developments re: LC 2020

#### Guidance Counsellor (GC)

##### *i. Education and Career Guidance*

- Delivery of career guidance with class / small groups to consider current and updated information on CAO/ DARE/ HEAR / SUSI /FET options of Apprenticeships / PLC etc.
- Keep students informed about additional education options which may have not been fully considered previously, e.g. study in Ireland, rather than abroad, training options, apprenticeships, PLC/FETAC
- Practical organisational and revision supports in study skills/exam taking skills/revision planning
- Provision of updated information as relevant to particular careers /education choices and links through emails/ school website

##### *ii. Personal Guidance Counselling Support*

- Delivery of guidance related learning class/ small group sessions to focus on self- care and encourage accessing information re general wellbeing, relaxation techniques, normalising responses, managing stress/anxiety/fear.



#### SEN Coordinator:

- Check in with students re: Student Support Plans ( for students with identified special educational needs)
- Check Reasonable Accommodations for Certificate Examinations (RACE) applications
- Provide / guide use of supplementary resources required to support SEN student's preparation for Leaving Certificate examinations

#### Pastoral Care (where available, may include chaplains, tutors, counsellors)

- Check in with students availing of personal support
- Provide ongoing personal support (in collaboration with Guidance Counsellor)

#### Home School Community Liaison Coordinator (where available)

- Make contact with parents of vulnerable students **and / or parents**. In consultation, with Principal and Care Team, review the school's HSCL client group, mindful that families/students not previously identified, may now have needs due to changes in circumstances caused by Covid-19
- Identify practical needs e.g. identifying a space to study and sources of practical support-e.g. access to IT and Wi-Fi
- Identify key school/community links e.g. mentors/youth workers to support students
- Liaise with SCP, EWOs, community and statutory agencies to support families/students
- Make contact with vulnerable students

#### School Completion Project Staff (where available)

- Check in and continue to provide support/ interventions to students known to SCP
- Identify student needs and liaise with HSCL
- Provide online activities to encourage reengagement of students with school and learning

#### School's Assigned Psychologist

- Provide advice and support to Student Support Team

All Student Support Team members are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the various on-line supports available for young people as outlined in [Appendix 2](#). It should be noted that many of these services have free and readily available resources to address the particular difficulties associated with Covid-19 and the Leaving Certificate 2020.

## Level 2: Support for Some

The Student Support Team may identify some vulnerable students, including Leaving Certificate students, who may require more focused, individualised support. NEPS has prepared guidance for school staff in relation to the provision of this support and enable teachers to talk with students, in a comforting and supportive way. This guidance outlines the ways in which teachers may offer support using the 'Listen, Protect, Connect, Model & Teach' approach, already familiar to many teachers. It is an approach that fits well within the normal teacher-student relationship and established boundaries of their work with students.

This guidance – *Wellbeing: Guidance for School Staff Providing Support to Students* - is available at [Appendix 3](#)



## Level 2 Role of Student Support Team

### Principal/Deputy Principal/Year Head

- Ensure an effective 2-way communication system is in place for parents and students
- Check engagement with classes-identify at risk/disengaged students
- Provide a separate/dedicated contact number/email for students' parents with concerns regarding coping, anxiety and stress difficulties

### Guidance Counsellor

#### *i. Education and Career Guidance*

- Provide 1:1/ small group guidance session to support each student individually to:
- Consider current applications options and personal implications for CAO/ DARE/ HEAR / SUSI / FET options, Apprenticeships / PLC etc.
- Discuss the difficulties selecting education and career paths
- Review, confirm, adapt or develop plans for education / career path
- Explore alternative Higher Education/ Further Education Training/other routes as appropriate

#### *ii. Personal Guidance Counselling Support*

- Provide 1:1 guidance counselling for those referred by SST or identified through guidance class groups
- Provide ongoing 1:1 guidance counselling with students as appropriate
- Provide 'Listen, Protect, Connect, Model & Teach' approach outlined in [Appendix 3](#)
- Identify and provide referral to Level 3 supports for students where appropriate, i.e. those for whom level 2 is not sufficient in helping them to return to their usual, or relatively usual, level of functioning.
- Refer/Signpost to Level 3 services where needed

### SEN Co-ordinator

- Identify students in need of level 2 response
- Identify key learning support needs and supplementary resources required to support student
- Provide 'Listen, Protect, Connect, Model & Teach' approach outlined in [Appendix 3](#)

