

1ST & 2ND CLASS

# Parent Support Sheets – Introduction

## Dear Parents and Guardians,

Irish mental health charity, A Lust for Life, have developed a primary school wellbeing and resilience programme, 'The Schools Programme', which is designed to build resilience, increase wellbeing and enhance the emotional literacy of 1st to 6th class school children. Over the last number of years we have worked with a team of educators and psychologists as well as parents and children to develop a programme which aims to teach children the essential tools to manage the ups and downs of life. We are delighted that your child/the child in your care is taking part in the programme at present.

We have created these Parent Support Sheets to help you engage with the 'Try it at Home' activities with your child and we have also included some top tips from Clinical Psychologist, Author and Mental Health Lead for the Schools Programme, Dr. Malie Coyne. Malie is also a parent to two little ladies, and so knows first-hand the rollercoaster that is parenting!

## Dr Malie Coyne.

You know the way when we ask our child "How was school today?" and they answer "Fine", and nothing else?! Well, we've designed these Parent Support Sheets so that you can become familiar with what your child is learning in our programme, and to give you the opportunity to embed these ideas at home. We all lead busy lives, so please don't feel under any pressure to spend lots of time on this. Any time at all to have a chat with your child will benefit them hugely.

One of my favourite quotes is "The child-parent connection is the most powerful mental health intervention known to mankind" (Bessel Van Der Kolk), as I believe that it is through your relationship with your child that they learn how to manage the ups and downs of life and build resilience. This may seem like a tall order, but all they need is for us to be 'good enough', to attune to their needs most of the time, make mistakes, repair them, and get up and try again!

Researchers are increasingly finding that the key to an emotionally healthy life is resilience. Resilience means learning to cope with manageable threats, while having the ability to rebound in the face of difficulties. The single-most important factor that nurtures resilience in children is having a stable and committed relationship with a trusted adult (that's you!), to whom the child can turn to in times of challenge or need.

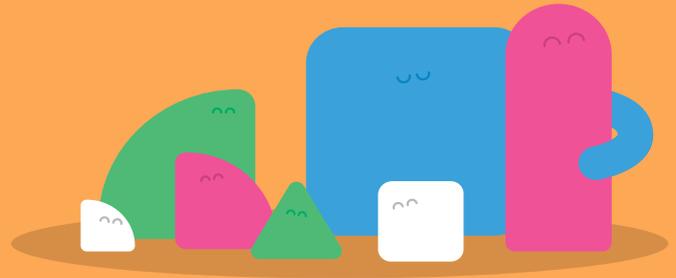
Children learn resilience by watching how we manage difficult situations. Any busy, stressed-out or disastrous episode in your week can become an opportunity for connection with your child. It's by connecting with you – rather than by having a perfect home life – that they can feel soothed, safe and cared for, and can begin to develop ways of soothing themselves. Similarly, every moment you invest time to reflect on yourself as a person and as a parent, and actively fill your emotional cup, is invaluable. Human connection heals adversity. It's as simple as that.

The Parent Support Sheets will include a Lesson Summary, a 'Try it at Home' activity, a few tips from a psychologist (me!), and some useful resources for further exploration of the topic. Hopefully they will help you in connecting with your child on these important life lessons.

Here is video on 'Good Enough Parenting' to kickstart the A Lust for Life Schools Programme Parent Support Sheets: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=657264725017649>.



Scan here for  
'Try it at Home'  
activities!



1ST & 2ND CLASS

# Parent Support Sheets – Lesson 1: My Wellbeing

## Lesson Summary:

The aim of this lesson is to support children's understanding of wellbeing and improve their self-esteem. Children learn about what 'wellbeing' means, which is the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy. They talk about what helps their wellbeing (e.g. school, work, sleep, physical activity, nutrition, play, and relationships). They also look at what helps them feel special and unique, and what they can do to feel good in themselves.

## Try It At Home Activity: 'What can you do to feel good?'

In this 'Try It At Home' activity, children are asked to draw a picture of them doing something that makes them feel good (e.g. playing, walking, talking to a sibling or friend, playing with an animal, or whatever makes them feel good!), and share this with you.

To encourage your child to reflect on what they did in class, ask them more about 'what makes them feel good' in their own lives. Show genuine interest in their picture, and explore with them why they drew what they drew. You could also ask your child questions such as:

- What makes this special for you?
- Do you think everyone in your class would draw the same thing as you?
- What else do you do that makes you feel good?



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activities!

## Dr. Malie's Top Tips:

- When talking about 'wellbeing' with your child, it can be helpful to talk about **what makes you feel well in yourself**, and how you learnt that. Talk to them about the basic steps we all need to actively take every day to balance our wellbeing (e.g. having proper sleep, exercise and food), so we're better able to enjoy life.
- **Play** is a hugely important aspect of a child's life and is considered a right of the child in the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Not only is play a right for children, it's absolutely essential for their growth and every aspect of their physical, emotional, social and cognitive development.
- **Playing with your child** deepens your emotional connection and helps them to feel special. A short blast of quality time with parents gives children the chance to counterbalance the negative feelings they can carry around with them all day. Consider this 'special play time' as refilling your child's emotional cup so they can go back to exploring their world full-up with love and possibility. Here is a great podcast on playing with your child with Hayley Rice, Play Therapist: <https://play.acast.com/s/a-little-birdie-told-me/14-hayley-rice>

- **'Free play'** is exactly what you might expect; typically free of adult supervision, it allows children to explore and experience the world around them. Free play is like a testing ground for life, where children learn to make friends, to cooperate with others as equals, to negotiate rules, to creatively solve their own problems, and to develop a mastery over their worlds.

Now that you know how beneficial free play is for your child's development and emotional wellbeing, you may wish to ask yourself:

- Is my child getting any time for adult-free play?
- Could a supervised activity be exchanged for a less supervised one?
- Does my child get opportunities to resolve their own challenges before I fix things?
- Could I allow them to do one new thing today which I had not let them do before? (Safely of course!)

Perhaps you could begin to identify some small changes in your routine which would allow your child to taste more freedom, excitement and challenge all rolled into one.

Just as play is important for wellbeing, so is downtime. It's important to remember that less is more. Children nowadays often have very busy schedules, and have little time to rest, recharge and relax. Because we want to do what we think is best for our children, we feel pressure to enrol them in lots of activities so as not to deprive them or miss an opportunity to nurture potential talent.

Having downtime is crucial for children's wellbeing, so it can help to reduce external activities and commitments by focusing on the ones your kids really like. Whilst many children enjoy the distractions of watching a screen, it is also important that they engage in relaxing time with rejuvenates them (e.g. free play; reading; nature).

### Resources:

To learn more about wellbeing and how to support your own wellbeing as well as your child's, check out the following sources:

- The Department of Education have published the following information on their website about wellbeing. This is updated quite regularly: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/9cda4-wellbeing-information-for-parentsguardians/>
- Minding your own wellbeing as a parent is crucial. Here is a free video course by HSE Health and Wellbeing called 'Minding your Wellbeing Programme', which consists of 5 video sessions on practicing self-care; understanding our thoughts; exploring emotions; building positive relationships; and improving our resilience: <https://www2.hse.ie/healthy-you/minding-your-wellbeing-programme.html>