



ALL YOU NEED
TO KNOW ABOUT
Dáil na nÓg
2010



Delegate
Toolkit 2010

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Published by The Stationery Office, Dublin

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Dear Delegate, Welcome to the DELEGATE TOOLKIT for Dáil na nÓg 2010

Inside you will find lots of important information, including:

- Background to Dáil na nÓg
- What to expect as a Dáil na nÓg delegate
- Tips on how best to have your say on the day
- Background information on the two themes or topics being discussed at Dáil na nÓg 2010, which are:
 - **Equality of Access to Education**
 - **Mental Health**
- Information on how to be nominated as a Dáil na nÓg Chairperson
- Information on the Dáil na nÓg Council and how to get involved
- Practical information about the event on **Friday, 5th March 2010** and the agenda for the day.

It is important to be prepared for Dáil na nÓg to make sure your voice is heard!

You should do your best to read all the contents of this Toolkit *before you meet with the other delegates in your area*. You should definitely try and **read it all before 5th March 2010**.

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Happy reading and we look forward to seeing you in Croke Park!

'It was definitely a day that made me proud to be an Irish youth.'

WHAT DELEGATES SAID ABOUT

DÁIL NA nÓG

2009

'Everything that affects me obviously affects other young people so getting a chance to be heard in Dáil na nÓg was representing not only me but every youth in Ireland.'

'We are being listened to by people who have the power to change public policy.'

'(Things will change...) because Minister Andrews seems to actually take into consideration what we think.'

'I was surprised how much the Dáil na nÓg Council had achieved in a year - they should be the ones in Leinster House!'

'I found it a wonderful experience - I felt really valued and was thrilled with the opportunity of meeting all the very important decision makers.'

'It's a chance to get my opinion heard and an honour.'

'One of the few chances to finally be heard - we hardly ever get the chance to influence decisions others make about us.'

'I thought it was good to see what the Council had done because I'm new to the Comhairle and I like to know what we can do.'



Part 1: Dáil na nÓg & How it Works

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What is Dáil na nÓg about?

- Dáil na nÓg is the National Youth Parliament of Ireland.
- At Dáil na nÓg, people like YOU represent the views of people aged 12 - 18 from all over Ireland and debate issues of concern to them.
- On the day, participants tell important decision-makers including the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Mr. Barry Andrews, TD (**who will be at Dáil na nÓg for the whole day**), what they think of issues that affect their lives and what changes need to happen to make things better.
- Dáil na nÓg is a national version of your local Comhairle na nÓg.
- The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) organises Dáil na nÓg on behalf of and in cooperation with the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA).

Who are the delegates?

- The young people who have been elected to Dáil na nÓg and will be attending on the day are called 'delegates'.
- YOU are a delegate, representing your local Comhairle na nÓg and area.

Where are the delegates from?

- Most Dáil na nÓg delegates have been elected by members of their Comhairle na nÓg. There are 34 Comhairle na nÓg across Ireland.
- To ensure that the Dáil represents *all* young people, some delegates also come from seldom heard or minority groups.
- If you would like to find out which young people are representing you, please contact your local authority. Details are on the Dáil na nÓg website (www.dailnanog.ie).

Why is my job as a delegate important?

- As a Dáil na nÓg delegate, you won't just be representing yourself — you will be representing all the young people in your Comhairle na nÓg and local area.
- Through you and the other delegates, the opinions of young people all over Ireland will be heard and will help to inform the Government in its important decisions (such as public policy and service provision).

Preparation in advance is key!

- The **Dáil na nÓg training day** is arranged for all delegates. This is an important opportunity for you to:
 - get **practical information** on the event;
 - get background information on the **themes** being discussed on the day;
 - focus on the **causes, effects and solutions** to a particular issue;
 - **practice taking part in group discussions** similar to those on the day;
 - **practice coming to agreement** as a group on two clear **recommendations**.

What will we be talking about?

- There are two main themes being discussed at Dáil na nÓg 2010. These are:
 - **Equality of Access to Education**
 - **Mental Health**

How were these themes chosen?

- In 2009, members of each Comhairle na nÓg were asked to propose two themes or topics that were of most concern to young people in their area.
- All the themes suggested were analysed by a researcher at the OMCYA and the Dáil na nÓg team.
- They identified the two most popular themes, as well as five sub-themes or 'key issues' to be discussed on the day.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Everyone's voice should be heard
- There are no right or wrong answers
- Respect each other
- Listen to everybody
- Encourage other people in your group
- Have fun!

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Sub-themes

- These two main themes are divided into five sub-themes, called '**Key Issues**' (see Part 2 for more information).
- In this way, delegates can tell the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and other important decision-makers what young people think about each theme in more detail.
- You will need to **decide on the top two 'key issues'** that you would most like to talk about before Dáil na nÓg.
- You will have a chance to think about this with the **help of this toolkit and during the training day**.
- You should try and make sure that young people from your area are equally involved in discussions on the different key issues if possible.
- The Dáil na nÓg Team will make every effort to ensure everyone gets to discuss their chosen key issue on the day.

On the day: What to expect

- The Dáil na nÓg Team wants to make sure that **YOU** have a great experience from the moment you walk into Croke Park.
- You will have a chance to meet other young people from around the country and share your views with them.
- We want to make sure that you have lots of opportunities to put your opinions forward as clearly as possible.
- Most of all, we want you to **have fun and enjoy participating** in Dáil na nÓg 2010!

On the day: Developing clear recommendations

- At Dáil na nÓg, you will spend time discussing one of the ten 'key issues' with other young people.
- Your group will then decide on **two recommendations** that it would like to propose, in order to change things for the better.
- Each discussion group will have a facilitator and note taker to help.
- One of your group's recommendations will be voted on by all 200 participants later in the day and may become part of the Dáil na nÓg Council's 'To Do List' for 2010 and 2011. (See Part 3 for more information on the Council).
- Therefore it is very important that each recommendation:
 - has just **one clear goal**;
 - suggests **an action to achieve that goal**;
 - is a **maximum of 25 words long**.

BRAIN TEASER EXERCISE: SPOT THE CLEARER RECOMMENDATION!

Which of the two recommendations below is clearer and why?

(A) Adults need to change their attitudes towards young people.

or

(B) Increase the number of working speed cameras and traffic police in urban and rural areas in proportion to the population in that area.

Although statement (A) has a goal, it does not suggest an action plan. It is unclear if the 'adults' referred to are teachers, parents, the Gardaí or everyone over the age of 18. There is no practical suggestion on how a change in adults' attitudes could be achieved.

On the other hand, Statement (B), which was suggested in relation to road safety, is much clearer and has an obvious goal and action.

- There will be two groups discussing each topic, so your group will also develop a 'reserve recommendation' which will be used if the other table comes up with a very similar one.
- The facilitators from the two tables will work together to decide which recommendation will be used for the vote.



'The training was brill. It really helped me prepare and I met some cool people.'