### Pastoral Care (where available, may include chaplains, tutors and counsellors)

- Provide 'Listen, Protect, Connect, Model & Teach' approach outlined in [Appendix 3](#)
- Provide on-going support/mentoring
- Collaborate with Guidance Counsellor
- Refer/Signpost to level 3 services where needed

### Home School Liaison Coordinator (where available)

- Provide 'Listen, Protect, Connect, Model & Teach' outlined in [Appendix 3](#)
- Contact parents to help link disengaged students with Guidance Counsellor
- Support student to re-establish contacts with school based staff
- Link parents/students with community-based supports such as community projects/local youth workers
- Re-establish links with parents known to HSCL Coordinator
- Refer/Signpost to Level 3 services where needed



#### School Completion Project Staff (if available)

- Check in and continue to provide support/interventions to students already engaged with SCP and any other students who may need SCP support due to changed circumstances.
- Support online with appropriate level 2 supports within school structure and in collaboration with the HSCL Coordinator.

#### School's Assigned Psychologist

- Advice/support/signposting for Student Support Team.
- Advice/Support re 'Listen, Protect, Connect, Model & Teach' approach outlined in [Appendix 3](#).
- Advice/Support for Guidance Counsellors.
- Advice/Support for students and parents accessed through existing school structures.

### Level 3: Support for a Few

#### Level 3 Role of the Student Support Team

Those students who are already identified as needing a high level of support in school, for physical, learning, social, emotional or behavioural needs, will be well known to the Student Support Team and a range of supports for these students will need to be in place. The unique circumstances arising from school closure and public health restrictions arising from COVID-19, however, means that for some students, levels of stress and distress will emerge over this changing time. This includes that experienced by Leaving Certificate students.

For some students, uncertainty about the future, along with other stressors, may mean that the supports already offered at Levels 1 and 2 above may not fully meet their needs. In these cases, the role of the Student Support Team will extend to signposting or advising on referral of students to other services. For students under 18 years, where this is deemed necessary, the Student Support Team will advise parents on how to access such services. The range of HSE and HSE-funded supports available to young people are listed in [Appendix 2](#).

#### 2.4 NEPS Support for Schools and Students

In response to the current circumstances, NEPS has developed a range of on-line wellbeing resources for students and teachers. NEPS is also liaising with the Department of Health and the HSE to plan effective responses to students' needs, while complying fully with all public health advice. Services that NEPS is specifically offering to schools at this time are as follows:

- NEPS has prioritised supporting schools to support Leaving Certificate students.
- Where the Student Support Team feels that the involvement of a psychologist would be beneficial to a student, the normal structures will be in place that allow for the school to contact a psychologist and request such involvement.
- Involvement of the NEPS psychologist will be agreed with teachers, parents and students and may include consultation, advice and support to teachers, parents and students.
- The NEPS psychologist will also be available to support school staff regarding wellbeing at whole school level.



## Appendix 1: Guidance Counsellor Role

Within this model of support, the provision of careers, educational and personal guidance counselling at Levels 1, 2 and 3 will continue to be informed and supported by the Whole School Guidance Plan. The aim of Guidance in schools is to help students to develop an awareness and acceptance of their talents and abilities; to explore possibilities and opportunities; to grow in independence and to take responsibility for themselves; to make informed choices about their lives and to follow through on those choices. In response to COVID-19, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) has put a contingency measure in place to support the continuity of guidance counselling. The guidelines contained in this document will support post-primary school leaders to plan for the continuity of guidance counselling support using technology or via the internet. These guidelines and more detailed information are available [here](#).

The guidance counsellor provides support to students to review careers and education plans and make informed decisions which can in turn contribute to a reduction in anxiety and stress. The provision of careers, education and personal guidance counselling in this context reflects the [whole school guidance framework of guidance for all, guidance for some and guidance for few](#). In line with good practice and in consultation with school management, small class/group sessions can be provided and further supported by 1-1 guidance counselling sessions.

Further information for Guidance Counsellors is available [here](#) and [here](#).



