



Wicklow School Refusal Pack

Information for Schools, Students and Parents/Guardians
A collaboration between Wicklow CYPSC, TESS, NEPS, SCP,
HSE, Tusla, Crosscare, SPECS, KWETB, Lucena/CAMHS



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Síceolaíochta Oideachais
National Educational Psychological Service



Every School Day Counts
www.tusla.ie/tess



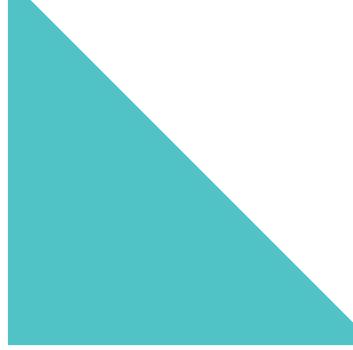
Seirbhís Sláinte
Nios Fearr
á Forbairt

Building a
Better Health
Service



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Acknowledgements

School refusal is a challenge that confronts some students and parents and all schools sooner or later. Early recognition and intervention are key to prompt resolution. Where the problem persists or becomes complex, schools often seek the advice and support of outside agencies. However, navigating the system (for example knowing who to contact and when) can pose its own set of challenges.

To this end, a number of agencies in Co. Wicklow have joined to produce this Resource Pack for schools, students and parents. We acknowledge with gratitude the contribution of all agencies. However, particular mention must be made to the significant contribution made by the Ballywaltrim School Completion Programme (TESS) and its Co-ordinator, Jane Sharpe.

We acknowledge with gratitude the authors of the '*Roscommon School Refusal Resource Pack*' who allowed us to borrow heavily from their document and to the authors of '*School Refusal, Good Practice Guide for Schools*' from whose document the Roscommon authors borrowed heavily.

The suggestions and strategies outlined in this pack are not exhaustive. However, it is hoped that the pack will provide some guidance and support to students, parents and teachers.

Glossary of Terms

CAMHS – Child and Adult Mental Health Services

CYPSC – Child and Young People's Services Committee

EWO – Education Welfare Officer

EWS – Education Welfare Service

HSCL – Home School Community Liaison

HSE – Health Service Executive

ISS – Inclusion Support Service

NCSE – National Council for Special Education

NEPS – National Educational Psychological Service

PC Psychology – Primary Care Psychology

SCP – School Completion Programme

SENO – Special Education Needs Organiser

SNA – Special Needs Assistant

TESS – Tusla Education Support Service

TUSLA – Child And Family Agency

Foreword

**This Resource Pack is based on current knowledge in this area.
It is intended as a guide only. Not all the suggestions here will
apply to any one student or situation.**

WICKLOW SCHOOL REFUSAL PATHWAY

The resource pack was designed to provide schools, students and parents/guardians with a School Refusal Pathway. The pathway was developed by services working with young people who are experiencing difficulties attending school for various reasons. It is hoped that this pathway and resource pack will provide a guide for schools and parents on the best way to manage school refusal and the relevant services that may be of assistance.

School refusal often causes high levels of distress for families and can be very difficult for schools to manage. Early intervention, clear planning and good communication between school, families and professionals is key. When a difficulty attending school becomes entrenched it is often much harder to work with than if it is identified early and intervention plans are put in place.

The pathway recognises the importance of early intervention and the key role that school has in identifying and intervening in this issue. The pathway guides families and schools on how to progress with early intervention and what to do if this intervention isn't working and professional support is required.

Data Protection – Regulation EU 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the council of 26th April 2016, which has come into force in Ireland on the 25th May 2018, replacing the existing data protection framework under the EU Data Protection Directive where data pertaining to an individual is protected.

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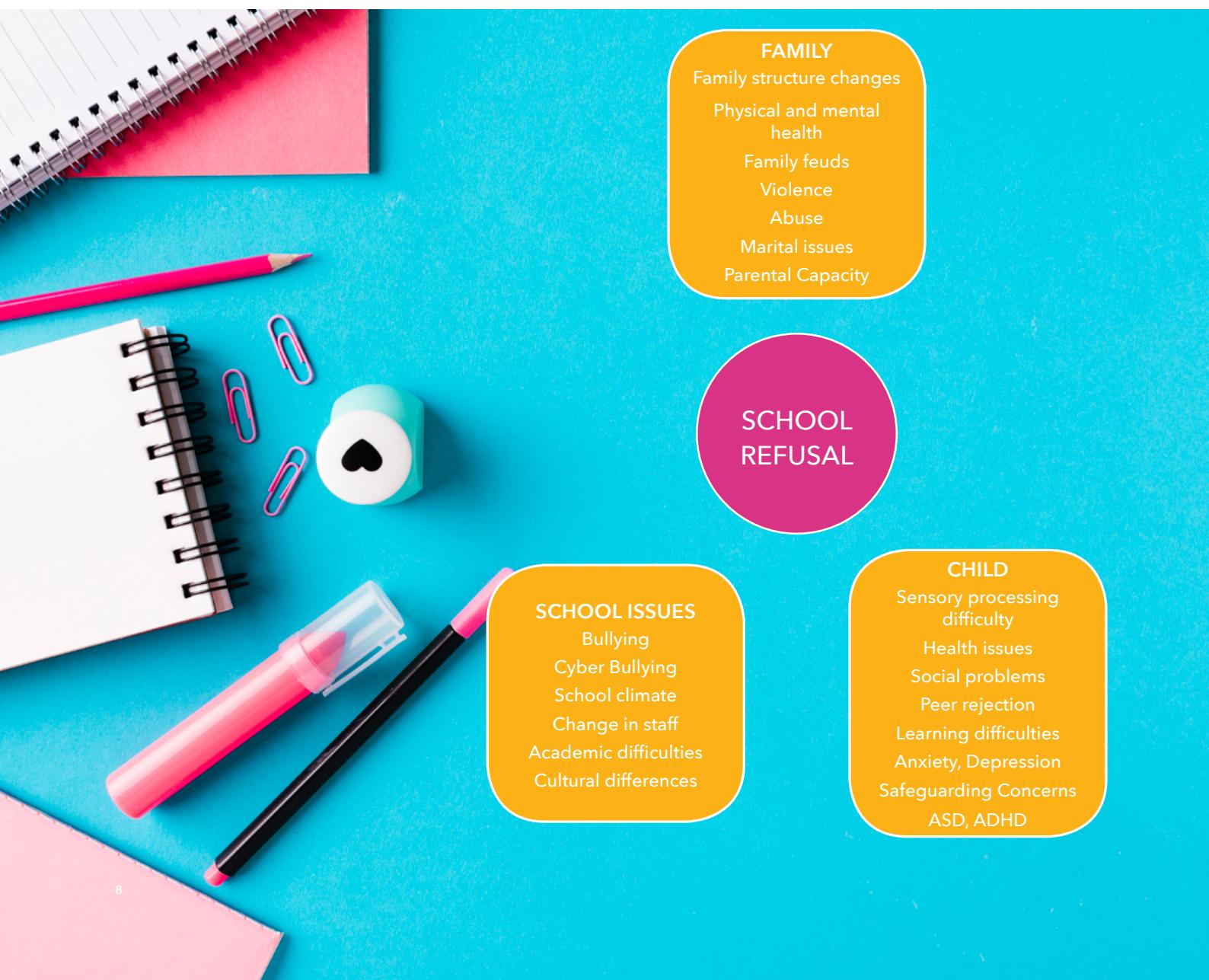
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I. What is school refusal?

School refusal is a systemic difficulty, and refers to student, parents/guardians and school challenges where the student finds it difficult to attend or stay in school. Parent/guardian and school find it difficult to support the young person, which often results in the request for involvement of other services.

