

Mental Health Matters



A Mental Health Ireland Project sponsored by



DEPARTMENT
OF HEALTH AND CHILDREN
AN ROINN
SLÁINTE AGUS LEANAÍ



Southern Health Board
Bord Sláinte An Deiscirt



Mental Health Matters

A Mental Health Ireland Project

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Foreword

Chairman, Mental Health
Association of Ireland

Mar réamhrá is cúis mhór onóra agus aoibhnis dom, im' phost mar chathaoirleach ar Chumann Shláinte Intinne na hÉireann, an deis seo a bheith agam *Mental Health Matters* a sheoladh. Is fíor an seanfhocal, "Mol an Óige agus tiocfaidh sí", agus tá sé thar a bheith oiriúnach maidir le aidhm an fhoilseacháin seo.

For over two decades the MHAI has enjoyed a special relationship with the education sector by virtue of our National Public Speaking Project which has served to promote and highlight the central role which education at all levels plays in the promotion of positive mental health.

Through our contact with schools we became aware of the need for relevant materials specific to Irish needs. *Mental Health Matters* is our reaction to this need. As a response, it reflects the tremendous voluntary spirit which characterises the MHAI. Our volunteers have been involved at all stages of this production and the organisation's Development Officer network will further support the delivery of the materials in schools.

Mental health is a gift, which we must all safeguard. Everyone – but in particular young people – should become familiar with the concept. In so doing they will be far better able to cope with the ever-increasing pressures of life. Hopefully, through using *Mental Health Matters*, our young people will help to create a society where there is far greater tolerance and where the stigma of mental illness becomes a thing of the past.

As Chairman of the Mental Health Association of Ireland, I thank all those who have been involved with the production of *Mental Health Matters* and look forward to the benefits its use will bring.

Derry O'Dwyer, Chairman
Mental Health Association of Ireland.

2001

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	1
Teacher's/Facilitator's Guide	3
Mental Health Awareness Questionnaire	5
Unit One Health - Physical and Mental	7
Unit Two Mental Ill Health	31
Unit Three Mental Illness	49
Unit Four Treatment and Care	85
Unit Five Society and Mental Health	105
Unit Six Mental Health and You	129
Conclusion	144
Supplementary Materials	145

INTRODUCTION

We live in an age where one might be forgiven for thinking that change is the only constant. Traditional values are being lost and people find that more and more they are being thrown back on their own resources and coping mechanisms. In such a context it is little wonder that mental health problems are on the increase particularly among young people.

It is now more important than ever for our young people to be introduced to the concept of positive mental health. We have bombarded them with the importance of physical well-being and its maintenance but perhaps the importance of a healthy mind in the development of the whole person has been neglected. *Mental Health Matters* seeks to redress this balance and also aims to:

- Address the issue of mental health in a realistic and relevant manner appropriate to the age group.
- Present mental health as a distinct concept integral to our daily lives, the maintenance of which is vital to physical health.
- Challenge young people's attitudes and misconceptions as regards mental illness.
- Look critically at society's attitudes to mental illness and the factors which influence such attitudes.
- Make young people aware of services and facilities should they, a member of their family, or a friend need to avail of them.

Mental Health Matters is structured in six units, each of which explores a specific theme through a series of exercises. These exercises are supplemented by teacher information and support materials contained in a learning resource section. The methodology is varied allowing teachers to adapt the exercises as they see fit. A teacher may choose to omit certain exercises in favour of others but the guiding principle is to ensure that all students will have a basic awareness of the importance of good mental health.

Introduction continued

The programme also includes a support DVD and it is suggested that an initial viewing of the DVD may serve as an introduction to *Mental Health Matters*. The DVD exercises seek to reinforce the learning process and serve as a trigger for further activities and discussion.

Mental Health Matters can be used as a resource in a number of areas:

- Transition Year – as an independent module on mental health.
- The Leaving Certificate Applied Programme.
- A component of Social, Personal and Health Education.
- A unit in a particular subject area – Religious Education, Home Economics (Social and Scientific).

