Introduction

The overall aim of this lesson idea is to raise awareness of human rights and to be an educational resource for use in a post primary setting in Northern Ireland. Use of the lesson ideas is at the discretion of the education provider.

It is important at the outset to prepare students to discuss sensitive or controversial issues. A safe and positive learning environment which enables students to participate with confidence can be empowering. Agree strategies to use to ensure respectful yet challenging discussions:

See sheffield.ac.uk/lets/toolkit/teaching/sensitive for more ideas and guidance on creating good learning environments for teaching about sensitive and controversial issues. When dealing with mental health issues provide guidance on safety, confidentiality and where to get additional and professional help whilst following your schools guidance and policies relating to child protection.

NI Curriculum Links:

**LLW Strands**
Human rights and social responsibility,
Equality and Social justice.

**Local and Global Citizenship**
Identify and exercise their rights and social responsibilities in relation to local issues

Develop their understanding of the role of society and government in safeguarding individual and collective rights

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Some of your students may have personal experience of the issue under discussion and may find participation in these discussions difficult. Create a safe and positive environment. Agree strategies in advance. See notes on teaching sensitive issues.
Mental Health and Well Being

This section gives you a breakdown of the relevant human rights, and any laws associated with this particular human rights issue. It also provides background information you may find useful.

Relevant Rights:
The main lens for considering mental health services is through the right to health.
- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) Article 12, contains the most specific rights in relation to health care as it explicitly provides for the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article 12 You have the right to be listened to, and taken seriously.
- UNCRC Article 19 You have the right to be protected from all harm including physical and mental abuse. Even your parents have no right to hurt you. If you are being harmed the government must do something about it.
- UNCRC Article 24 You have the right to the best type of health care, such as medicine, doctors, and hospitals. Health education is an important part of this and should be part of school work
- European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) the right not to be tortured or treated in an inhuman or degrading way; the right to respect for private and family life, home, and correspondence; the right to liberty.

Teachers’ Notes and Background Information
One in eight of 11 to 19-year-olds had some form of mental disorder in 2017. Source; Mental Health of Children and Young People Survey, NHS Digital 2018
- UK teenagers turn to mobile apps to help with mental ill health. Source, NHS
- Two-thirds of young people (16-25yrs) in Northern Ireland regularly feel stressed and a third go as far as saying they often feel hopeless. Source, Princes Trust 2018
- The Mental Health Foundation and the Royal College of Psychiatrists found more people died from suicide in Northern Ireland after the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement (4,400) than during the Troubles (3,600), with Northern Ireland also having the UK's highest suicide rate per head of population.

Society, including our services, tends to treat mental health and physical health as separate. Our physical and mental health are, however, entirely inter-connected; our physical well-being affecting our mental well-being and vice versa. Mental health issues also still carry a certain stigma and are not often discussed with the same openness as issues related to our physical health. School curricula deal with education relating to our physical health from nursery school, teaching us how to brush our teeth, wash, eat well and exercise from an early age. Mental health education, if it exists at all, is rarely mentioned until the teenage years, often only when problems have already arisen or crisis occurred.

Educating students on how to look after their mental health and how to seek help should they need it is crucial to supporting them to achieve their full potential and realise their rights more fully.
The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission’s job is to make sure government and public bodies protect the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland. We advocate that Northern Ireland should maintain the highest standard of human rights.

We also consider the policies and plans that government and other organisations develop, and tell them if we think there could be a problem and we try to help them improve it. We are experts in human rights law, we monitor international treaties and listen to discussions in places like the United Nations.

We promote awareness of human rights through education, training and research.

In its Annual Statement to Government each year the NIHRC raises issues relating to the right to health. We also report on this issue to the United Nations including to the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

What we do
Activites

Learning Intentions: to know and understand
• Explore the challenge of mental health facing young people today
• Learn about rights connected to mental health and well being
• Understand the role of the NIHRC in promoting and safeguarding these rights.