School refusal may happen at any age but most typically occurs in children 5-7 years and/or 11-14 years of age. Generally, the student refuses to attend school and experiences significant

distress. School refusal differs from truancy in that the young person is at home with the knowledge of the family despite their efforts to enforce attendance. The behaviour is differentiated from parents/guardians who deliberately withdraw their child from school and from youths experiencing difficult circumstances such as homelessness that prevent adequate school attendance. There are many reasons why a student may refuse to attend school or remain in school.



2. What causes school refusal?

Factors may include:

- Student Temperament
- Death in the Family
- Environmental Factors
- Parent/guardian Mental or Physical Health
- Coping Skills
- Parents Separating
- Moving House
- Anxiety
- Jealousy of new sibling
- Academic pressures, fears or dislike of subject
- Peer Problems
- Poor relationships with teachers
- Long term illness
- School Climate
- Sexual Identity
- Cultural Differences



BULLYING can also be a cause of school refusal. Bullying is unwanted aggressive behaviour among school-aged children involving a real or perceived power imbalance that is repeated or has the potential to be repeated over time. Bullying can include threats, intimidation, and/or attacking someone physically or verbally.

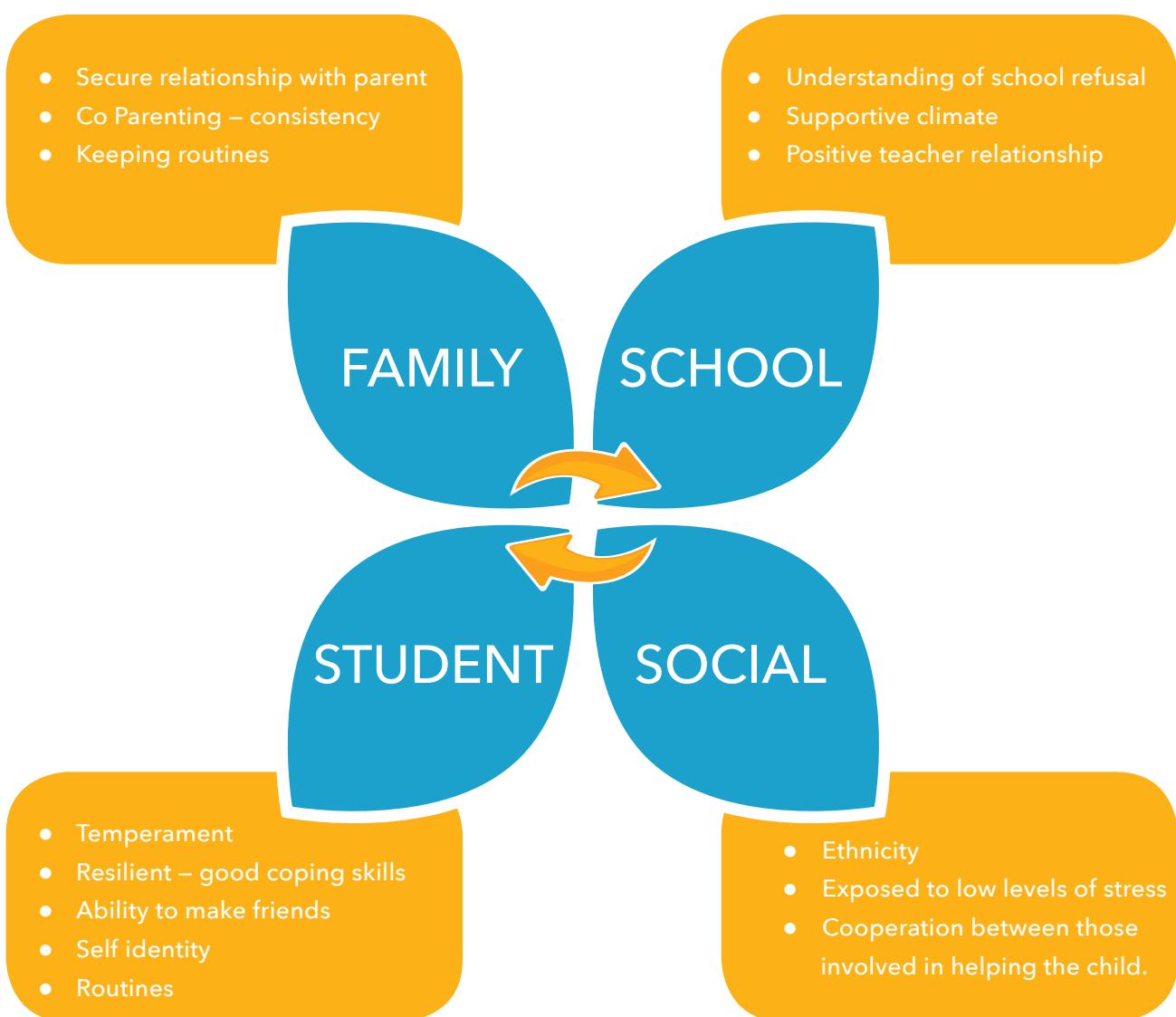


Signs that a young person may be a victim of bullying:

- Mood Changes
- Unexplained injuries
- Lost or damaged clothes, books, electronic items
- Decline in academic performance
- Complaining of headaches, stomach pain, feeling sick
- Skipping meals, binge eating, not eating lunch at school
- Nightmares and trouble sleeping
- Sudden loss of friends or avoidance of social situations
- Decline in self-esteem or feeling helpless
- New onset of self-destructive behaviors: running away, engaging in deliberate self-harm, suicide threats.

Bullying can also occur on computers, mobile phones and tablets and is known as Cyber Bullying.

2.1 WHAT ARE THE FACTORS THAT REDUCE SCHOOL REFUSAL.



2.2 HOW DOES SCHOOL REFUSAL COME ABOUT?

The following diagrams illustrate the cycles of thoughts and feelings that can lead to a student

initially refusing to attend school and continuing to refuse to attend.

When school refusal starts

BEHAVIOURS

- Refusal to get ready for school,
- Refusal to attend school, leave the house, etc...
- Avoidance of school related situations and people,
- Crying, hiding, tantrums, etc.

FEELINGS

- Anxiety, fear, embarrassment, inferiority, depression, uncertainty, insecurity, isolation.

THOUGHTS

- Mammy is sick and might go to the hospital if I'm not here.
- I'm safe at home.
- I don't have to worry about not being able to do the work.
- No one can laugh at me when I'm at home.

or

BEHAVIOURS

- Refusal to get ready for school,
- Refusal to attend school, leave the house, etc...
- Avoidance of school related situations and people,
- Crying, hiding, tantrums, etc.

FEELINGS

- Anxiety, fear, embarrassment, inferiority, depression, uncertainty, insecurity, isolation.

THOUGHTS

- Everyone will be asking me questions about why I haven't been to school.
- I won't know the work because
- My friends won't want to mix with me anymore.

3. Parents/Guardians.

Be on the look out for:

- Frequent tearfulness/ distress/ pains in tummy/ bedwetting/ headaches/ signs of distress on Sunday nights or Monday mornings
- Distress or saying they feel sick after a school break
- Frequently asking the teacher to ring their parent/ wanting to go home/ saying that they are feeling sick
- Challenging behaviour/ having tantrums about going to school, or before school in the morning.
- Prolonged difficulties (anxieties) for a young person when mixing with others (e.g. going outside to play; going to after school activities, parties, etc.)
- Pre-occupation with being organised for school
- A family stressor (e.g. parental separation or bereavement) can trigger some anxious behaviours/ feelings about leaving home, or leaving a parent in order to attend school. (Providing the young person with a calm listening ear, and letting them know that you understand, but that they still need to attend school, can help them get through a difficult period.)