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Part 2: Themes for Discussion at Dáil na nÓg

2010

The two main themes chosen by young people for discussion at Dáil na nÓg 2010 are:

- **Equality of Access to Education**
- **Mental Health**

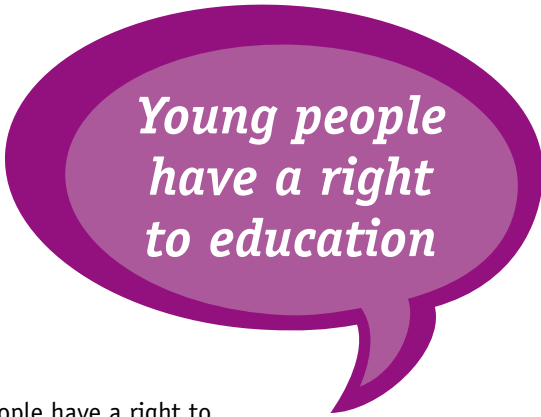
How will this section help me?

- This section of the Toolkit gives YOU some background information on the five 'key issues' under the themes 'Equality of Access to Education' and 'Mental Health'.
- It is important to read it so that you have some information to inform your opinions and discussions.

Theme 1: Equality of Access to Education

These are the five education sub-themes or 'key issues' that will be discussed at Dáil na nÓg 2010 based on young people's suggestions:

- Key Issue 1: Cost of 2nd level education
- Key Issue 2: Cost of 3rd level education
- Key Issue 3: Young people having a say in education
- Key Issue 4: Exam pressures
- Key Issue 5: Transport to/from education



*Young people
have a right
to education*

KEY ISSUE 1: COST OF 2nd LEVEL EDUCATION

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that young people have a right to education. In Ireland, everyone up to the age of 18 has a right to education, and everyone between six and sixteen must attend school by law.

Education in Ireland is officially free, unless you attend a private school where fees must be paid. However there are various other costs involved in going to school. These include: books, uniforms, school and exam fees, lunches, transport, and school trips.

All of these extra costs can add up and the beginning of a new school year is a particularly expensive time for families.

Some facts

- 2008 research* found that although second level education is officially free, the cost of going to secondary school for six years can add up to €12,736 per person.
- 2009 research** showed that uniforms can cost up to €400 for secondary school (not including footwear), and secondary school books can cost €390.
- The United Nations Committee which monitors countries on how they protect the rights of children expressed concern to the Irish Government in 2006 about the costs of education, materials etc., that parents have to pay.***
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that countries should offer financial assistance for education costs when needed.

* Bank of Ireland Life in association with Schooldays.ie (2008): www.bankofireland.com

** Barnardos (2009) *Written Out Written Off* Campaign on educational disadvantage: www.barnardos.ie

*** United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006) *Concluding Observations: Ireland*: www.ohchr.org

Government funding for 2nd level education

Due to the fact that Ireland's economy is in recession at the moment, the Government is under pressure to make many difficult decisions on funding priorities.

In Budget 2010 the Government increased funding in some areas of education. In relation to secondary school education it promised:

- extra funding to schools for school books this year;
- €50 million to increase IT and computers in schools;
- €12 million to recruit 500 extra teachers over the next three years;
- to keep grants for secondary schools at the same level as 2009.

Some cuts in education funding were also announced in last December's budget. Money used to build schools was reduced by 7% and some funding was cut for choirs and orchestras, physics and chemistry, and transition year among other things.

Supports for families

Some families find it harder than others to cover the costs of sending their children to school. The 'Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance' is a source for financial support for some in Ireland.

The fund aims to help families meet the cost of uniforms and footwear for their children. It is available to households that meet certain criteria, including that their income is below a certain amount. The current rate of €305 for 12 – 17 year-olds was not cut in the last budget.

Supports for schools

Some schools are given extra funding and support through the School Support Programme (now part of the 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools' (DEIS) scheme) if they are considered disadvantaged. However not every school is eligible for these supports and families on lower incomes whose children don't go these type of schools can also find things difficult.

Questions to consider

- What are the three biggest costs of going to secondary school in your view?
- What are the impacts (if any) of education cuts for young people?
- What ways could the cost of going to school be reduced?
 - What could young people do themselves?
 - What could families do?
 - What could schools do?
 - What could the Government do?
- Can you think of some new ideas for cost-cutting schemes? For example:
 - Book lending schemes - how might they work?
 - What role could libraries play in reducing costs?
 - Could the cost of mock exams being marked by external examiners be reduced? How?
 - Any other ideas?

The cost of going to secondary school for six years can add up to €12,736



KEY ISSUE 2: COST OF 3rd LEVEL EDUCATION

Most students who attend a full-time third-level course for the first time in Ireland do not have to pay tuition fees. However, there are many other costs to cover when a student goes on to College or University. These include:

- student registration charges (up from €900 to €1,500 in 2009);
- exam fees;
- books and photocopying;
- other materials that are needed for College work;
- living expenses like food and accommodation.

Some facts

- Not everyone is eligible for free tuition fees at third level. To be eligible you must:
 - be attending a full time, publicly-funded undergraduate course for two years;
 - be going to a University, Institute of Technology, College of Education, National University of Ireland or some religious Colleges;
 - be a European Union (EU) national or have refugee status and have been living in the EU for three of the five years before the course;
 - not be repeating the year due to failing exams or changing course.
- Students who are from outside the EU are not usually eligible for free third level fees, even if they have been going to school in Ireland.
- There is a Government grant scheme that supports some students who need financial support, but not everyone is eligible for this.
- The amount of these grants and scholarships for students were reduced by 5% in January 2010.
- Funding for Universities and Institutes of Technology was reduced by 4% for 2010.



'It's a great way for young people to have our say and express our views and opinions.'



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*'We are the future
and we know
what we need for
the future.'*

Re-introduction of 3rd level fees

Last year the Government talked about introducing third level fees again in order to bring in some money, but these plans were put on hold. However, there is no guarantee that a future Government won't re-introduce third level fees. Here are some of the arguments for and against re-introducing fees:

Arguments for 3rd level fees

- The current system encourages inequalities between rich and poor: Many families who can afford to pay fees don't have to, while people from disadvantaged backgrounds are not attending third level as much as was hoped when fees were taken away.
- Some families could afford to pay fees and we could have a well organised grants system that gives support to *everyone* who can't afford to pay fees.
- Currently the State is paying for the education of many people who will go on to be high earners and it can't afford this. If a loan system was offered to cover fees, these people could pay that back later.
- Many who have benefitted from free fees are now emigrating so the country is losing its investment.

Arguments against 3rd level fees

- Free education is a right and introducing fees would take this away.
- Some families struggle to send their children to College due to other costs now and not all are eligible for grants. So how would they manage if fees were re-introduced?
- Students are not able to get part time jobs easily at the moment and many parents are losing theirs, so fewer people could afford to go if fees came back.
- Ireland is known internationally for its high number of well-educated young people. We risk losing this good reputation if many can't afford to go.

Questions to consider

- Are the costs of third level education reducing young peoples' access to education in Ireland in your view? If so, how?
- How do you think education cuts and the recession will affect your chances of going to College?
- What could or should the Government do to help families who struggle with costs?
- Colleges have a lot of independence to make their own financial decisions but are also suffering cuts. What could they do to ease the financial pressures on students, if anything?
- Do you think third level fees should be re-introduced or not? Why?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of a loan system like in the UK which students pay back later?