Pupils will;
• Discuss the challenge of mental health issues for young people today
• Think about how access to rights and good mental health are connected
• Explore how good mental health and well-being can be promoted

Activity One - Individual reflection
• Draw the outline of a body on paper - Ask students to think about all the pressures that they experience.
• Write the pressures we put on ourselves inside the body and any external pressures from other sources such as peers, teachers, family, society etc. around the outside.

Discussion
• Look at the number of different pressures on us. Do some weigh heavier than others?
• How does it make you feel when you look at all the factors affecting us?
• Is it the same for everyone?
• Have all of these factors always been there for us?
• How able do you feel to cope with these pressures?
• Help students to recognise that it is a strength to ask for help dealing with the pressures of everyday life - not a weakness.
• Help students to recognise how pressures can be relieved as well.

Activity Two - Pressure pushing down

What’s needed: A large number of weighty items (such as rocks, potatoes or apples,) markers, sticky labels

• Ask a student to volunteer to come to the front. Give them a basket or bag and ask them to hold it out in front of them.
• Ask other students to choose an item and write one of the pressures they identified in the first exercise on to it (you could use sticky labels) they could choose rocks they feel are proportionate to the size of the pressure.
• Ask them to come up in turn and add their rock in to the basket. Eventually the student holding the basket will no longer be able to hold everything and may drop it.

Discussion
• What might have helped the student holding the basket deal with the pressures.
• Help from others?
• Build up their own strength?
• Reducing some of the pressures?

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Activities (continued)

Activity Three - Watch the video
youtube.com/watch?v=wAHdzy_SOy8&t=21s
The video shows a group of young people discussing mental health issues.

Discussion
- Is there still a stigma about discussing mental health?
- What, if any, mental health education have they had in or outside of school?
- What mental health supports are students aware of?
- How confident would they feel seeking help?

Activity Four - Exploring Mental Health
In groups ask students to use an issue tree to talk about and record the ‘root’ causes of mental ill health in teenagers and the consequences which are the ‘branches’.
Allow them some time to share their thoughts. Note that some factors seem cyclical and appear both at the root and in the branches. E.g. overeating can lead to being overweight and depression and being depressed can lead to overeating and getting more overweight. Note rights not being realised e.g. if students are being denied support due to their sexuality, being poor, their disability, their religion etc. can contribute to poor mental health.
- Think about who has responsibility for dealing with various mental health related issues?
- What role do individuals, groups, NGOs and governments take in relation to any of the issues raised?

Activity Five - Know your rights in relation to mental health
Refer to Articles 19 and 24 of the UNCRC. How do you feel you are currently able to access these rights in your school? Community?
Cut up the articles of the UNCRC and ask the students to lay them out on paper and connect any related to the mental health issues they have been discussing.
UNCRC available from childrenslawcentre.org.uk/images/UNCRC.pdf

Debrief: Recognise that mental health issues can affect our right and if rights are denied it can impact our mental health.

Activity Six - Promoting positive mental health
The young people in the video suggested some things to help manage mental health.
Ask the groups to use their creativity to come up with a picture of a person. On flip chart show the skills, attitudes, values, characteristics and habits of someone that is better equipped to deal with the pressures of everyday life and maintain a state of well-being.
E.g. The person could be doing exercise or leisure activities they enjoy and eating healthily, finding time to relax and do nothing, or making time to see friends face to face, having times that are phone and screen free. Knowing who to go to or where to go to seek help.

Take action: Brainstorm ideas for a school awareness campaign to get people talking about mental health and promote their right to positive mental health and well-being in school. E.g. design posters, plan a well-being week for staff and students, create a video, plan an assembly, invite in an organisation which supports student well-being. Follow through with some of the ideas and share your actions through social and local media, the school website newsletter etc. to raise awareness in families and the wider community.
Activities (continued)

Additional Resources

• See NIHRC Advice on rights related to mental health
  nihrc.org/advice-for-you/mental-health
  nihrc.org/uploads/general/Mental_Health_2015_final.pdf

• Look at the Children’s Law Centre publication ‘Do You Know Your Rights? Mental Health Law childrenslawcentre.org.uk/images/MentalHealth.pdf

• For support and outreach for young people with depression see aware-ni.org

• For support information and advice see childline.org.uk