## Appendix 2: Supports for young people

### Childline (ISPCC)

- Ireland's 24-hour national listening service for young people up to age 18
- Freephone **1800 666 666** (any time, day or night)
- Text **50101** (from 10am to 4pm every day)
- Chat online at [www.childline.ie](http://www.childline.ie) (from 10am to 4pm every day)

### BeLonG To Youth Services

- **BeLonG To** provide support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI+) young people in Ireland
- Text LGBTI+ to **086 1800 280** to chat in confidence with a trained crisis volunteer (anytime day or night, standard SMS rates may apply)
- Visit [www.belongto.org](http://www.belongto.org) for more information

### Jigsaw

- The Jigsaw Support Line is available for free mental health support and advice to young people aged 12 to 25 years old, and parents or concerned adults in Ireland.
- Freephone **1800 544729** (from 1pm to 5pm Mon to Fri)
- Text CALL ME to **086 180 3880**, giving your preferred day and time for a call (from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday)
- Email [help@jigsaw.ie](mailto:help@jigsaw.ie) (for responses from 9am to 5pm Mon to Fri)
- Visit [www.jigsaw.ie](http://www.jigsaw.ie) or [www.jigsawonline.ie](http://www.jigsawonline.ie) for more information

### Barnardos

- Barnardos provide a national [telephone support service for parents](#), in response to the challenges they are facing during the Covid-19 pandemic. Freephone **1800 910 123** (from 10am to 2pm, Mon to Fri)
- Barnardos also provide a [children's bereavement helpline service](#), for members of the public seeking information and support in relation to bereavement. Telephone **01 473 2110** (from 10am to 12pm, Mon to Thurs.)

### SpunOut.ie

- SpunOut.ie provides a wide range of articles and information for young people, on many different topics, including mental health
- Text SPUNOUT to **086 1800 280** to chat to a trained volunteer (standard message rates may apply)
- Visit [www.spunout.ie](http://www.spunout.ie) for more information

### More online supports

The [YourMentalHealth.ie](http://YourMentalHealth.ie) website provides information and signposting on all mental health supports and services that are available nationally & locally provided by the HSE and its funded partners. You can also call the freephone YourMentalHealth Information Line to find supports and services **1800 111 888** (any time, day or night).



## Online counselling supports

### Turn2Me & MyMind

Turn2Me provides a 3 tiered approach to supporting mental well-being; self-help, support groups and professional support. Online services include counselling and support groups.

[www.turn2me.ie](http://www.turn2me.ie)

[www.mymind.org](http://www.mymind.org)

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The support offered by various agencies listed above are for individuals who are feeling worried or anxious about various issues. For students who have complex mental health needs access to help continues to be through your GP or health centre or hospital emergency services as detailed below.

### GP and health centres

A GP can offer support for anyone in crisis. If possible, ask someone to come along with you. Find a service near you:

- [GP or health centre](#)
- [Out of hours GP service](#)

### Hospital emergency services

Go to or call the emergency department of [your local general hospital](#).

### Telephone emergency services

You can contact emergency services on **999** or **112**.

### Samaritans

The Samaritans telephone service is available 24 hours a day or confidential, non-judgmental support:

- Freephone **116 123**
- Email [jo@samaritans.ie](mailto:jo@samaritans.ie)
- Visit [www.samaritans.ie](http://www.samaritans.ie) for details of the nearest branch

### Messaging support service

A new mental health messaging support service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It provides in-the-moment anonymous support when you need it most. This service aims to connect you with a trained volunteer in less than 5 minutes. They will listen to you and help you think more clearly, enabling you to know that you can take the next step to feeling better. Text **YMH** to **086 1800 280** (*Standard SMS rates may apply*)



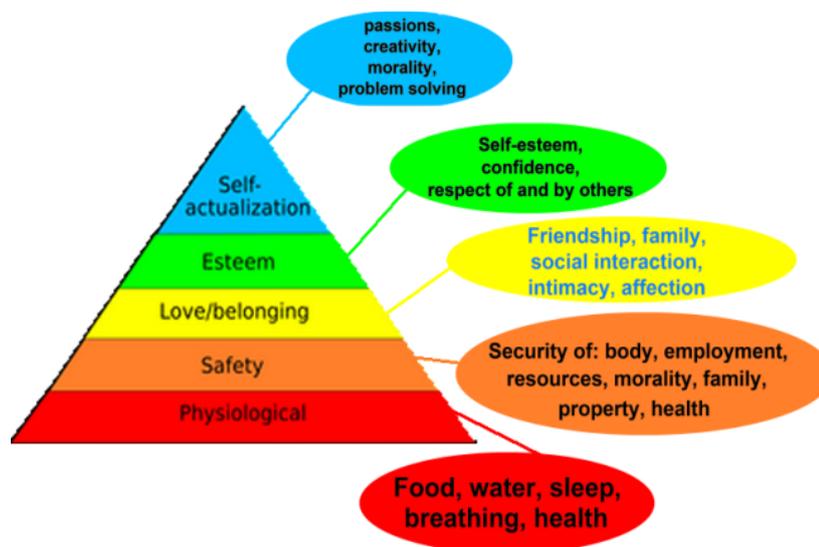
## Appendix 3: Wellbeing: Guidance for School Staff Providing Support to Students