KEY ISSUE 3: YOUNG PEOPLE HAVING A SAY IN EDUCATION

Young people have a right to have a voice on issues that affect them in their lives. This is confirmed in a number of international and national documents:

- Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children and young people have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them.
- The Irish Government's plan for children called the 'National Children's Strategy' says: '*Children and young people will be given a voice in matters which affect them.*'

Some facts

- Young people can have a say in what's happening in their locality through Comhairle na nÓg and nationally through Dáil na nÓg.
- The Office of the Minister for Children (OMCYA) asks young people for their views on different issues regularly (such as mental health, alcohol, play and recreation).
- Student councils are the formal structure in Ireland at present for young people to have a say in school and education issues.
 - Irish students' right to establish student councils is set down in law (the Education Act 1998).
 - There are some excellent student councils in secondary schools in Ireland and there are still some schools that have no student council.
- Secondary school students spend an average of 1,169 hours a year in education, so they have a right to be interested in it and want to influence how it operates.

What is a Student Council?

A student council is an elected group of students which represents the entire school and acts as the voice for their opinions. An effective student council should:

- find out what students think about issues and listen to their suggestions;
- keep students informed about relevant decisions or changes;
- ensure students have a real influence over things that affect them by being involved in decision-making on important matters like school policies, etc.

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Student Council Support Service

There is a Student Council Support Service (www.studentcouncil.ie) run by the Department of Education and Science which supports schools that want to set up a student council or improve the effectiveness of one.

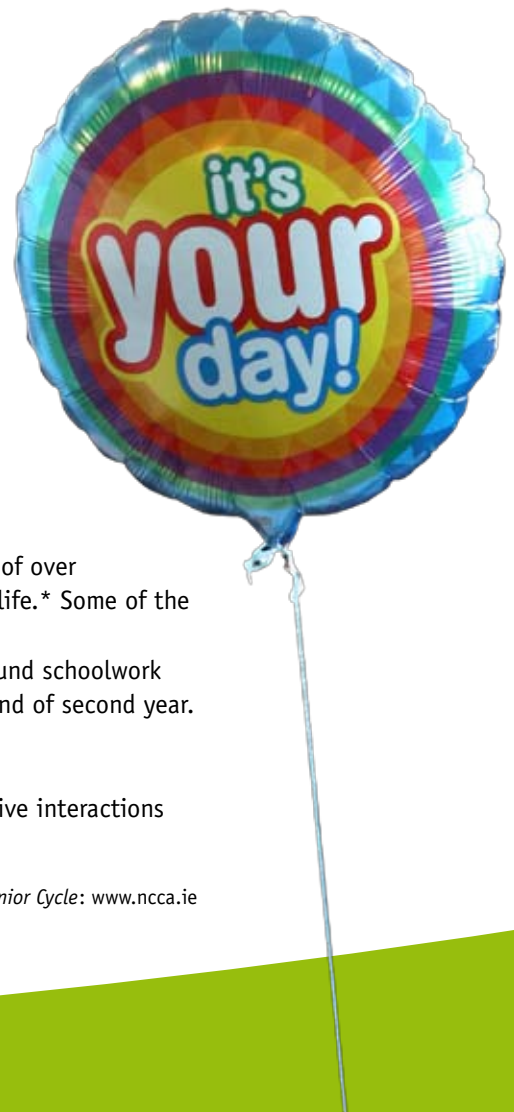
It provides school visits, on-site training, workshops, useful resources and examples of good practice. There is also a resource pack for students and teachers on setting up a student council, running elections, holding meetings etc., called the *Student Council Resource Pack* (OMCYA, 2006).

Other ways young people give views on education

In 2006 the National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NCCA) got the views of over 900 second year students in 12 Irish schools on what they thought of school life.* Some of the findings included:

- Many students become less positive about school over time: While 80% found schoolwork interesting at the start of first year only 55% found it interesting by the end of second year.
- Students preferred subjects with more project work than languages.
- Students were more negative when they had restricted subject choices.
- Those who were happiest and did best in school were those who had positive interactions with their teachers.

* Economic and Social Research Institute on behalf of the NCCA (2006) *Pathways Through the Junior Cycle*: www.ncca.ie



Questions to consider

- Is there a student council in your school?
 - If yes, how effective is it?
 - To what extent are students involved in decisions that affect them?
 - What issues does it focus on? Are there other issues that it could focus on that would be more interesting or important?
- How could student councils be made more effective?
 - What could young people do to improve them?
 - What could schools, teachers and parents do to improve them?
 - What could the Government or national support services do to help?
- What other ways could schools get students' views on issues like teaching and learning outside of the student council (e.g. online surveys)? What benefits would this have?
- How could young people have more of a say in how the education system/curriculum is run at Government level, since they are the users of the service?
- How can we ensure that all voices are heard?
 - What about seldom heard young people or people from different or marginalised backgrounds, or those who don't have English as their first language?
- What supports could be set up in school to help young people to develop the skills, confidence and ability to participate better in these structures (e.g. transition year activities)?

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*'It's a chance to
get my opinion heard
and an honour.'*



KEY ISSUE 4: EXAM PRESSURES

Exam pressures are a major source of stress for many young people. The time coming up to exams can be stressful if someone feels they haven't studied enough during the year. However, it can also be stressful for those who have worked continuously through the year if all the marks are dependent on the end of year exams.

The exam period itself is also stressful, with lots of tests in a short space of time and lots of last minute revision. It's natural for young people to become tired, worried and anxious as a result and this is not good for their mental health.

Some facts

- In a 2009 consultation with young people in Ireland, participants named exam pressures as one of the biggest things that hurt their mental health.*
- A survey in 2009 showed that exam stress and pressure to achieve affects 52% of people aged 18 – 24 in Ireland compared to only 30% in the UK.**
- There are various sources of information and support about how to reduce exam stress (including websites like www.spunout.ie and www.reachout.com).
- Tips include developing good study habits during the year, having a quiet study area, asking for help and support if needed and managing your own and others expectations.

* Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (2009) *Teenage Mental Health: What helps and what hurts?*: www.omcya.ie

** Samaritans and YouGov (2009) *Worries 2009 – Republic of Ireland*: www.samaritans.org

Exams versus continuous assessment

Some people wonder if the format of exams is healthy and helpful for young people as they are based entirely on answers given on the day of the exam. This type of assessment may not suit everyone and can be a major source of stress. Everyone has to do some form of assessment, but do they have to be in the current format? Is continuous assessment a possible alternative?

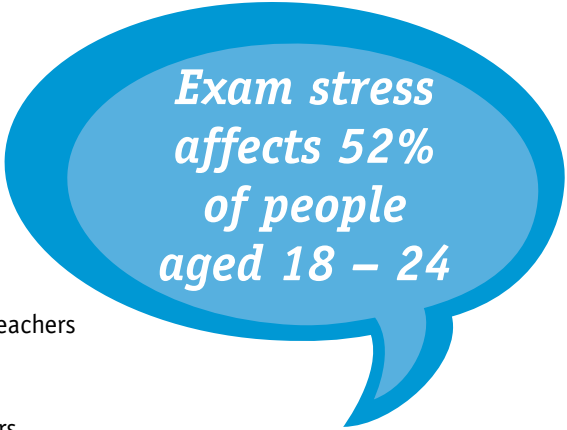
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Arguments for continuous assessment

- Continuous assessment could be used to complement State exams as is done in the UK and Northern Ireland.
- It could take homework, assignments and class tests into account.
- It would help to reduce the stress on young people at exam time where the focus is all on performing in a two or three hour period.