Adolescents may also show the following behaviour:

- Worry or fear related to school
- Sleeping difficulties and fatigue
- Change of mood, negativity towards school, subjects or teachers
- Increased self – consciousness
- Lack of engagement with school activities, outings, trips
- Poor sense of school belonging



3.1 WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP WITH EARLY SIGNS OF SCHOOL REFUSAL?

- Speak calmly with the young person. Let them know you understand.
- Encourage them to talk to you about how they feel.
- Be reassuring and encourage positive statements e.g. 'I can do this', 'school was good today'.
- Praise them for making the effort to go to school.
- *Model coping behaviour as best you can.
- Be consistent and present a united front.
- Establish and maintain good evening and morning routines.
- Encourage relationships outside of school.
- Monitor their use of online screen time.
- Help with organisation of homework, school bag and uniform.
- Listen but do not reinforce their fear/anxiety.

Use the checklist on the following page to help you.



If your child is still refusing to go to school what else can you do?

- Keep a record of days your child refuses to go to school
- Help your child identify stressors
- Ask for homework to be sent home
- Consider other educational alternatives
- Stay calm and help your child build resilience by:
 1. Encouraging your child to problem solve
 2. Promote self esteem by encouraging your child to set achievable goals
 3. Don't have all the answers
 4. Let your child make their own mistakes. This will help them learn that failure is not the end of the world.

► *RESOURCE PACK ON COPING BEHAVIOUR;

<https://hbtg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/KAN-Emotional-resilience-toolkit.pdf> (as amended)

And remember YOU ARE NOT alone!

Who can help you?

SCHOOL:

Contact your child's teacher or School Principal. They can begin to support the student and consult with their NEPS psychologist.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES:

Go to your GP and explore whether there is a primary care child psychology service in your area and if so, seek an appointment.

Checklist for Parents/Guardians

TASK	YES/NO	COMMENTS
Reassure and encourage your child.		
Problem solve ways to cope.		
Help find and discuss some positive aspects of school that they enjoy.		
Have the parent who is better at encouraging attendance take the child to school.		
Young person accompanied to school by friend/friends.		
Friend or identified teacher to meet your child.		
Deal constructively with family concerns and parenting issues.		
T.V., laptops, gaming devices and the internet are not accessible when not in school.		
Structure maintained outside of school.		
Use school timetable at home.		
Ensure school books are at home.		
Be mindful of your interactions with your child during 'school time' at home.		
Keep your child home only when they are sick.		

3.2 WHEN TO SEND YOUR CHILD TO SCHOOL

Children will get sick from time to time but it's important to manage the number of days they

miss. The following are just guidelines. If you are unsure, please meet with your GP.

SEND YOUR CHILD TO SCHOOL:	KEEP YOUR CHILD AT HOME:
Parent/Guardian is Sick or Hospitalized Plan ahead where you can. Ask a friend, relative or spouse to take your child to and from school.	Fever Keep your child at home if they have a fever. If the fever does not go away after 2-3 days consult a GP.
Child Refuses to go to School Talk to your child, they may be experiencing bullying, be behind in schoolwork, or not getting along with others.	Diarrhoea If your child seems ill, has a fever or is vomiting, keep them at home.
Chronic Disease or Illness Speak with your school about your child's condition and develop a plan. School personnel can assist both you and your child.	Vomiting If your child has vomited twice or more in 24 hours, keep your child at home until the vomiting has stopped for 24 hours.
Cold Symptoms If your child does not have a fever and is able to participate in school activities send them to school.	Coughing If your child has severe, rapid coughing or wheezing keep your child home and contact a GP.
Head Lice If your child has lice (intense itching), they can return to school after an initial treatment.	Head Lice Intense itching, may feel like something is moving. Your child can return to school after treatment.
Strains, Sprains and Pains If your child can walk, talk and eat he or she should be in school. If pain is severe or ongoing, consult a GP.	Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye) The white of the eye is pink with a thick discharge. Contact GP for medication/treatment before sending the child to school.
Menstrual Issues Most of the time menstrual issues should not be a problem. If they are severe consult a GP.	Rash With Fever If a rash spreads quickly or is not healing keep your child at home and contact your GP.
	Sore Throat For a sore throat with fever, stomach ache, and/or red, swollen tonsils keep your child at home and contact a GP.

Resources for Parents/Guardians:

- "Help! I've got an Alarm Bell going off in my head! How panic Anxiety and Stress affect your body", by K.L Aspden. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- "Overcoming your child's fears and Worries" by Cathy Cresswell and Lucy Willetts , from the CBT overcoming series. Publishers Constable and Robinson.
- Does Your Child Need Help With Anxiety
<https://www.tusla.ie/services/family-community-support/parenting-information/parenting-information-fsa/>
(as amended)
- For suggestions on Apps on mindfulness and relaxation:
<http://parentingchaos.com/anxiety-apps-kids/>
(as amended)
- Special Educational Needs:
<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/in-education/exclusion/school-refusal-strategies.aspx>
(as amended)
- Promoting Emotional Resilience: A Resource Pack:
<https://hbtg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/KAN-Emotional-resilience-toolkit.pdf>
(as amended)
- Screen Time Advice for Parents
<https://www.webwise.ie/parents/screen-time-advice-for-parents/>
(as amended)
- ASD Supports
<https://asiam.ie/>
(as amended)



4. The Child/Young Person

Everyone has a responsibility to help. This includes your child too... Help them draw up a plan and you can do it together.

Here are some ideas that might help:

► DRAW UP CHECKLISTS.

Did you know?

Morning routines and attendance patterns are set in September. So set yourself up for success by getting off to a smooth start in September.

Here's a 'Nightime Checklist' that you might find useful.

NIGHTTIME CHECKLIST

- Choose and lay out clothing and shoes.
- Put any items that you need for school in your school bag (e.g. permission slips, books, journal, homework)
- Make your lunch.
- Set your alarm!

And a 'Morning Checklist' that you might find useful.

MORNING CHECKLIST

- Get out of bed when your alarm goes off.
- Have a good breakfast.
- Leave yourself plenty of time to get to school.
- Walk or cycle to school if you can.



► CHECK OUT THESE LINKS ON WWW.YOUTUBE.IE

Are You Anxious to Go to School? Advice from a Therapist.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3nCwYcwuHM>
(as amended)

Dealing with School Phobia & Anxiety. Hear a Young Person's Experience.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqs1BuNyVY4>
(as amended)



Resources for a Young Person

MAKE YOUR OWN TRACKER
 (you can choose what you want to track, here are some examples).

School + Attendance = Good School Results

Set your own targets.

Week 1: I made it to school every day this week.

1

Date

2

Date

3

Date

4

Date

5

Date

Reason

Reason

Reason

Reason

Reason

Week 2: I made it to school on time for the whole week.

7

Date

8

Date

9

Date

10

Date

11

Date

Reason

Reason

Reason

Reason

Reason

Week 3: Attended full days for the whole week.

13

Date

14

Date

15

Date

16

Date

17

Date

Reason

Reason

Reason

Reason

Don't forget to ask for help.



FAQ'S For Young Person



Do I have a right to education?

Yes, the Government must make sure you receive a certain standard of education.

Do I have to go to school?

Yes, from the age of 6 to 16 years, or once you have finished three years of secondary school.

Do I have a right to be taught at home?

Yes, but your parent/guardian must register you with the EWS to ensure your education meets the required standard.

Do I have to go school every day?

Yes. Your parent/guardian must make sure that you go to school every day.