### Introduction

This guide has been developed to enable you, to talk, in a comforting and supportive way, with students who may need the support of the Student Support Team at this time. Leaving Certificate students in particular, who may be experiencing signs of distress, may benefit from this support.

This guide includes identifying signs of stress in students. It will allow you to give immediate support to distressed students by using a **Listen, Protect, Connect, Model & Teach** approach and signposting additional supports for students when needed. As a member of the School Student Support Team or equivalent structure such as Care Team or Pastoral Care Team, you are in a unique position to help your students, as best practice indicates that students need to be supported by people they know and trust. Just as you help connect students with appropriate academic and pastoral care services under normal circumstances, you are well placed to help these students return to school work, continue to learn and complete school tasks. The provision of such support is already familiar to many teachers. It operates within the normal teacher-student relationship and does not require specialist skills. This support may be provided virtually (e.g. via email, video call, phone call) or face-to-face depending on public health restrictions as the situation evolves.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a useful model to draw on to build resilience. As a first step we need to address basic needs. People are not resilient until they feel safe. It is important to connect people to their support systems, as people who are connected to other people recover better.



### Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



When providing support to students, it is extremely important to be mindful of your own self-care. It is therefore essential that you:

- Pace yourself
- Look after your basic needs: eat well, sleep well and remain physically active
- Recognise your own stress
- Be aware of the boundaries to the support you can offer and of your own professional competencies and remember to signpost to other services if appropriate
- Connect with others for support
- See [here](#) for more information on teacher wellbeing and self-care

### Delivering support remotely

When planning to support students, consider the following:

- Choose the most appropriate channel of communication (e.g. via email, video call, phone call), making sure it is safe, secure and easy to use
- Decide where you will provide the support to students. Choose a space that allows for the safety and privacy of both you and the student
- Let those you live with know that the room is being used for a call /video conference.
- Decide what times you will be available
- Decide how to share information with students
- Review your knowledge of current referral pathways and know the procedures for when and how to refer students to other support services if needed
- Have an up to date emergency contact list and list of appropriate referral agencies and services available. See [Appendix 2](#).
- Have a digital copy of the list of agencies and psychoeducational materials that can be forwarded to the student ([here](#))
- It is important to ensure that you are comfortable in your own professional capacity to support students in this way, understand your limits and know how to refer students on and know how and where to get support for yourself.
- Maintain regular contact with your colleagues to share information and support each other. It is also important to maintain and access your own professional supervision and/or link in with colleagues to access support.
- Remember while offering support without visual contact, it is important to speak slowly, clearly and calmly and to communicate with empathy and warmth through using the voice in a way that shows care.
- Listen attentively and demonstrate this listening by using affirmative sounds.



## The LISTEN, PROTECT, CONNECT, MODEL & TEACH Approach<sup>1</sup>

People have an inbuilt capacity to adapt. This is what is at the heart of resilience. Most people will weather the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought, and emerge stronger and with new skills. Most of our students will respond well to information and practical advice on new ways of managing, and staying active and connected. Others may experience increased levels of stress at this time and will struggle to adapt for a variety of reasons. These students will need greater levels of practical and social support to make the adjustments needed to stay well. Stressful times can impact on students' sense of safety and a loss of power and control. As their teacher/guidance counsellor you have an opportunity to promote a sense of calm, hope and support to your students.

*It is important to remember that not all individuals will be in need of additional support.*

*Expect resilience, but be on the lookout for those who appear to be struggling.*

During this time, changes can happen in students' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Your students may be worried and anxious about the uncertainty surrounding the Leaving Certificate examinations for example. They may worry about family members who may be ill or have experienced job loss or they may have suffered a bereavement. Faced with this degree of change and uncertainty, it is normal to feel shocked, anxious, confused, and concerned. Common reactions to such situations include trouble sleeping, trouble concentrating and listening, and not finishing work. Your students may become more irritable, sad, angry, or worried as they think about what has happened and the uncertainty ahead. See [here](#) for more information.

