

Youth Work Ireland



# Be Well

## Facilitator Notes

**Working with Young People to Identify  
& Address Anxiety - Facilitator Notes**

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Youth Work Ireland

# Acknowledgements & Thanks

## Young People, Volunteers and Staff Participating in Regional Pilots

In March 2016 150 young people, volunteers and staff from Youth Work Ireland Member Youth Services came together at four regional workshops to pilot and evaluate the Be Well Pack. Their time, energy and interest has significantly shaped this pack.

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## External Reviewers

External Review of the content of the Be Well Pack was provided by:  
Colm Humphries, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Philemon  
Maura Leahy, Relationships Ireland  
Cecilia Saviotti, NCFP Clinical Psychologist, Kildare Youth Services

## The Youth Work Ireland Wellbeing Squad

Throughout 2016 Youth Work Ireland will be working on the theme of Wellbeing. To ensure a youth voice on everything we do the Youth Work Ireland Wellbeing Squad, made up of young people from across Youth Work Ireland's services are assisting in the development and delivery of our work. Special thanks to our Wellbeing Squad members who helped to plan and deliver the Be Well Regional Pilot Workshops

## Editorial and Publishing

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## About this pack

This pack was commissioned by YouthWork Ireland as part of its year of promoting the work being done by youth services around the issue of mental wellbeing. The pack was written by Leighann Ryan Culleton, Carlow Regional Youth Service with the support of Youth Work Ireland National Office. The facilitators notes are to be used in conjunction with the Activity Pack.

This pack has been influenced by the FRIENDS Programme ([www.friendsprograms.com](http://www.friendsprograms.com))

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# Facilitators Notes



1. Young People's Mental Health in Ireland.
2. Anxiety What is it? How does it affect young people?
3. The Importance of Early Intervention and Prevention.
4. Guidelines for Facilitators
5. Making it Fun

## 1. Young People's Mental Health in Ireland - Background

The World Health Organisation (2005, p.7) defines adolescent mental health as: *"the capacity to achieve and maintain optimal psychological functioning and well-being. It is directly related to the level reached and competence achieved in psychological and social functioning."*

The number one health issue for young people in Ireland is their mental health. Mental health has been defined as a state of well-being in which the individual recognises their own abilities and is able to cope with normal daily stresses in life<sup>1</sup>. Good mental health in adolescence is a requirement for optimal psychological development, the development and maintenance of productive social relationships, effective learning, the ability to care for oneself, have good physical health and effective economic participation as adults. In Ireland by the age of 13 years, one in three young people are likely to have experienced some type of mental health difficulty<sup>2</sup>.

### **Anxiety and Young People**

Problems with anxiety are the most frequent mental health problems in children and adolescents. These problems seem to be among the earliest of all forms of significant mental health difficulty<sup>3</sup>. In 2012, The **My World Survey**<sup>4</sup> was the first national study on young people's mental health and provides a reference point for the mental health of young people in Ireland. It collated data on over 14,000 young people aged 12-25 years from across Ireland. The study's findings suggest that while the majority of young people were doing well across a variety of mental health indicators, over one-third of young people are outside the normal range for both depression (35%) and anxiety (34.5%) and that psychological difficulties increase among young people over time.

In addition, it highlighted that mental health difficulties tend to emerge in early adolescence and peak in the late teens and early 20s. This peak in mental health difficulties, in general, was coupled with a decrease in protective factors such as self-esteem, optimism and positive coping strategies. Youth, is a particularly vulnerable period in our lives<sup>5</sup>.

## Resilience and the “5-A-Day” Approach

There is increasing evidence that regardless of mental health status or life circumstances, effective mental health is improved by helping people become resilient in the face of difficulties. Resilience can be defined as an ability to cope with life events that place bigger demands on our coping. Resilience is developed every day by dealing well with what happens.

Resilience can be developed and strengthened through simple daily activities. The ‘5-A-Day’ programme for mental health and resilience is included in this pack because it provides the things young people can do to develop their resilience and promote their mental health. That is, the “5-A-Day” approach helps young people to better cope with normal daily stresses in life.

# 2 What is Anxiety?

Anxiety can be a normal part of childhood and adolescence, and many young people go through anxious times. Anxiety is defined as a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease about something with an uncertain outcome. However, phases are temporary whereas an anxiety difficulty tends to become more chronic and interferes with everyday functioning.

Some stress and anxiety can be a good thing. Being concerned for our future and wellbeing and that of others can motivate us to strive and develop. Such concerns help get us out of bed in the morning, work harder and achieve the things we want.

Too much anxiety, or the lack of coping skills and resiliency can be a difficulty for young people. Young people with an enduring anxiety problem usually show signs of this in some symptoms and behaviours. For example, you might see someone become unusually worried when they have to cope on their own or away from someone they trust. New environments can be a real source of worry. Significant anxiety can occur when someone is over thinking about something and cannot stop the thought. Fears and phobias that may even seem silly to the person is not uncommon. Anxiety interferes with how people work every day, doing the daily tasks can become so hard that often they are avoided. That can lead to school refusal, academic difficulties and social problems. If that pattern continues, these problems can become long lasting and lead to depression and behaviours like school or college dropout and poor coping skills like substance misuse.