Arguments against continuous assessment

- It is not clear how fair continuous assessment would be if different teachers around the country were setting assignments and marking them.
- Standards in marking between schools might vary too much.
- Teachers might not be happy about being both teachers and examiners.
- Students might not be happy either as it would not be as anonymous as the exam system.



Exam stress
affects 52%
of people
aged 18 – 24

Junior Cert Review

Last year the Minister for Education called for the Junior Certificate to be reviewed, saying that it was overloaded and too focused on written exams. In response to this, the National Council for Curriculum Assessment has begun a review of the Junior Cert, and will hopefully make proposals on possible changes soon. However, it is unclear when and if changes will be made.

Leaving Cert Points System

The debate also continues on whether or not the Leaving Cert Points System is a good idea, particularly as it puts extra emphasis on getting good exam results at the end of sixth year if a person wants to get into a certain College course. This in turn creates even further pressure and stress for young people.

Questions to Consider

- How could exam pressures on young people be reduced by:
 - young people themselves?
 - family members?
 - schools?
 - the Government?
- How could young people be supported better at exam time?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of the current end of year exam system?
- What changes could be made to the current exam system?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of the continuous assessment system?
- What are your views on the Leaving Cert points system?

KEY ISSUE 5: TRANSPORT TO/FROM EDUCATION

A discussion of transport issues for young people involves considering things such as cost, frequency and availability of transport, particularly in relation to accessing education, but it should also look at alternative ways of travelling to school.

Public transport

Currently, if students need to use buses or trains to get around they can use a number of public or private transport companies. The main public ones in Ireland are Bus Éireann, Dublin Bus, Irish Rail or the Luas.

Some facts

- These companies all have reduced fares for people under 16.
- On public buses, child fares are not valid all day. Students have to pay full adult fares if they are travelling after 5pm.
- Once a young person turns 16 (18 in the case of Dublin Bus) they generally have to pay adult fares. This can be difficult if young people are still in full time education and not earning an income.

School Transport Scheme

For people who live a distance from their school, there is also a subsidised (reduced cost) School Transport Scheme which is run by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Government.

Some facts

- This scheme carries about 135,000 pupils every school day.*
- Not all students are eligible for it, and when they meet the criteria there is still no legal right to transport in Ireland.
- The cost for students using the scheme was increased last year (from €168 for Junior Cycle or €234 for Senior Cycle) to a standard cost of €300 per person. This must be paid by parents.

*The School Transport section of the Department of Education website: www.education.ie

Frequency and choice

As well as cost, the need for better frequency and choice of transport is something that concerns young people, especially those in rural areas.

In last December's budget the Government announced a €10 million increase in funding for school transport, including new services. As yet it is not known what it will be used for and what the new services will look like.

Walking and Cycling to School

Some students also walk or cycle to school, and there are many campaigns in Ireland and abroad which encourage more students to do this. The campaigns promote more healthy and environmentally-friendly ways of travelling to school, as well as safer walking routes.



Some facts

- Central Statistics Office figures show that at least 46% of children travel to school by car.* This adds to traffic congestion and increases air pollution.
- Walking and cycling are excellent ways of getting necessary physical activity for a healthy balanced lifestyle and this is even more important due to rising levels of obesity in young people.
- There is a Green-Schools Travel programme that encourages young people to walk and cycle to school (www.greenschoolsireland.org).
 - In the programme's early stages, 29 schools in the Greater Dublin Area increased the number of people walking to 15% higher than the national average.
 - There are now many initiatives around the country including 'Walking Buses'. This involves a group of children walking to school with two adults – one 'driver' and one 'conductor'.

* Green-Schools Environmental Programme: www.greenschoolsireland.org

Questions to consider

- Is there a lack of information about the various transport options and walking initiatives available to young people in your view?
 - If so, how could this be improved?
- Commercial/public transport providers – what should they do to improve the cost, frequency and availability of transport for young people?
- What do you think of the School Transport Scheme, the areas it covers and who is eligible?
 - How could it be improved in your view?
- What can young people do to tackle the transport issues they face?
 - Could they lobby transport providers? City or County Councils? The Government? Other policy-makers or politicians?
 - How could student councils, parent councils and school management play a role?
 - How could they lobby for safer walking routes and things like 'walking buses'?



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'The Council accomplished a lot in a short space of time.'

Theme 2: Mental Health

Young people chose mental health as a theme for discussion at Dáil na nÓg in 2008, 2009 and again for 2010. The fact that it has been chosen again shows that mental health is still a big issue for young people in Ireland.

Due to the fact that achieving changes in public policy and services can take time, it is important that young people continue to talk about their problems in this area, propose solutions and call for changes. The more they do this the more the Government and other decision-makers will listen to young people's needs and views.

Progress to date

The 2008 and 2009 Dáil na nÓg Councils worked hard to get the key recommendations made at their Dáil na nÓg event implemented. This work has involved many activities including meetings with various Government ministers, department officials, politicians and policy makers:

- The 2008 Dáil na nÓg Council worked on a mental health awareness campaign on TV and the internet that was designed by young people, for young people.
- The 2009 Council lobbied for SPHE to be taught at senior cycle, including positive mental health awareness, and for RSE to be more effective. You will hear more about the work of the 2009 Council at Dáil na nÓg 2010.

National context

It is also good timing for young people to discuss mental health issues at Dáil na nÓg 2010 because the Government announced last December that €43 million would go to providing a range of mental health facilities in Ireland. We don't know yet how much of this funding will go towards children's and young people's mental health services. At present 5 – 10% of the mental health budget is spent on children's mental health services, despite children making up ¼ of the population.

Mental Health sub-themes for 2010

When young people's suggestions for Dáil na nÓg 2010 in the area of mental health were analysed, the following five sub-themes or 'key issues' emerged for discussion:

- Key Issue 1: Developing good mental & emotional health
- Key Issue 2: Community facilities & mental health supports
- Key Issue 3: Body image
- Key Issue 4: Tackling bullying
- Key Issue 5: Depression & suicide

KEY ISSUE 1: DEVELOPING GOOD MENTAL & EMOTIONAL HEALTH

When you think about mental health, do you just think about mental health problems or illnesses? Well maybe you could think about it another way – because it is not just about mental illnesses or difficulties. Nor is it just about the absence of mental illness.

Good mental and emotional health is about having the skills to make the most of and enjoy your life. It is about being able to deal with the normal ups and downs of life such as relationships with families and friends, school life or other pressures.

It doesn't mean a person has to be happy all the time. It is about a person recognising when they are going through a bit of a tough time, talking to someone if they can, asking for help, and feeling strong enough and confident enough to get back to feeling good.

The good news is that there are many practical things we can all do to mind our mental health. So what are these? Well, one of the most important ways of doing this is by doing what is known as 'building resilience'.

What does 'building resilience' mean?

One way of describing resilience is that it is like a rubber band. If we stretch a rubber band and let go it will generally go back into shape. But if we stretch it too far – past breaking point – it will snap.

Having resilience is about a person having the skills to know their own breaking point – and not letting themselves go past that point no matter how stressed they are. Instead, although a stressful situation or period in life may be very tough, they have the skills to cope with it and bounce back again.