When students share their experiences, thoughts and feelings about the event, be alert to risk factors for adverse reactions. Risk factors may include:

- Challenging family circumstances
- Experience of recent bereavement
- Living in poverty or in communities experiencing disadvantage
- Pre-existing mental health difficulties
- Learning difficulties
- Perfectionist tendencies

It is normal for people to sometimes feel distressed due to COVID-19. However, if a student is experiencing ongoing, overwhelming distress, or they are struggling to function in their daily lives you may wish to consider signposting them (and their parents) to the appropriate professional services. See [Appendix 2](#) for more information or contact your NEPS psychologist for support and advice if required.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) for Irish schools from Psychological First Aid materials developed by the American Red Cross (2014); International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2020); National Child Traumatic Stress Network National Centre for PTSD; Adams Psychology Services.



## 1. LISTEN, PROTECT, CONNECT, MODEL & TEACH

The first step is to listen and pay attention to what students are saying. Your students may also show their feelings in non-verbal ways, such as having difficulties managing their emotions and staying regulated. Let your students know you are willing to listen and talk about what is happening, and/or to help them access other support services if needed. (See Questions/Suggestions for Talking and Listening with your students at the end of this document).

- Listen for clues that indicate when students are having a hard time. Write down a few examples that may be helpful to note. Listen to the student's emotional and practical needs. If the student is worried, ask what they are worried about.
- If a student is particularly stressed, worried or anxious, reassure them that it is normal to have such feelings during a crisis like this.
- What might be preventing the student from doing school work and/or connecting with online lessons?
- What might be preventing the student from completing school assignments?

Listen, observe and note any changes in:

- Behaviour and/or mood
- School performance/engagement with online tasks, lessons or resources
- Behaviours at home that parents/guardians discuss with you.

## LISTEN, 2. PROTECT, CONNECT, MODEL & TEACH

Despite the uncertainty of Covid19, it is important that students understand that the school is looking after their wellbeing. You can provide comfort, increase a sense of safety and support your students to feel better by doing some or all of the following:

- Communicate with students regularly. Regular updates are important. Updating students with current, accurate, and up-to-date information will help put students at ease. Answer questions simply and honestly, clearing up any confusion students may have about the current situation. Let your students know that they are not alone in their reactions.
- Talk to your students about what is being done by the school and community to help them to stay safe and prepare for their exams.
- Promote the importance of self-care including keeping a daily schedule, eating well, getting enough sleep, daily exercise and engaging in enjoyable activities. See [here](#) for more information.
- Be sensitive to students' current level of functioning and try to be flexible to their needs in order to alleviate any additional stress they may be experiencing.
- Encourage students to limit access to the media. Remind them that some reports may not be accurate and identify where they can get reliable and up-to-date information.
- List other things you do that help your students feel better. Sharing this list via email with other teachers may increase ideas to help your students.



### LISTEN, PROTECT, 3. CONNECT, MODEL & TEACH

Reaching out to people in your school and community will help your students to cope. Social support is key to an individual's ability to be resilient in challenging times so create new ways to connect with students. These connections will build strength for everyone. Consider ways to make some or all of the following connections:

- Prioritise relationships. If students have regular opportunities to connect with people or have opportunities for social support they will feel more regulated. Encourage students to connect with friends using technology and to connect through virtual study groups/ lunch breaks etc.
- If required 'Check in' with students again using technology – e.g. phone call, text, Zoom, email.
- Find resources that can be supportive to your students.
- Build on your students' strengths by encouraging them to draw on what they have learnt in the past to help them cope with the current situation.
- Remind your students that this is an unprecedented situation and that schools are doing the best they can to support students in this time of uncertainty.

### LISTEN, PROTECT, CONNECT, 4. MODEL & TEACH

As you help your students through this unprecedented situation, your efforts may be more successful if you keep the following in mind:

- Your own thoughts, feelings and reactions insofar as these may affect your students.
- How you cope and behave in this situation will influence how your students cope and behave. Your students will be observing you for both verbal and non-verbal cues.
- Acknowledge the difficulty of the situation, but demonstrate how people can come together to cope during this crisis.

### LISTEN, PROTECT, CONNECT, MODEL & 5. TEACH

Talk to your students about expected reactions in this current situation (emotional, behavioural, cognitive and physiological). These are normal reactions to abnormal events. See [here](#).