### The Anxiety Responses Can Include:

Physical Symptoms	Cognitive Symptoms	Behaviour Symptoms
Sweating Increased heart rate Racing mind Feeling sick Butterflies in stomach Breath quickens	Racing thoughts Negative self talk Irrational thinking patterns about past behaviours Intense worrying	Avoidance of situation Withdrawn Challenging behaviours Anger Extreme self-consciousness Phobias Fearfulness





## 3. The Youth Worker's Role and the Be Well Workshop

This workshop addresses Outcome 1 of **Better Outcomes Brighter Future: Active and healthy, with positive physical and mental wellbeing**<sup>6</sup>. Youth work, through its emphasis on well-being, contributes to a range of outcomes for young people, most notably in the areas of promoting positive mental health. Given that many anxiety problems develop early in life, effective early intervention and prevention programmes represent a significant opportunity to prevent a great deal of suffering for individuals and their families.

For the purposes of the Be Well Workshop, youth workers are well-positioned to deliver awareness raising and information workshop that assist in enhancing resilience. Youth workers can also effectively signpost additional mental health services and supports for young people. It is in these ways that youth workers can contribute to promoting and fostering wellbeing and improved mental health among young people.

Youth worker's role in promoting wellbeing is an important role and one that we should celebrate and promote. We must, however, be clear that youth workers have no role in diagnosing, answering detailed questions on, or providing treatment for young people experiencing ongoing difficulty with anxiety or other mental health issues. If a young person expresses a need for help in managing their anxiety or any other mental health issue, the youth worker's role is to follow the referral process within their service.

## 4. Guidelines for Facilitator Delivering Be Well Workshop

### Preparing for Workshop

Take the time to familiarise yourself with the content of all the activities prior to delivering the workshop. The outline below is a prompt to be used during the workshop – if possible, try not to read word-for-word from the activity guidelines during the workshop. Be sure that all workshop handouts are copied and ready prior to commencement of activities. When choosing a room for the workshop, aim for a space that is sufficiently large, quiet and well lit. Lastly, it's important that the young people feel they have some privacy and an opportunity to separate themselves for parts of the workshop.

### Adapting to the group

It's recommended that the facilitator adapts the activities to suit particular group needs, strengths and any particular group requirements including age, gender and culture.

### Important Information about Sharing Emotions and Experiences

The workshop is a place to safely explore anxiety and the **opinions** and **feelings** that young people have about this part of their lives and to **name and explore** common **anxieties**. It is not a place for telling **personal stories** or making **personal disclosures** as such disclosures can be distressing for others who may have similar stories.

With this in mind, it is important that the group collectively make a contract to sensitively establish that the workshop is not a place for telling personal stories. The comfort and security provided in the youth work environment may naturally encourage young people to share and divulge personal experiences – sharing of such stories must be gently, but firmly discouraged. It is wisest to say that if anything we talk about here brings up personal things that are hard for you, come and speak to us afterwards as we would be happy to listen and maybe direct you to someone helpful.

If possible you might attempt to screen who attends the workshop. You might consider that young people who have had a bereavement or large personal event in the last year should not attend as they need to prioritise their own self-care.

At the same time, the youth worker is well placed to encourage participants to share their ideas and feelings. Don't force participants to share their emotions with everyone in a large group unless they feel comfortable. It is okay if a young person in the group doesn't want to participate in a particular conversation.

### **At the beginning of the activity, ensure participants understand the difference between:**

- **Every day, stressful life experiences** of being a young person (e.g. exams, bullying, and relationships), which can comfortably be discussed.
- **Very personal experiences** (e.g. trauma, experiences of harm). Emphasise that very personal life experiences and feelings are best discussed on a more private, confidential level with the appropriate staff member within your organisation. This ensures that young people have their concerns addressed in a fully supportive environment and prevents inappropriate disclosures during the workshop.

### **Paraphrasing / Summarising / Reflecting**

Using techniques such as paraphrasing, summarising and reflecting throughout the workshop encourages young people to open up and talk more freely in a group environment. It also enhances the learning outcomes for participants.

#### **Facilitating techniques briefly described:**

*Paraphrasing* feeds back to the speaker the essence of what they are saying, but in a shorter, condensed format. This demonstrates to the group that they have been heard and also reinforces group learning, for example *'so what you're saying is that school exams are very stressful and can impact on other areas of your life such as arguing with family members. Is that what you're saying?'*

*Summarising* is similar to paraphrasing but covers a longer period of time. The skills of summarising involve attending to the key concepts of the conversation and then relaying these concepts back to the group. When summarising the young person's ideas, it's important to use a mixture of the speaker's words as well as your own for example *'so let me see if I've heard you correctly so far. You often find it difficult to go to sleep at night when you are doing exams because you are feeling worried about not doing well. Is that right?'*

*Reflecting* involves observing participant's emotions' and feeding key feelings back to them. This helps participants to clarify their own feelings and indicates that they have been heard correctly for example *'it sounds like you're feeling pretty upset and worried about your exam next week'*



## Reflecting on the workshop

It's important to set realistic goals as a facilitator and for the young people participating in the workshop. When you've completed the workshop with a group, you should evaluate your level of success in achieving the objectives.



Reflecting upon your experiences in a focused space is key. Think through all the phases of your experience doing the workshop as this encourages you to think systematically about your facilitation experience - try using all the headings to structure your reflection.

## 5. Making it Fun

*'If children have interest, education happens'* Sir Arthur C. Clarke

It simply doesn't matter how necessary and important this material is if the young people are bored and not engaged they won't learn! Some tips to make the learning process fun for the young people during this workshop are:

- Love what you do
- Create a safe and comfortable working environment
- Appreciate young people ideas, opinions and involvement
- Be Fun
- Be Involved

## References

- 1 WHO, 2005
- 2 Cannon et al., 2013
- 3 Beesdo, Knappe & Pine, 2009
- 4 Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012
- 5 Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012
- 6 DCYA, 2014



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