But don't worry, building up the skills to have the resilience and ability to cope can be learned and everyone has the capacity to get through the tough times, with a little help along the way.

Some facts

- In a recent survey of over 1,000 young people only 40% felt they could cope well with their problems and over 1/3 felt they were generally not happy.*
- Building resilience has been shown to reduce young people's chances of developing mental health problems.
- One good way of building resilience is by learning how to fail successfully! Without failure we would never learn from our mistakes and learn how to do things differently.
- It is very important to have a good relationship with one or a few people who we trust and can talk to like friends, family members or other adults we trust such as teachers.
- Friends, parents and others can be most helpful by offering a listening ear, letting us make our own mistakes and helping us to find our own solutions without being judgemental.
- A sign of strength and resilience is being able to ask for help.
- You don't need to have all the answers, but being able to ask for and get what you need is the key thing – this is a sign of good emotional and mental health.

* Headstrong, the National Centre for Youth Mental Health (2009) *My World Survey*: www.headstrong.ie

Questions to consider

- What helps your mental and emotional health?
- What hurts it?
- What does good emotional health mean to you?

MENTAL HEALTH IS ABOUT:

- How we think and feel about ourselves
- How we deal with the stressful times in life
- How we're able to ask for help when we need it
- How we feel about and get on with others

- How could you build resilience and coping skills into *your own* life?
- What could the following do to help you build resilience to life's ups and downs?
 - your family?
 - your friends?
 - your teachers and school?
 - your local community, including youth or sports groups?
 - others?
- How could young people communicate better with their families or other trusted adults such as teachers about:
 - their problems and stresses in life?
 - what they can do to help young people developing coping skills?

KEY ISSUE 2: COMMUNITY FACILITIES & MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

Local community facilities such as sporting organisations, youth organisations, youth clubs or other outlets are very important for young people. They give young people an opportunity to spend time together, make friends, develop common interests and (where relevant) get physical exercise.

However, some young people don't have these kinds of facilities in their local area, or may not know about them or be able to access them. They also may not have friends or family they feel they can talk to. This is where the availability of other support services such as mental health supports can become crucial.

Community mental health supports for young people

Some examples of community mental health supports for young people include:

- family doctors;
- child and adolescent psychiatric services;
- private counsellors/psychotherapy services (some low cost services available);
- school guidance counsellors and psychologists working in schools;
- various youth clubs and cafes with links to specialist services.

Other services* that can be contacted and used by young people include:

- telephone helplines such as:
 - Childline (www.childline.ie)
 - The Samaritans (www.samaritans.org)
 - Teenline (www.teenline.ie)
- online information and support services with discussion forums and advice such as:
 - www.spunout.ie
 - www.reachout.ie
 - www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp
- voluntary organisations which provide support on specific issues like:
 - depression (www.aware.ie)
 - bereavement (www.console.ie or www.barnardos.ie)
 - bullying (www.sticksandstonesireland.com or www.beatbullying.org)

*A more comprehensive list these services is in the 'Useful Contacts and Resources' document accompanying this toolkit.



Some facts

- In a recent survey* of over 1,000 young people it was found that:
 - one in five had no one to talk to about their problems;
 - one in ten said they had serious problems but did not seek professional help;
 - only 64% had an adult they could trust always available to them.

- In a 2004 survey** of over 4,000 young people:
 - 27% were experiencing serious personal, emotional or mental health problems;
 - less than one in five of these were getting professional help;
 - most said they would talk to friends or family about their problems but very few reported they would talk to a teacher or professional.

* Headstrong (2009) *My World Survey*: www.headstrong.ie

**National Suicide Research Foundation (2004) *Lifestyle and Coping Survey*: www.nsrfl.ie

Government work in the area

In 2006 the Department of Health and Children launched a mental health strategy called *A Vision for Change*. This plan stated that everyone should have access to local, community-based mental health services which would provide a range of services to people of all ages. The goals of this plan haven't been achieved yet, however funding was promised recently to make progress on it. The Government also plans to increase the number of psychologists working in primary and secondary schools in Ireland as part of the National Educational Psychological Service.

Community work in the area

Other work is also being done. There are many youth cafes around the country and new models are being developed. For example, an organisation called Headstrong has developed the 'Jigsaw' model (www.jigsaw.ie). This brings all the important people in a community together (including young people, schools, doctors, counsellors, youth workers, sports coaches, etc.) to improve mental health supports for young people. It can include setting up a youth friendly space where young people can meet others, talk about their concerns and also connect with specialised services if needed.

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'I enjoyed being able to question people who implement change.'

Questions to consider

- What facilities are available to young people in your community to help them keep positive day to day? (e.g. youth clubs, sporting organisations)
- What specialised mental health services are available?
- What type of facilities and services are most useful and effective for young people in your view?
- If funding isn't available for setting up a new youth cafe in your area in the coming years, how could current facilities be improved?
- How could schools play a role in making more facilities available for the local community?
- How could mental health supports in schools be improved?
- What prevents some young people from reaching out to services?
- How could young people be made more aware of the facilities and services available?
 - How could they be encouraged to use them?
- If YOU were advising the Ministers in charge of health and mental health on how best to use the extra funding from Budget 2010, what would you suggest they do?

KEY ISSUE 3: BODY IMAGE

Image pressures can be a big source of stress for young people. They can feel under pressure to look a certain way, have a certain body shape or size, or wear certain clothes and labels.

This can leave many feeling anxious and inadequate about their physical appearance, and especially about their body weight and shape. This creates a negative body image.

Image pressures can come from many sources, including young people's own beliefs and attitudes, those of friends and family, the media (including magazines and the internet), the opposite sex, the fashion industry, etc.

What is body image?

Body image is how people see their own bodies and what they think and feel about it. It is also about how they believe others see them and their body. If people are fairly happy with how they look overall, and how they believe others see them, then they have a positive body image.

Negative body image

A person's body image may be very different to the reality of their body shape or weight. For example a person can develop a negative body image if they believe their body is bigger or smaller than it is in reality, and that it's not good enough.

An unhealthy body image can damage a person's self-confidence. If a person feels bad about themselves they may begin to believe that they are not good people inside too. However, in reality what's on the inside is more important than how they look on the outside.

The media plays an important role in this area, as people are bombarded daily with images of models (male and female) in advertising and by the fashion industry. Magazines use techniques like airbrushing to make models look even more perfect (and even more unrealistic). The political party the Liberal Democrats called for an end to airbrushing in the UK earlier this year due to the pressure it can put on young people's body image.

Some facts

- 90% of all women aged 15-64 worldwide want to change at least one thing about their physical appearance, with body weight ranking the highest.*
- Looking at magazines for just 20 minutes lowers the self-esteem of over 80% of girls.**
- It's not just girls who are affected by body image concerns. One in four teenage boys would consider plastic surgery to look like David Beckham, Brad Pitt or Usher.***
- It is estimated that 200,000 people in Ireland may be affected by eating disorders.****
- There has been a 67% increase in the number of men being treated for eating disorders in the UK in the last five years.*****
- If a person is unhappy about how they look and it is affecting their attitude to life and food, they should talk to someone about it.