- Different people may have very different reactions, even within the same family.
- People may need different amounts of time to cope and adjust.
- Encourage your students to identify and use positive coping strategies to help them to deal with this situation. See [here](#).
- Help your students problem-solve to get through each day successfully.
- Encourage students to think about ways they can help others.
- Remind students that, with time and assistance, they **will** get through this. For students who continue to feel distressed and overwhelmed, they should let a parent or teacher know.



#### Ending the conversation:

- Summarise the conversation by highlighting key issues discussed and action points.
- Agree if a follow up conversation is needed, and if so, find a suitable time.

If there is a need to signpost or refer on please see the list of services in [Appendix 2](#) (Subject teachers may wish to link with the schools guidance counsellor for support and advice regarding referrals to mental health services)

#### Questions and suggestions for talking and listening to students

##### Key considerations for teachers/ guidance counsellors:

- How am I building and maintaining rapport?
- Am I listening?
- What is it like for this student at the moment?
- Am I on the same page as this student?
- Do I understand what his/ her concerns are?
- Am I communicating that understanding to the student?
- What more can I do to try to get on the same page?

##### Opening conversation:

- Introduce yourself if student is new to you.
- How may I help you?
- What are the most important things I can help you with?

##### Listening and showing empathy:

- Tell me about what is worrying you....
- I am hearing that you are worried about ...
- I understand your concerns - a lot of Leaving Cert students feel that way.
- It is very normal to be sad, angry, upset, worried, frustrated....
- I hear what you are saying about....
- I fully understand why you are feeling like this...
- In this situation, your reactions are normal.
- Maybe we can discuss some things we can do to help...
- It is a difficult situation, and I do understand it is very challenging. Let's discuss if there is anything you can do to make the situation more tolerable.
- Would it be helpful to discuss possible solutions?
- The things we are doing to support you and your classmates are...
- I wonder if it is any help to you to know that these feelings are natural for many in the present situation. It can be overwhelming, so maybe we can talk about how to manage the feelings. The first step is to acknowledge the feelings as you rightly do, the next to ensure they don't take up too much time or space in your life. Should we maybe talk more on this?
- It can help to have one or two daily worry times, for example half an hour in the afternoon. If worrying thoughts occur during other times of the day and night, ask them to come back later, or tell themselves that they will take care of them during the worry time. This will give them time to take care of what else they have to do.
- It is a difficult situation, and I do understand it's very challenging. Let's discuss if there is anything, you can do to make the situation more tolerable
- I am concerned about you and would like to suggest I refer you to someone who can help



#### Reflective comments:

- From what you're saying, I can see how you would be ...
- It sounds as if you're saying ...
- It seems that you are ...

#### Clarifying comments

- Tell me if I'm wrong, but it sounds as if you ...
- Am I right when I say that you ...

#### Supportive comments:

- No wonder you feel ...
- It sounds really hard ... I'm really sorry this is such a tough time for you.
- It sounds as if you're being hard on yourself.
- We can talk more tomorrow if you'd like.

#### Empowering comments & questions:

- What have you done in the past to help feel better when things got difficult?
- What do you think would help you to feel better?
- I have an information sheet with some ideas about how to deal with difficult situations. Maybe there's an idea or two here that might be helpful for you.
- People can be very different in what helps them feel better. When things get difficult for me, it helps if I ... Could something like that work for you?

Dos and Don'ts when offering support	
Do	Don't
✓ Listen more than you speak to identify concerns	✗ Pressure others to speak if they do not want to speak
✓ Ask gently probing questions	✗ Be judgemental
✓ Use open questions: when, where, what, who?	✗ Use technical terminology
✓ Acknowledge feelings and understanding of events	✗ Talk about yourself or personal issues or troubles
✓ Normalise emotions and reactions	✗ Give false promises or false assurances
✓ Recognise internal resources and capacity to cope	✗ Share someone else's story or experiences.
✓ Be patient and calm	✗ Exploit the trust and confidentiality shared
✓ Allow processing and ventilation of emotions	✗ Use technical terminology
✓ Provide information about Covid-19. Be honest about what you don't know. This is a new virus that we are all learning about.	✗ Pressure others to speak if they do not want to speak
✓ Listen for students' options and help them make the choices. Ensure confidentiality unless issues mentioned affect the safety of the individual or others	
✓ Ensure the 'Do no harm' principle is upheld.	