What happens if I am sick or have other reasons for not going to school?

Your parent/guardian should contact the school to explain why. If you miss 20 or more days in a school year the school must tell the EWS. If there is no clear reason for your absence, the EWO may visit your home to help you improve your school attendance.

Do I have to do homework?

Each school sets its own rules and policies for homework.

Do I have to do tests and exams?

The law does not say that you must sit the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate. However, both are state recognised and the most common way to further education.

What happens if I get into trouble at school?

By law, every school must have a code of behaviour for students. The code of behaviour explains what will happen if you do not obey the school's rules. The school must act fairly and give you a chance to have your say. Breaking school rules can result in: detentions, temporary exclusion from class, suspension.

What happens if I am suspended?

Suspension means you are not allowed to attend school for a set number of days. The school's decision to suspend must be reflect the seriousness of what you have done.

What happens if I am expelled?

Expulsion means you cannot attend this school again. The Board of Management must inform EWS and wait 20 days. The EWO will make sure you still get an education.

Can I appeal my suspension or expulsion?

Your parents/guardian appeal on your behalf, first to the Board of Management and if unsuccessful, to the Department of Education and Skills. An appeals committee will write to your parents/guardian and to the school with the recommendations.

What should the school do if I am being bullied?

Tell your teacher, principal or trusted adult. Schools must have a policy for dealing with bullying that include; procedures for investigating and dealing with bullying; for helping those affected by bullying; strategies to prevent bullying happening.

Do I have a right to privacy in school?

Privacy in school means attending school without any interference by the school in your private life, your personal space, your body or your belongings. School's can, however, search your bag if it's believed you are carrying illegal substances or alcohol with consent from both you and your parent/guardian. Your locker is school property but you are entitled to privacy while the locker is assigned to you. A teacher may search your locker if they have a good reason. They must tell you the reason for the search.

Do my parents have a right to know how I am doing in school?

Yes, they have a right to be kept informed about your education and behaviour in school.

Do I have a right to see my school records?

When you are 18 the school has to make school records available if you ask for them. If you are under 18, your parent/guardian can access school records on your behalf.

5. Information for Schools

SCHOOL IS CENTRAL IN PREVENTION, EARLY IDENTIFICATION, AND CONTINUING MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOL REFUSAL.

5.1 SIGNS THAT MAY BE OBSERVED IN SCHOOL:

Most young people are occasionally reluctant to go to school or have some anxiety about certain activities. School refusal, however, is a more persistent problem that might be characterised by some of the following;

- frequent complaints of illness before or during school, such as stomach aches, headaches, dizziness or fatigue (These problems often quickly fade if the young person is allowed to stay home)
- difficulty attending school after weekends or holidays
- long, unexplained absences from school
- periodic absences or missed classes for which no explanation is given
- frequent lateness to school or an adolescent who misses the bus every day
- difficulty attending full days
- struggling with breaks and lunch times
- refusal to separate from parent/guardian
- evidence of underachieving

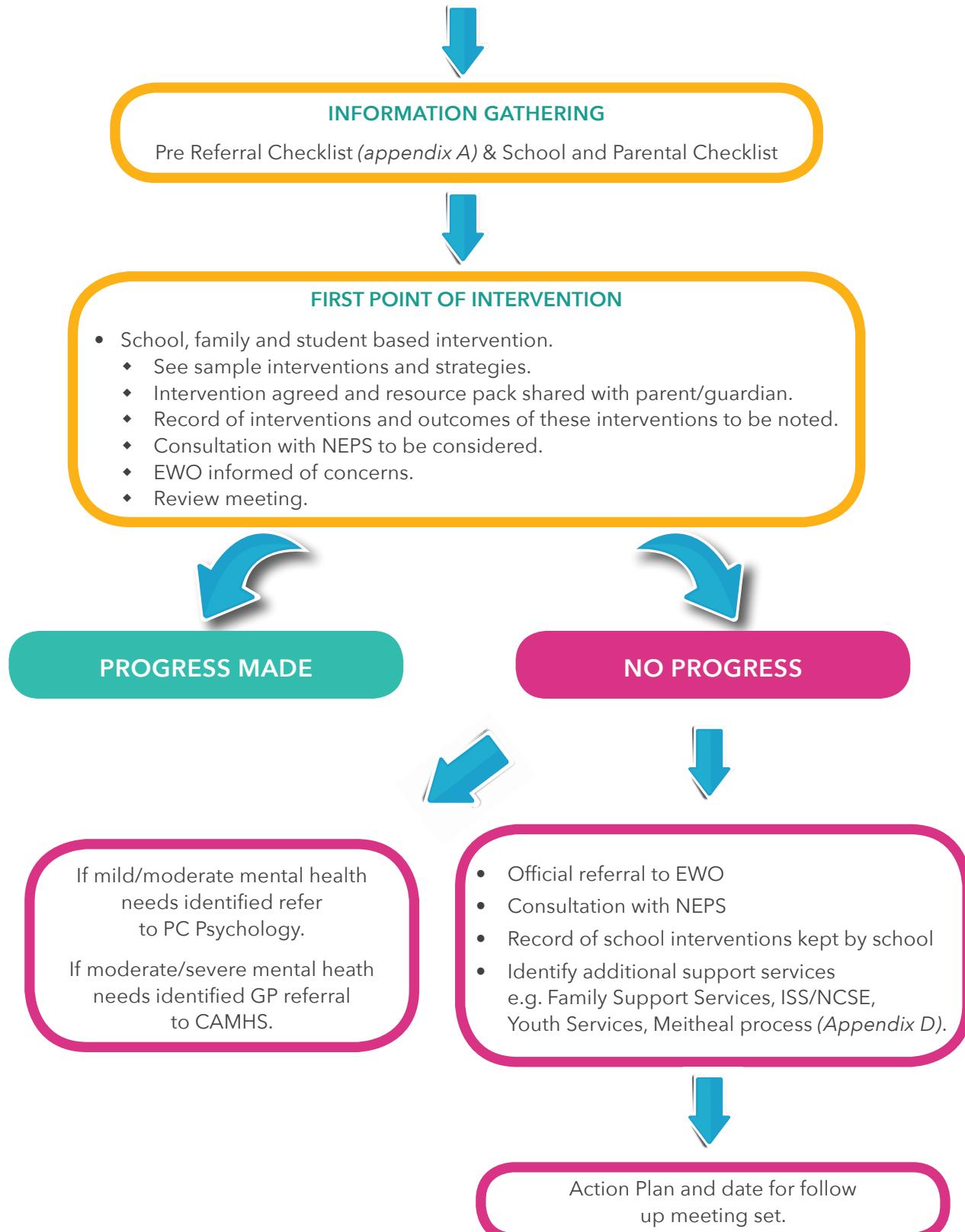
Be on the Look Out For:

It is vital that parent/guardians and schools work together to understand the young person's reason for school refusal. Open and continuous communication is key to ensure appropriate supports are in place to enable the young person/child to return to full attendance. A school refusal pathway has been developed to provide a guide for schools and parents/guardians on the best way to manage school refusal.



5.2 WICKLOW SCHOOL REFUSAL PATHWAY

SCHOOL REFUSAL IDENTIFIED AS A CONCERN BY PARENTS/GUARDIANS OR SCHOOL



Information Gathering: School & Parental Checklist

A high number of yes responses indicate a greater risk.