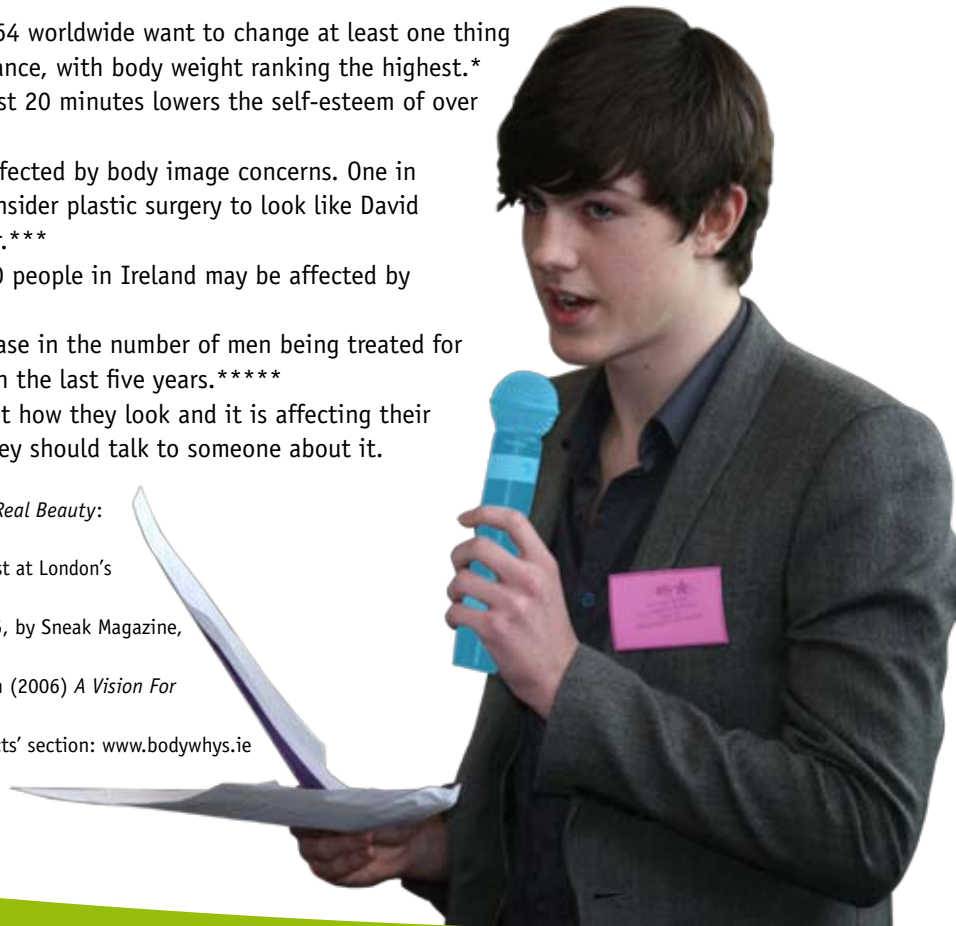
* Dove research for their *Campaign for Real Beauty*:
www.campaignforrealbeauty.com


** Dr. Raj Persaud, Consultant Psychiatrist at London's Maudsley Hospital, UK

*** Survey of 2000 boys, average age 15, by Sneak Magazine, 2005

**** Department of Health and Children (2006) *A Vision For Change*: www.dohc.ie

***** Bodywhys website, 'Stats and Facts' section: www.bodywhys.ie





Bullying can take place anywhere and affects people of all ages

Questions to consider

- What do you understand by the term body image?
- What are the top two things that most affect young people's body image? (media, parents, peers, etc.)
 - How does this happen?
- What are the differences in how boys and girls experience this?
- Are young people aware of the risks and realities of over and under eating?
 - How could it be made more acceptable to talk about things like eating disorders, anorexia and obesity?
 - Where can young people get help with over and under eating?
- What tips could you give to other young people about how to improve their body image?
- What can be done by the Government or other organisations to support young people's image of their bodies?
- Are the images that the media portrays realistic? Who benefits from this?
 - What do you think of airbrushing?
 - Does reading magazines make you feel good or bad? How?
- How could the media reduce image pressures for young people?
- Are you aware of any campaigns to promote positive body image?
 - If yes, what are they and how could young people get involved?

KEY ISSUE 4: TACKLING BULLYING

Bullying can take place anywhere – in school, at home, on the street, through text messaging, online via social networking sites, in sports organisations, youth organisations or other clubs. People can be bullied from a very early age right up until they are adults.

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Although bullying is very common and some people might say they're just having a bit of fun, it can have very harmful effects on the people involved:

- It can have a negative effect on in the way they get on with others, in the way they feel personally, and how their education goes.
- The bullied person may suffer from disturbed sleep, depression or other problems.
- They may be afraid to tell family and friends about the bullying.
- The person doing the bullying may feel isolated, insecure and unhappy.
- Other people may feel guilty if they know of someone being bullied but they are too afraid to tell anyone.

Some facts

- In 2006, research* on bullying with 2,345 students from 33 primary schools in Ireland found:
 - one in four girls and one in three boys had been bullied within the last three months
 - about one in ten primary school children had received nasty text messages within the last three months.
- Bullying can affect even very young children. Recent research** showed that 40% of nine year-olds had been victims of bullying in the past year.
- Research*** into the mental health of 1,100 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Ireland last year showed:
 - nearly two-thirds (58%) reported homophobic bullying in schools;
 - 50% had been called abusive names and ¼ had been physically threatened by other students;
 - 34% reported homophobic comments by staff – including teachers;
 - 72% didn't feel that they could be themselves in school and ⅔ didn't have an adult in school that they could talk to.

* Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre, Trinity College Dublin (2006): www.abc.tcd.ie

** OMCYA in association with Department of Social and Family Affairs and Central Statistics Office (2009) *Growing up in Ireland National Study of Children*: www.growingup.ie

*** GLEN and BeLonG To (2009) *Supporting LGBT Lives*: www.glen.ie



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'Everything that affects me obviously affects other young people so getting a chance to be heard in Dáil na nÓg was representing not only me but every youth in Ireland.'

Supporting victims and tackling bullying

Children and young people who are being bullied may suffer long term problems if they don't get support and help to deal with the experience. Various supports are available to young people including online and phone-based support services or counselling.

There are lots of things that can be done to tackle and prevent bullying of young people in Ireland. Some examples include:

- adults being available in schools and other community organisations to talk to young people if needed;
- setting up mentoring projects where older young people look out for and help younger ones;
- young people forming a group in a school or a local area to create a culture that says bullying isn't OK and encourages an ethos of telling;
- anti-bullying policies in schools, including policies on tackling cyber bullying and homophobic bullying;
- students and teachers setting up anti-bullying committees and drawing up codes of behaviour, sending a clear message that bullying is not acceptable;
- student councils running campaigns on the issue in cooperation with parents' councils, school management and the community;
- running workshops on the issue, putting information in newsletters and bulletin boards and doing surveys.

Questions to consider

- What types of bullying are you aware of?
- Do young people know where to go to get help or talk to someone if they or someone they know is being bullied?
- Is homophobic bullying common in your school?
 - How do you think it affects the person who is being bullied?
 - How can it be tackled?
- Is cyber bullying common in your experience?
 - How can young people protect themselves from cyber bullying? (e.g. don't reply to messages/tell a trusted adult/report the bullying to mobile phone providers or internet site owners, etc.)
- Name one or two ways that young people themselves can tackle bullying?
- Name one or two things that schools could do to tackle different kinds of bullying and encourage people to speak up about it?
- What could youth or other community organisations do?
- What should the Government do to tackle bullying?

