

Information for parents

Junior Cycle SPHE

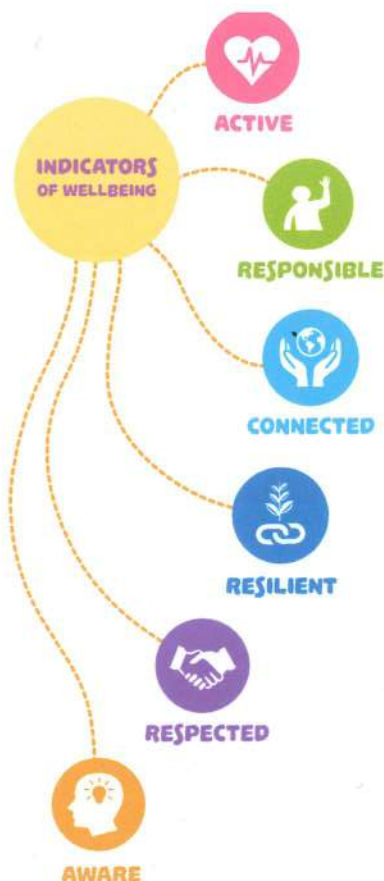
The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is currently working on updating the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum from primary through to senior cycle education. The new Junior Cycle SPHE course will be introduced in schools in September 2023.

Why SPHE matters

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) provides a safe classroom setting where students can discuss and learn about important aspects of their lives. Within this space, students can grow in awareness, and develop the understanding and skills they need to maintain healthy lives, make healthy choices and build caring and respectful relationships.

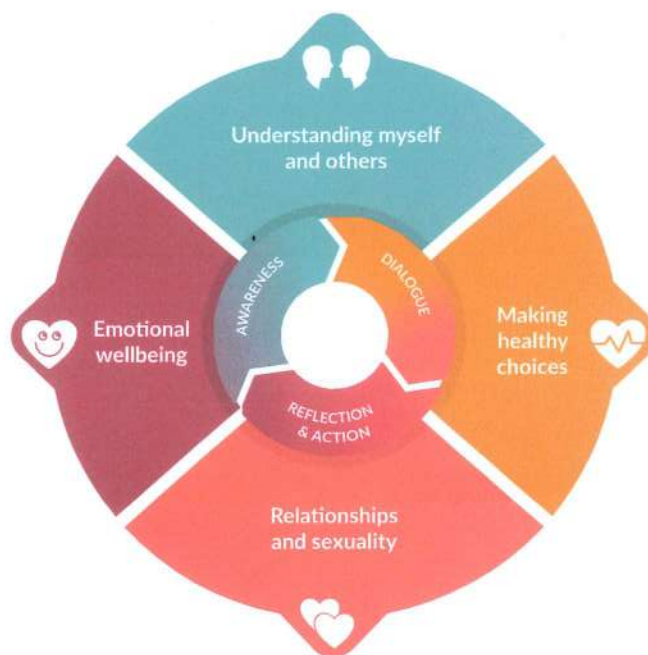
SPHE places a strong focus on developing the important life skills that young people need growing up in a fast changing and complex world. Specifically, it focuses on developing the social and emotional skills of self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness and relationship skills.

SPHE is a key pillar of the junior cycle Wellbeing programme in all schools as it helps students identify actions they can take to protect and promote their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of others. SPHE fosters all 6 indicators of Wellbeing.



Source: [Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines](#)

What will students be learning in SPHE?



Learning in the course is divided into four strands with each setting out important learning for students. These strands are:

- Understanding myself and others
- Making healthy choices
- Relationships and sexuality
- Emotional wellbeing

Teaching and learning in SPHE focuses on

- **awareness-building** so that students understand their own thoughts, emotions, values and behaviour and how different factors influence these
- **respectful dialogue** which gives students opportunities to hear and to discuss a diversity of viewpoints and enlarge their understanding on topics of relevance to their lives.
- **students reflecting** on what they have learned and coming to informed thoughtful decisions about how the learning can help them in their lives now or in the future.

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The four strands of Junior Cycle SPHE

Understanding myself and others

This is a foundational strand as it focuses on developing self-awareness and self-esteem and building some of the social and emotional skills needed for healthy relationships. This strand helps students to identify their personal strengths and values. It explores the range of influences that impact on self-esteem and self-image and self-identity.

Making healthy choices

This strand is about helping students to consider how they can make healthy choices and the influences at play. They will discuss a range of aspects – food, sleep, alcohol and other addictive substances and behaviours, and of course their online world.

Relationships and sexuality

Here the key focus is on creating and maintaining healthy and respectful relationships. So students will discuss the signs of healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships, how to set boundaries in relationships and show respect for the boundaries of others. They will learn about the importance of consent as an aspect of all healthy relationships and how to take care of their reproductive health. There is also a focus on responsible decision making and examining some of the pressures on young people to become sexually active.

Emotional wellbeing

The focus in this strand is on developing young people's skills, knowledge and coping strategies to help them manage stress, self-regulate their emotions, know how to self-care and where to seek help if needed. The aim is to enable them to cope with the normal emotional ups and downs of teenage life.

For more detail go to SPHE (curriculumonline.ie)

The role of parents

Parents are the primary educators of their children and important partners in all aspects of the education process. NCCA has consulted with parents in developing the updated junior cycle course and will continue to consult on further SPHE developments.

Is the same SPHE curriculum taught across all schools?

There is a national curriculum for all subjects, including SPHE, that is taught across all primary and post-primary schools irrespective of the particular school ethos. The SPHE curriculum sets out the topics to be taught in schools, and teachers have freedom to choose the classroom resources they will use when teaching the curriculum. They are aware of the need to teach topics in a way that is sensitive to the age and stage of development of their students and meets their needs.

How can we ensure that the learning is age-appropriate?

In developing the curriculum, significant work goes into ensuring that learning is age-appropriate. Decisions about what to include in the curriculum are based on research and best practice, as well as extensive consultations with parents/guardians, teachers and children/young people themselves.

Within the classroom, the teacher has flexibility to judge how and when topics should be taught, so that learning takes place in a way that is meeting the needs, stage of development and school context of their students.

**For further
information**

www.ncca.ie Go to junior cycle curriculum developments