Name of Young person:				
Date:				
ATTENDANCE				
	YES	NO	N/A	COMMENTS
Reluctance to leave the house in the mornings				
Late for school				
Absent for part or whole days				
ENVIRONMENTAL				
	YES	NO	N/A	COMMENTS
Significant life events (e.g.: moving house/school, separation of parents/family members, additions to the family, death of a pet) Please specify				
Young person living in more than one home/temporary accommodation				
Parental involvement with education (e.g. homework, parent teacher meetings, good communication with school)				
Practical/financial challenges in getting to school				
LEARNING NEEDS				
	YES	NO	N/A	COMMENTS
Inabilities to problem solve				
Organisational difficulties				

Information Gathering: School & Parental Checklist

	YES	NO	N/A	COMMENTS
Homework not done/incomplete on a regular basis				
Difficulties working under pressure/ processing difficulties				
Specific learning difficulty Please specify				
Not achieving learning potential				
Avoidance of particular school activities/subjects				

SOCIAL

	YES	NO	N/A	COMMENTS
Bullying				
Fallen out with friends/ difficulties with peer relationships				
Social communication difficulties				
Not independent for age				
Struggles during unstructured times				
Lack of active engagement in social and leisure outlets				

EMOTIONAL WELL BEING

	YES	NO	N/A	COMMENTS
Often appears tired				
Often appears to be lacking in interest/ motivation				
Demonstrates low self esteem				
Shy, quiet or passive				

Information Gathering: School & Parental Checklist

EMOTIONAL WELL BEING				
	YES	NO	N/A	COMMENTS
Appears worried or anxious				
Displays behaviours that challenge				
Lack of involvement in school life				
PHYSICAL WELL BEING				
	YES	NO	N/A	COMMENTS
Had a serious illness or have a medical condition				
Complained of sickness or headaches				
Had rapid weight gain or loss				
Changes in eating habits				
Other				
Completed by: (please include school, parent/guardian, young person's name as appropriate)	<hr/> School Representative <hr/> Parent/Guardian <hr/> Young Person			

6. School Based Programmes and Interventions

WHAT CAN BE HELPFUL FOR ALL STUDENTS IN SCHOOL?

6.1 PROMOTION OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

An active and positive relationship between parents/guardians and school is essential to ensure a quick collaborative response when difficulties occur. Channels between parents/guardians and the school should remain open in order to share information in terms of the student's social, emotional and educational development. This open communication system ensures that where concerns arise, they can be dealt with efficiently.

Parents/Guardians may sometimes feel it is hard to connect with their young person around school issues. Some ways in which parents/guardians can get involved are listed below:

- Checking in around homework.
- Taking an interest in any projects which may have to be completed.
- Attending school events such as parent-teacher meetings, fundraising events or school performances.
- Keeping communication active with the young person's class teacher/year head in the form of a communication notebook or through 1:1 face to face meetings.
- Being invited in to help in the class with making resources, career days or assisting on school tours.
- Supporting attendance of after school activities.
- Communicating with Home School Liaison Officer and School Completion Staff (where available).

It is important that parents/guardians receive consistent information and advice in terms of encouraging regular school attendance and initial steps to take should a decrease in attendance be noted.

6.2 GENERAL TESTING

It can be difficult to keep track of a large number of students within the school. However, in order to ensure that young persons do not "fall through the net", it is suggested that regular testing in the areas of reading, writing, spelling, numeracy and behaviour (including social skills) are undertaken.

6.3 FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- Special Education Needs – A Continuum of Support
 - ◆ Guidelines for Teachers
 - ◆ Resource Pack for Teachers

https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/neps_special_needs_guidelines.pdf

- Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties – A Continuum of Support

https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/neps_besd_continuum_teacher_guide.pdf

6.4 FOR POST PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A Continuum of Support for Post Primary Schools
 - ◆ Guidelines for Teachers
 - ◆ Resource Pack for Teachers

https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/neps_post_primary_continuum_resource_pack.pdf

These resources are also available on www.education.ie

6.5 ATTENDANCE

Monitoring attendance is crucial in terms of identifying early warning signs for school refusal. This is an area that all schools are obliged

to adhere to and it is important that this information is utilised effectively.

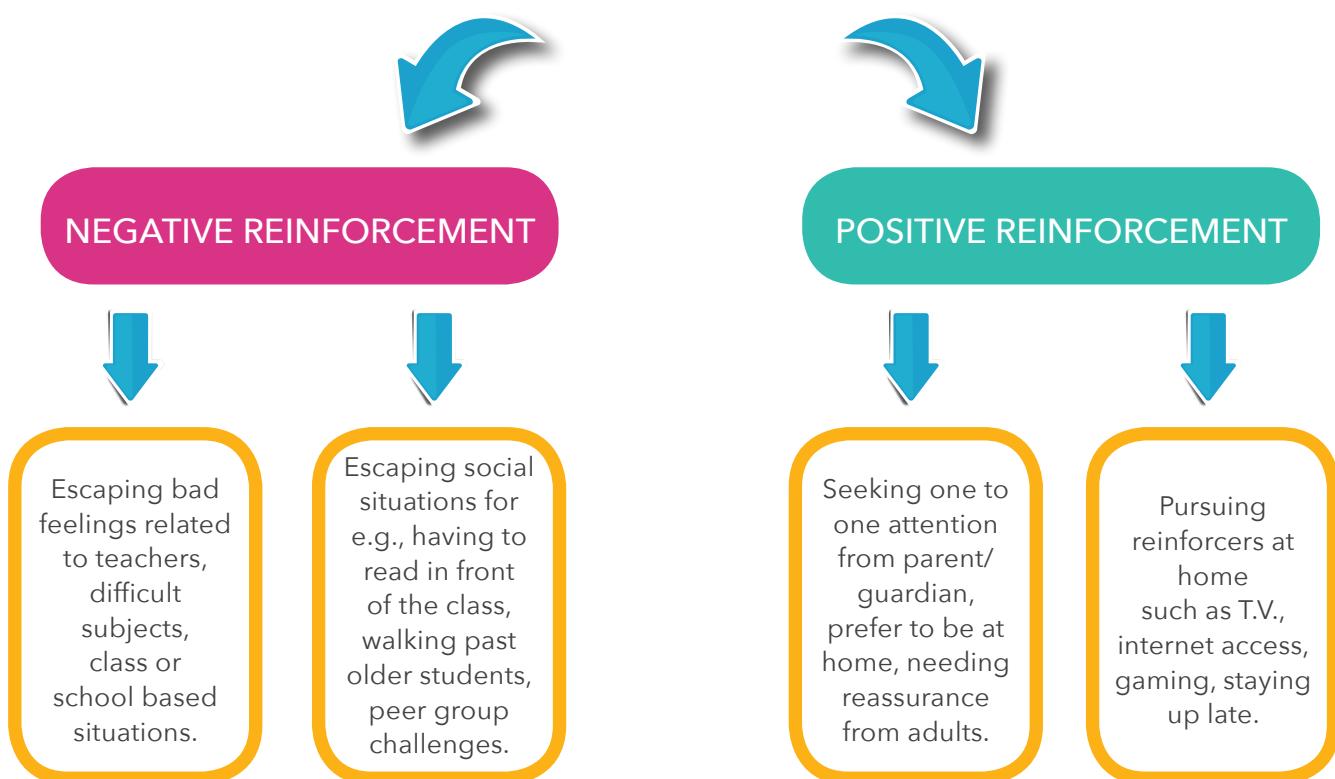
Areas which may need checking include:

- Medical difficulties – are there underlying medical reasons for the student refusing school?
- Social reasons – Gain a greater understanding of the student's social circle or lack of.
- Educational reasons – is the student

having difficulty in particular subjects, or overall?

- Environmental reasons – is there something in the environment causing distress for the student?
- Functions of School Refusal – are there other reasons the student is avoiding school?