KEY ISSUE 5: DEPRESSION & SUICIDE

Young people and adults can feel low or 'blue' at times in their lives. This is normal. Everyone has times of happiness, sadness and feeling stressed out.

However if these feelings go on for a long time and begin to interfere with your life, such as stopping you from getting involved in activities, then it can become an illness. This illness is called depression.

Signs of depression

Signs of depression include:

- feeling hopeless, miserable, lonely and moody a lot of the time;
- being withdrawn – avoiding friends or family;
- feeling guilty or worthless as a person, criticising yourself;
- feeling tired and exhausted a lot of the time;
- not looking after your appearance, not eating or sleeping properly.

Sometimes if a person doesn't get help and treatment to tackle their depression, they can begin to believe that they will feel that way forever. This can lead to deliberate self harm or becoming suicidal. Suicide is often described as a 'permanent solution to a temporary problem'. Deep down, many young people who feel suicidal may not really want to die, but at the time they feel that death is the only way of dealing with their problems. This is not the case.

Signs that someone may be suicidal

Signs that someone may be suicidal include:

- becoming isolated and withdrawn;
- sudden changes in mood and behaviour;
- drug and alcohol abuse;
- talking about suicide or deliberate self harm.

Some facts

- 10% of the Irish population suffers from depression.*
- It is more common in girls than boys.
- Within an average class of 30 young people:**
 - six will feel they have no one to talk to about their problems;
 - three will have serious mental health problems but will not seek professional help;
 - six will have had thoughts about suicide and three will have deliberately harmed themselves.
- Incidences of self harm are on the increase in Ireland.
- In a 2004 survey*** of 4,000 teenagers 10% had harmed themselves.
- More people have died by suicide than by road traffic accidents in Ireland since 1997 (460 suicides in 2007).****
- Youth suicide:
 - Ireland has the 4th highest rate of suicide among 15 – 24 year-olds in the EU (after Lithuania, Finland and Estonia).
- Young men aged 20 – 24 are most at risk. Suicide accounts for one in four deaths of 15-24 year-old males.*****
- If you know someone you think may be at risk of suicide, you should ask them about it and encourage them to get help immediately.


* www.spunout.ie

** Inspire Ireland Foundation (2009): www.inspireireland.ie

***National Suicide Research Foundation (2004) *Lifestyle and Coping Survey*: www.nsrif.ie

**** World Health Organisation: www.who.int

***** National Office for Suicide Prevention: www.nosp.ie



*About 10% of
Irish young people
and adults experience
depression*

Causes and Supports

There is no simple explanation for depression and suicidal behaviour. Things like constant rows with someone close, abuse, bullying and stress over exams can cause feelings of anxiety, low self-esteem and hopelessness in some people.

Depression can also be caused by specific events, such as someone's death, parents splitting up, a relationship ending or a violent incident.

There are various types of support and treatments available to people who are depressed and suicidal. Some* of these include:

- professionals such as family doctors and counsellors;
- support organisations that can be contacted by phone/email/text such as:
 - The Samaritans (www.samaritans.org)
 - Childline (www.childline.ie)
 - Aware (www.aware.ie)
- online support services which give information and/or support via blogs or emails such as:
 - www.spunout.ie
 - www.reachout.com
 - www.letsomeoneknow.ie
- medication, including complementary medicine.

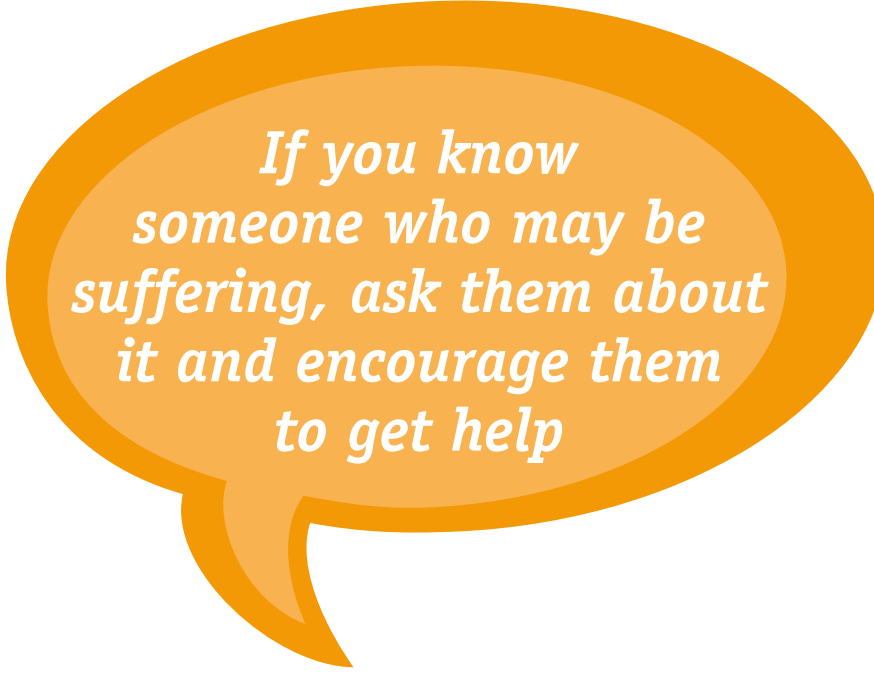
*A more comprehensive list these services is in the 'Useful Contacts and Resources' document accompanying this toolkit.

At a Government level there is a National Office for Suicide Prevention which works with other organisations to prevent suicide. There is also a national plan to tackle suicide among young people and adults called *Reach Out*.

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Questions to consider

- How could you recognise the signs and symptoms of depression in a friend?
- What makes one person more at risk of depression than another?
- What could young people do to raise awareness about depression in their area/school?
- Anyone who talks about killing themselves, or tries to do it needs help. What could YOU do to help?
- Who could young people talk to or seek help from if they are feeling depressed or suicidal in Ireland?
- How could online and telephone supports be improved?
- What are the Government and other organisations doing to tackle depression and suicide in young people and what could they do better?



*If you know
someone who may be
suffering, ask them about
it and encourage them
to get help*

'I was surprised how much the Dáil na nÓg Council had achieved in a year – they should be the ones in Leinster House!'



Part 3: Other Roles for Young People in



dáil
na nÓg

Every delegate plays an important role at Dáil na nÓg. However, there are a few vital roles that require extra time and commitment, and YOU can choose to be involved in these. Interested? Then read on ...

Chairpersons at Dáil na nÓg

There are two Chairpersons who run the group sessions (when all delegates meet together) at Dáil na nÓg every year. One is female and the other male. One Chairperson comes from the 2009 Dáil na nÓg Council (so they will have some experience in the job) and the other Chairperson is selected from among this year's delegates. It could be YOU...

What do Chairpersons do?

- The Chairpersons take turns to announce the next event or stage of the day, speaking with a microphone from the stage.
- They are in charge of the opening and closing ceremonies; introducing the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and other guest speakers and making any important announcements that need to be made.
- Most importantly, they chair the questions and answer session and the electronic voting session in the afternoon.
- They also keep everybody on time and ensure that people remain respectful of each other when speaking at Dáil na nÓg.