A programme such as this should be seen as part of the school's health promotion policy thus ensuring real ownership of the materials by both students and staff. As a result, the concept of mental health will be seen as something real and relevant to the lives of all.

Mental Health Matters is not exclusively the domain of schools. Any group or agency, which is concerned with the welfare of young people, can also use this programme.

An awareness of the importance of positive mental health is vital if young people are to achieve their full potential. Participation in this programme will help to foster this awareness.

*Please note the support DVD is referred to throughout the units 1-6 as a video.

TEACHER'S/FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

Mental Health Matters has been designed to allow for flexibility and individual teaching styles. Ideally it will be teacher-delivered in an 8–10 week Transition Year module (2 classes per week); however the materials can be modified to suit a variety of settings and programmes (see introduction). Effective delivery will be enhanced by participation in the Teacher Training Programme (contact MHI for more information). Regardless of the setting it will be helpful if certain procedures are followed.

Suggested Procedure

- 1 Having first introduced the programme and outlined its aims (see introduction) the Teacher/Facilitator should distribute copies of the 'Mental Health Awareness' questionnaire on page 5. This seeks to focus students on a variety of issues and also seeks to establish the student's level of awareness and knowledge. This exercise will be repeated once again at the end of the programme as a measure of information acquired. The Teacher/Facilitator should show the *Mental Health Matters* video as part of the introduction to the programme, it can then be revisited as appropriate to deal with the exercises specific to the DVD.
- 2 Before beginning any unit it is important to consult the Learning Resource which contains the support material for the exercises. The topics addressed in this module may at times raise matters of a personal nature for a class or individual. In this context the importance of the Teacher/Facilitator who knows his/her own class cannot be over-estimated in dealing with potentially sensitive issues. However, in the event of further help being required we have included a list of support agencies and contacts in the Supplementary Materials section.
- 3 Students should keep a journal in which to record information, insights and reflections.
- 4 Each unit opens with a reflection. Students should record this in their journal and briefly share their responses.

Teacher's/Facilitator's Guide continued

- 5 Now follow the steps as outlined in each unit.
- 6 **Mind Gym.** These are activities which are intended to emphasise the importance of exercising our brain in a variety of ways. They may be used either in class or at home.
- 7 Each unit concludes with a number of suggestions (Minding Minds) for developing and maintaining mental health. Students should record these in their journals.
- 8 Relaxation exercises, which some Teachers/Facilitators may wish to use before commencing the class, have been included in the Supplementary Materials section.
- 9 Teachers/Facilitators should be aware that there are a number of possibilities for cross-curricular work.
For example; Unit Four – Step Three; Unit Five – Step Two;
Unit Five – Step Seven; Unit Six – Step Four.
- 10 The final step in each unit is an optional exercise, which may be used in conjunction with the *Mental Health Matters* DVD.
These exercises seek to reinforce the learning process and serve as a trigger for further activities and discussion.

A time guide for the exercises has not been included in order to avoid limiting the Teacher's/Facilitator's creativity in exploring student response.

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS QUESTIONNAIRE

Photocopy and distribute to class

Students should complete the questionnaire and retain it in their file. This exercise should be repeated at the end of *Mental Health Matters* for comparison purposes.

Please tick as appropriate:

- | | Agree | Disagree | Don't know |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 Physical and mental health are independent of one another. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2 Good mental health is largely a matter of luck. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3 People are afraid of mental illness. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4 Mental illness is rare. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5 Drug therapy is the only treatment for mental illness. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6 A mentally healthy person is never angry, perplexed or frustrated. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7 Mental ill health and mental illness are the same. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8 Treatment for mental health problems hasn't changed much over the years. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 9 The media are irresponsible in reporting mental health issues. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 10 More social housing projects should be established in the community to accommodate those with mental health problems. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 11 Mental health issues should be taught in schools. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