FUNCTIONS OF SCHOOL REFUSAL



Collecting information and assessing the above areas can lead to a more in-depth, focused intervention which is tailored to the

individual needs of the student. The Continuum of Support documents aim to assist schools in developing plans that support students.

6.6 SCHOOL BASED PROGRAMMES/ CURRICULUM

There are a number of available school programmes and interventions which can assist in either the creation or implementation of a plan for early or established school refusal. These include:

- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)
- Stay Safe
- Social Skills Programmes
- The School's Code of Behaviour (including incentive programmes to encourage positive behaviour such as regular attendance)
- Health and Safety Policy
- School based resilience training programmes
- Teaching Mindfulness to all students
- School Completion Programme supports and interventions where available

See Resources for Parents/Guardians for more information.

6.7 WHEN NEEDS ARE IDENTIFIED POST SCREENING

As soon as a young person is identified, a plan should be implemented in a timely manner to ensure that difficulties do not escalate.

The Tusla Education Support Services (TESS) pre-referral checklist (*Appendix A*) and School and Parental checklist are useful resources to help in this process. For up to date TESS forms please go to: <https://www.tusla.ie/tess/tess-ews/reporting-documentation/>. Schools are encouraged to gather relevant background information, plan and evaluate as well as gather information on specific relevant interventions and resources available to them.

6.8 INVOLVEMENT OF OUTSIDE AGENCIES AND SUPPORT SERVICES

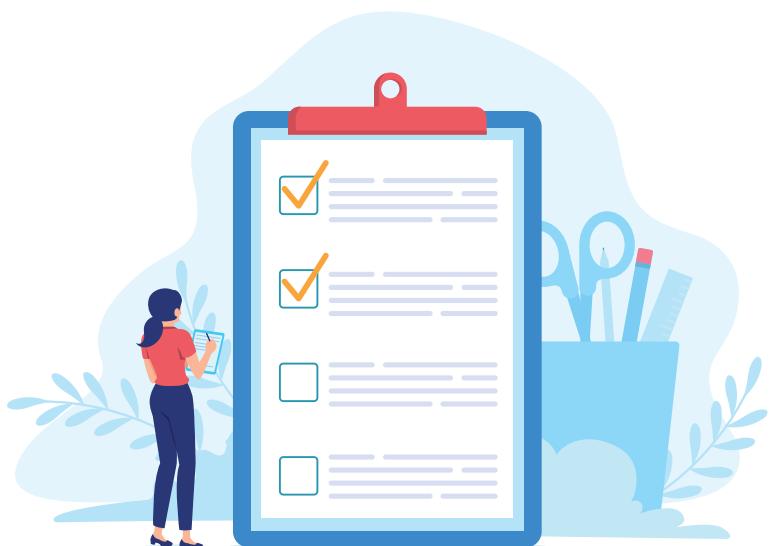
Sometimes, additional resources may be needed if a student has difficulties which involve the whole family. It is beneficial for schools to identify these needs and obtain further professional support when appropriate. Where there are difficulties with attendance, advice should be sought from the EWO and a referral to the EWS should be made. NEPS should also be consulted in this regard. A young person may be referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), Primary Care Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and/or other agencies depending on specific presentation.

Where there is uncertainty as to which service is most appropriate and where there are unmet needs for the young person a request can be made directly to the Meitheal Process. A referral can also be made to Child Protection Social Work (TUSLA) if it is deemed that the young person's needs are not being met by the parents/guardians.

See Appendix C for support services and contact details.

NEPS SCHOOL REFUSAL RESOURCE

[\(as amended\)](https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/Resources-Publications.html)



7. What can schools do when someone is identified as school refusing?



7.1 INDIVIDUAL INTERVENTIONS

When a student is identified as having difficulty in attending school it is imperative to implement interventions as soon as possible. The longer a student is out of school, the harder it is to return to the routine of school.

The following process is advised:

- 1.** Alert the parents/guardians to the fact that there are concerns about school attendance.
- 2.** Organise a meeting between school, parents/guardians and young person to identify and discuss the issues. Guidance Counsellors, Chaplains, Learning Support, HSCL, or SCP staff are often best placed to be a key support for the family. School refusal is not always due to anxiety and a full understanding of the family and young person's context should be sought by school.
- 3.** Identify the cause of the school refusal with the student and family (see *School and Parental checklist*). Once the reason for the school refusal is understood it will be easier to build supportive interventions around this.
- 4.** Learning or social needs may be identified and the school and family should seek to address these barriers with interventions, e.g. Resource, NEPS, SCP, buddy within school and so on.
- 5.** A plan for re-entry to school should be agreed with the young person, their parents/guardians and the school team. Full school attendance may be appropriate for younger students or those in the early stage of school refusal. A gradual return plan is often recommended for older students or students who are experiencing more severe anxiety or depression (see *Sample Return to School Plan*). The main focus of this plan is a gradual working increase in hours that the young person spends in the school environment. This plan should be agreed and signed up to by all relevant parties.
- 6.** If the student is not yet doing full days, time at home should be structured as if they were in school (e.g. uniform on, working on the subjects as per timetable, homework, reduced screen time).
- 7.** An EWO and/or NEPS consult may be sought at this stage.
- 8.** Teachers and school staff should be made aware of the plan and briefed on anxiety related issues if present e.g. talking aloud in class, pupils leaving the classroom unhindered. Staff should be advised not to quiz the student on absences or question why the student has not been in class.
- 9.** The student should be helped to identify staff members they feel safest with who can support the student throughout the return process. Regular check ins with that staff

member can be useful for the young person to discuss their difficulties.

- 10.** Any additional support strategies should be implemented as soon as the student begins the return to school, for example social skills programmes or extra tuition to catch up on missed work.
- 11.** Identify a buddy or mentor to meet the student on their first day back. Returning to school activities can be daunting and a peer is best placed to help with this. This peer can help ensure the student is included in a group for lunches, is briefed on class work and remains close to them as a support over the return to school period. With the young person's consent it may also be helpful to brief peers on the return to school and urge them to be supportive with no questioning as to why the student has been absent, whilst avoiding over-dramatising the situation.
- 12.** Where possible, a quiet space should be designated for the young person to use as a relaxation room; this will encourage the student to stay in the school rather than leave when their anxiety is high. A designated staff member may be useful to help calm the young person if time out is needed (SCP staff or members of the care team where SCP support is not available). Time out cards may be a useful strategy to trial with the student. This will allow them to leave the classroom without significant disruption. If they are in possession of these cards and are in the hallways during class time, they can show this card without being unduly questioned.
- 13.** Regular phone contact between parents/guardians and school is recommended in order to maintain the return to school plan.
- 14.** A record of attendance and time spent in school should be kept by the school.
- 15.** A review date for the return plan should be set ten school days from the initial plan being

made and all steps implemented over this period. A record of intervention should be kept in case of referral onwards. A checklist of these steps is found in Section 4 and if an onwards referral to services is made, the checklist could be included.

- 16.** Any successful work with an individual needs to be embedded in whole school systems. General good practice for promoting well-being and positive mental health also applies to school refusal. For a sample Whole School Audit for the promotion of emotional wellbeing;

<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/wellbeing-policy-statement-and-framework-for-practice%2018-932023.pdf>

(as amended)

7.2 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

When a student has special educational needs which contributed to school refusal, the following is important to have in place to facilitate a smooth re-engagement:

- All teachers, SNAs and staff members have been briefed about anxiety related difficulties, social difficulties, learning difficulties or challenges at home.
- Where the student's learning needs have been identified, the student may need to be prioritised for interventions within school and/or a request for NEPS involvement.
- A suitably resourced student support plan is implemented.
- Review of school based anxiety management programmes where available, providing the student with the opportunity to learn about anxiety and how best to manage and cope.