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Would YOU be right for the job? Are you...

- willing to listen to others?
- able to speak to a large group of young people and adults?
- enthusiastic for the job?
- not afraid to put forward ideas to the group if they need them?
- able to encourage everyone to have their say?
- hardworking?
- able to represent other people's views as well as your own?
- willing to talk to journalists about Dáil na nÓg and the themes that are being discussed?

Practical stuff! Can you ...

- give extra time to reading and learning about your role as Chairperson?
- get permission from your parents or guardian to travel to Dublin the day before the Dáil to get training for the job?
- arrive early (9am) at Croke Park on 5th March 2010 to get ready for the BIG DAY?

Will the Chairpersons take part in the group discussions?

Yes! The Chairpersons will not miss out on having their say. Once they've done their general announcements, they take part in the group discussions like normal delegates.

Will there be training for the Chairpersons?

Absolutely! A trainer will talk you through everything you need to know. This is an excellent opportunity to gain confidence in public speaking and acquire leadership skills.

I would like to be a Chairperson. What do I do now?

- Fill out the Dáil na nÓg Chairperson Application Form and write, in less than 200 words, why you want to be Chairperson and what qualities you would bring to the job.
- Send this application form, together with the completed Parental/Guardian Consent Form, to the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) in the stamped addressed envelope provided **by Friday 26th February at the latest.**

Would you like to stay involved with Dáil na nÓg for longer than one day?

Do you have the time to do this?

Dáil na nÓg Council

Remember that Dáil na nÓg is not just a one-day event! The ideas and recommendations that you and the other delegates put forward on the day will be followed up throughout the year by a group called the Dáil na nÓg Council.

What's the Dáil na nÓg Council?

- It gives young people a chance to follow up on what was agreed by delegates at Dáil na nÓg and works to get the main recommendations implemented.
- It meets and presents the outcomes of Dáil na nÓg to Ministers, TDs, Government officials and other policy makers.
- It represents Dáil na nÓg at relevant conferences and events.
- In 2010, **there will be 34 places available on the Dáil na nÓg Council** – one place for each Comhairle na nÓg.

How do I get involved?

Everyone who has been elected by their Comhairle na nÓg to attend the Dáil can be nominated to the Council. This election process takes place through your local Comhairle. For further information, please contact your Comhairle organiser.

What makes a good Dáil na nÓg Councillor?

If YOU would like to be a member of the Dáil na nÓg Council, you should:

- have an interest in youth issues (concerns of young people in schools, the local community, politics, etc.);
- be prepared to work with others in a team;
- be enthusiastic about the job;
- be able to speak about your views, but respect the opinions of others.

Time and commitment required!

You should also:

- be able to commit to attending meetings regularly;
- be prepared to travel to meetings (usually to Dublin and unaccompanied) about one Saturday a month during the school term;
- be prepared to travel on school days (sometimes);
- have permission from your parent(s) or guardian(s) to be involved and to travel to meetings.

Most importantly, you should have time to be involved in Dáil na nÓg for about a year

- If you are very involved in other things (like sports, hobbies, meetings) or are in an exam year at school, you might not have time to be on the Council.
- If you don't attend the Council meetings, you will be replaced by another delegate from your area.
- **So please don't sign up unless you are really committed!**

If you have any questions about the job of Chairperson or the Dáil na nÓg Council, please email Meadhbh Hand (meadhbh@nyci.ie) or Aoife Collins (aoife@nyci.ie), or call the Dáil na nÓg office in the NYCI on (01) 478 4122.



Part 4: Practical Information

- **When is Dáil na nÓg 2010?** Friday, 5th March 2010, 10.00am – 4.30pm.
- **Where is it?** Hogan Stand Conference Centre, Croke Park Stadium, Dublin.
- **How to get there?** The organisers of your Comhairle na nÓg will be in touch soon to let you know the details of the travel arrangements for getting to Dáil na nÓg.
- **What do I bring with me?** Just yourself! Pen, paper, lunch and anything else you need will be provided on the day.
- **What do I wear?** Dáil na nÓg is an important event, but it is also important that everyone is comfortable on the day. Therefore, the dress code is **casual**.
- **How do I prepare?**
 - The training day before the Dáil is the first time all the delegates in your area will meet together. This is an important meeting because it will help you prepare your ideas and opinions before the Dáil, so make sure you take part fully!
 - You should also find out what other young people in your area think about the themes being discussed, and what they think should be done to make things better.
- **What happens on the day?** People will start arriving from 10am. You sign in (register) and collect your badge, delegate information and official delegate bag. The Dáil will then officially start at 11am (see *Agenda*).



Agenda for Dáil na nÓg 2010

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| 10am | Arrival of Delegates & Registration Photographs & refreshments |
| 11am – 11.15am | Dáil na nÓg Opening Ceremony Welcome from Chairpersons, housekeeping rules & Minister's address |
| 11.15am – 12.40pm | Discussion Groups |
| 12.40pm – 1.30pm | Lunch |
| 1.30pm – 2.00pm | Dáil na nÓg Council Update |
| 2.00pm – 3.15pm | Questions & Answers Session |
| 3.15pm – 4.00pm | Electronic Voting Session |
| 4.00pm – 4.15pm | Evaluation of Dáil na nÓg by all delegates |
| 4.15pm – 4.30pm | Minister's Closing Remarks Dáil na nÓg Closing Ceremony |

What now?

- Think about the theme you have chosen to discuss.
- Answer some of the questions in the five key issues under that theme.
- Do some of your own research – read up on the issues using the list of further contacts and ask other young people what they think too.

Remember, young people are an important part of every community and it is important that you are valued, respected and listened to by those with the power to shape the policies and services that impact on your life.

It is up to YOU to make the best of Dáil na nÓg. We hope it gives you a chance to have your voice heard, but we also hope that you will enjoy the day, meet new friends and have fun!

We look forward to seeing you in Croke Park on Friday, 5th March 2010.

IMPORTANT!

Make sure you have filled out and returned all your forms to the Dáil na nÓg office:

- Parental/Guardian Consent Form - ASAP
- Theme Discussion Form - ASAP
- Chairperson Application Form – ASAP (26th February latest)

Check with your Comhairle na nÓg organiser if you are stuck in any way. Or contact the Dáil na nÓg office at: (01) 478 4122 or by emailing: aofe@nyci.ie or meadhbh@nyci.ie or by logging on to: www.dailnanog.ie



Acknowledgements

Many thanks to everyone who helped out in the development of the Dáil na nÓg Delegate Toolkit 2010 and in particular to:

- Anne Sheridan, Mental Health Promotion Officer, Health Service Executive (HSE)
- Lisa O'Hagan, Health Promotion Officer, HSE
- Michael McCann, retired secondary school teacher and former President of the National Association of Principals and Deputies
- Various staff in the National Youth Council of Ireland and in particular Aurica Cozneac on the Dáil na nÓg team
- Various staff in the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
- Deirdre Phelan and the other members of the Dáil na nÓg Steering Committee

*'Dáil na nÓg is a chance to improve
our futures, voice our opinions and
make better opportunities.'*



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