Sample Return to School Plan

PRIMARY SCHOOL

NAME OF YOUNG PERSON:	DATE
TUESDAY	
Arrive in school at 9.30 a.m., key person meets the student and together they work on an individual plan until break.	
Stay in with 2 peers at break, after break go to class with them.	
At lunch, student goes with 2 peers into the playground or to a quiet place to play. After lunch, student goes to library with key person for the afternoon.	
WEDNESDAY	
Arrive in school until 9.30, go to library with key person until break.	
Student goes to playground at break with 2 peers and then on class with them.	
Go out to play at lunch with peers and attend class after lunch if ready.	
THURSDAY	
Arrive in school 9.30, go to library with SNA until break.	
Meet friends in the playground at break (if ready) and attend classes until lunch.	
Meet friends at lunch and attend afternoon classes.	
FRIDAY	
Arrive in school at 9.30 a.m. Attend library for 30 mins with SNA.	
Attend playground and class as normal.	
MONDAY	
Student arrives in school at normal start time. Goes to the library with SNA for half an hour and then on to class.	
Student attends playground and class as normal.	

Signed: _____

Professional Role: _____

Sample Return to School Plan

SECONDARY SCHOOL

NAME OF YOUNG PERSON:	DATE
TUESDAY	
Arrive in school at 9.30 a.m. Meet key person and start work on an individual plan.	
Student meets 2 peers at break time in a quiet space (e.g. library/computer room). Student returns to class with peers after break.	
Student goes home at lunch time and continues school work at home.	
WEDNESDAY	
Arrive in school at 9.30 a.m. Meet key person and work on plan until break.	
Meet peers at break and go to class with peers after break.	
Student spends lunch with peers and stays with key person (if available) after lunch.	
THURSDAY	
Arrive at 9.30 and go to library with class work until break.	
Meet peers at break and attend classes with them until lunch.	
Meet peers at lunch in a quiet place and attend classes after lunch as normal.	
FRIDAY	
Arrive in school at 9.30 a.m. Meet with key person for first class. Attend all other classes as normal.	
Check in with key person at the end of the day.	
MONDAY	
Student arrives in school at normal start time and meets key person for first class.	
Student attends break times and classes as normal.	

Signed: _____

Professional Role: _____

8. What if this is not working or the plan has not progressed?

- A referral should be made to the EWO if the young person continues to miss school in the same academic year. A review meeting with parents/guardian and school should take place to discuss progress. Discuss barriers that have impeded progress and possible solutions to these. Identify the areas of the plan that have worked and look at why these supports have proved helpful. Brainstorm other supports which may help.
- All supports currently in place should be reviewed and if additional supports are needed they should be identified and implemented as soon as possible. This may include NEPS and Tusla Family Support Services.
- Linking with local Youth/Community Agencies to provide out of school supports can be beneficial in supporting the young person. Youth Work organisations provide personal and social development programmes that compliment a young person's formal, academic or vocational education and training.
- It may be helpful to request that the case be considered for the Meitheal process with the written consent of the parents/guardians. The Tusla Meitheal process identifies the strengths and needs of the young person and family while co-ordinating services in order to develop an agreed action plan and review process of same. The aim is for the identified unmet needs of the young person to be met by the parents/guardians supported by the various agencies. There must be two or more agencies involved with the young person for Meitheal to be considered. Following this meeting regular reviews will take place with the young person, parents/guardians and professionals to monitor and support the implementation of the Meitheal Action Plan (See Appendix D for a step by step guide).
- If no significant progress has been made, a referral can be made through GP or a senior clinician (see *CAMHS Standard Operating Procedures*):

[\(as amended\)](https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/camhs/publications/camhs-operational-guide-2019.pdf)

 - ◆ to **CAMHS** (if moderate to severe mental health issues are present); or
 - ◆ to **PC Psychology** (if behavioural or mild-moderate mental health difficulties are present).
- A referral can be made to TUSLA Child protection Social Worker if it is deemed that the parents/guardians are not supporting the young person to meet their identified unmet needs.



9. School Refusal and ASD

Some children who experience school refusal have autism spectrum disorder (ASD), where anxiety issues contribute to their difficulties at school in a way that can totally overwhelm them leading to a flight or fight response. The factors which influence the levels of anxiety in those with ASD are multiple and often complex, with each child experiencing a set of challenges unique to them. These challenges can be associated with difficulties such as context blindness, executive functioning, limited theory of mind, difficulties processing language, focus on detail, sensory processing and perfectionism.

Children with ASD need teachers and school staff who:

- Know their distinct thinking and learning style
- Are calm and reassuring, especially when the child is confused or experiencing sensory overload
- Manage the other students so that the child feels safe and can concentrate
- Know when the child needs a break or time alone (a card system and identified safe places to go can be very useful here).
- Prepare the child for transitions and changes in the daily schedule (visual timetables)
- Endeavour to understand the child's perspective, experiences and motivators
- Help the child cope with challenges, pacing and mistakes in a way that emphasises progress and success.

Once these areas have been addressed, schools could consider using resources such as:

- Middletown Centre for Autism designs and delivers training programmes cognisant of the needs of Parents/Guardians, Education Professionals and those who traverse these groupings

<https://www.middletownautism.com>

These courses are delivered to teachers in conjunction with training offered by the National Council for Special Education www.ncse.ie

- *Starving the Anxiety Gremlin* by Kate Collins-Donnelly
- AsIAM is an Irish based association whose website provides a range of resources for young people with ASD and their parents/guardians and teachers.

<https://asiam.ie/>
(as amended)





APPENDICES

Appendix A:

Educational Welfare Services

PRE-REFERRAL CHECKLIST

For School Referrals please complete pre-referral checklist and Sections 1 and 2.

Prior to submitting a referral form to the statutory educational welfare service, it is expected that the school has made attempts to resolve attendance

issues. The purpose of this checklist is to note the actions taken prior to referral to the EWS. This checklist should always accompany a referral form.

To be completed in discussion with the Class Teacher (Primary)/ Year Head (Post Primary) or a nominated teacher/principal.

Child's Name		Gender	Male <input type="checkbox"/>	Female <input type="checkbox"/>
Home Address				
Date of Birth		PPSN		
Ethnicity		Language Spoken at Home		
School Name			School Roll No.	
School Telephone No.				
Class/Year, e.g. 1st class or 1st year				
Number of school days absent this school year out of a possible number of school days open	<u> </u> days absent out of <u> </u> school days to date.			
Number of unexplained absences year to date				
What is the presenting issue for this child				

CHECKLIST ACTIONS TO ADDRESS POOR ATTENDANCE	DATE OF ACTION TAKEN	BY WHOM
In-school discussion with pupil (where appropriate)		
Contact between school and parent/guardian to express concern e.g. phone call, letter, discuss at parents evening		
Specific meeting in school with parent/guardian to identify problems and agree interventions		
Concerns and agreements communicated in writing to parent/guardian		
Implementation of any appropriate in-school measures (e.g. change of class, 'contact person' in school, support in class etc.)		
Use of appropriate interventions with pupil (e.g. attendance charts/attendance report, incentives, rewards etc.)		
Other school interventions (e.g. care team, Pastoral care team, student support team etc.)		
Previous EWS involvement in this case		

DOES THE SCHOOL HAVE...		
...Home School Community Liaison Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>		
... School Completion Programme Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	IF YES, PLEASE ATTACH ANY ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS GIVEN OTHER THAN OUTLINED ABOVE (ON A SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY).	

Signature of Principal: _____

Date: _____

Name of Principal (Capitals): _____

For up to date TESS forms please go to:
<https://www.tusla.ie/tess/tess-ews/reporting-documentation/>

Appendix B: Educational Welfare Referral Form

EDUCATIONAL WELFARE SERVICES

SECTION 1 – CHILD AND FAMILY DETAILS

(Schools should have already filled out child's other details in the pre-referral checklist).

Child's Name	
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FAMILY DETAILS

Mother's Name		Tel No.	
Address (if different from the child's)			
Father's Name		Tel No.	
Address (if different from the child's)			
Details of Guardian/Carer (if child is not residing with parent/s)			
Relationship to the child		Tel No.	
Are other siblings known to EWS			

Appendix B: Educational Welfare Referral Form

EDUCATIONAL WELFARE SERVICES

SECTION 2 SCHOOL DETAILS – PART 1

Child's Name			
School Name		Roll No.	
School Address		Tel No.	
School Email			

No. of school days absent this school year to date			
Total no. of school days absent last school year			
Date parents/guardian were informed of referral to EWS?			
If Post Primary – Year group of pupil		If Primary – Class group of pupil	
Date pupil entered the school			
Summary or reason for referral to EWS			

For up to date TESS forms please go to:
<https://www.tusla.ie/tess/tess-ews/reporting-documentation/>

Appendix B: Educational Welfare Referral Form

EDUCATIONAL WELFARE SERVICES

SECTION 2 SCHOOL DETAILS – PART 2

Previous school/s	
Does this child have special educational needs?	
Has the child been assessed (or is assessment pending) by the National Educational Psychological Service?	
What resources (if any) have been allocated to meet the child's needs?	
Does the child have any health issues?	
Does the school have knowledge of other agencies involved with the child or family? If so which?	
Has the school referred the child or family to another agency? If so what agency?	
Has the school made a referral to the Social Work Department of the Child and Family Agency in respect of child protection or welfare concerns?	
Is there any additional information that you feel is relevant for this referral?	

NOTE:

A referral received by the statutory educational welfare service does not replace the responsibility of the referring school continually to support the child as required and to work in collaboration with the service in that regard.

Signature of Principal: _____ Date: _____

Name of Principal (Capitals): _____

Appendix B: Educational Welfare Referral Form

EDUCATIONAL WELFARE SERVICES

SECTION 2 SCHOOL DETAILS – PART 3

FOR EWS USE ONLY

Referral Reference No:		
Allocated for Assessment?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Case to open?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Reason for decision		
Signature of EWO	Date	
Signature of SEWO	Date	
Date Stamp	Date Stamp	Date Stamp

Appendix C: Useful Contacts

USEFUL CONTACTS NAME	ADDRESS	PHONE NO.
TUSLA EDUCATION AND SUPPORT SERVICES (TESS) EDUCATION WELFARE OFFICERS (EWO) Provide advice, support and guidance to parents who need support in ensuring that their young person attends schools regularly. SCHOOL COMPLETION PROGRAMME (SCP) A targeted support for children and young people identified at risk of early school leaving or who are out of school. Referrals can be made in relation to any child enrolled in a school included in a SCP project. HOME SCHOOL COMMUNITY LIAISON (HSCL) The HSCL Coordinator works to improve educational outcomes for children through their work with the key adults in the child's life.	Head Office: Tusla – Child and Family Agency, Floors 2-5, Brunel Building, Heuston South Quarter, Dublin 8.	01-7718500
NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE (NEPS) NEPS psychologists work with both primary and post-primary schools and are concerned with learning, behaviour, social and emotional development.	NEPS Head Office: Dublin Region Department of Education and Skills, Marlborough Street, Dublin 1	NEPS Head Office: 01 889 6400 Email: neps@neps.gov.ie www.education.ie The Dublin Mid-Leinster Regional 076 1108400
JIGSAW WICKLOW Jigsaw Wicklow is a free, non-judgmental and confidential support service for young people (15-25) living in County Wicklow. They provide guidance and support for young people who are going through a difficult or distressing time. They also provide advice and guidance for anyone who is concerned about a young person in their life or work.	To be set up in early 2020.	Please see www.jigsaw.ie (as amended) for details

FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES Family Support is a style of work and a wide range of activities that strengthen positive informal social networks through community based programmes and services. The main focus of these services is on early intervention aiming to promote and protect the health, well-being and rights of all children, young people and their families. At the same time particular attention is given to those who are vulnerable or at risk. Drop in services are available, please contact these numbers to find your local drop in service.	Tusla Family Support Services East Wicklow West Wicklow Family Support Projects: Arklow Springboard, Arklow Greystones Family Resource Centre, Greystones Supporting Parents and Early Childhood Services [SPECSS] Bray Wicklow Child and Family Project	0402 24828 01 2557528 01 2116481 0404 64725
MEITHEAL CO-ORDINATOR Meitheal is the proposed Child and Family Agency standardised approach to assessing the needs of children and families that have come to the attention of practitioners and community members because of a child welfare or safety concern. Meitheal is a national practice model that enables the needs and strengths of children and their families to be properly identified and understood. This way of working will ensure that the proper supports and services are made available to children and families when they are required.	Senior Child and Family Support Network Co-ordinator CFSN Bray/Greystones CFSN South Wicklow	087 09118882/087 1907681 086 1445761 087 7644220
CHILD & ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE (CAMHS) Lucena Clinics Multi-disciplinary assessment, treatment and diagnosis of moderate to severe mental health difficulties.	Bray Wicklow Arklow Tallaght (West Wicklow)	See www.lucena.ie for referral form and up to date contact details for all centres.

USEFUL CONTACTS NAME	ADDRESS	PHONE NO.
HSE PRIMARY CARE PSYCHOLOGY Assessment, Intervention (Individual and Group), Psychological Therapy, Advice and Consultation.	Bray/Kilmacanogue/ Enniskerry Greystones Newtown/Kilcoole/, Aughrim/Rathdrum Wicklow/Arklow and South Wicklow Network Blessington The Vista Primary Care Centre Naas	01 2744113 01 2018518 01 2018518 076 6958371/0402 39625 045 986821
ISPCC The Child and Family Support Services is an intensive therapeutic support service for young people and their families who are at risk of/or experiencing difficulties due to drug and alcohol misuse or who are experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties.	ISPCC, The Wicklow Enterprise Centre, The Murrough, Wicklow Town	0404 66933/32296
YOUTH SERVICES Provide targeted youth activities and supports for young people in the 12 – 24 age range, including Youth Information, Outdoor Learning, After schools groups and Drop-ins, Drugs Education and Prevention, Garda Youth Diversion programmes, Counselling, and in some projects one to one supports.	Bray Youth & Information Service - Crosscare, St. Brincin's, Herbert Road, Bray, Co. Wicklow. Catchment area - Bray to Newtown/Kilcoole. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drugs Education Project - C/O BYS (<i>as above</i>) • Youth Counselling Project - C/O BYS (<i>as above</i>) • New Directions - GYDP - C/O BYS (<i>as above</i>) • Outdoor Learning - C/O BYS (<i>as above</i>) • Newtown/Kilcoole Youth Project - C/O BYS (<i>as above</i>) • The Seomra Youth Centre, Unit 1, Carlisle House, Adelaide Road, Bray, Co. Wicklow 	01 2050502 01 2764783

YOUTH SERVICES (CONTINUES)		
YouthSPIN		01 2050502/0402 39646
CONNECT Bray	Community Centre Old Connaught, Bray	01 2768848
	Ballywaltrim Community Centre, Boghall Rd, Bray	
East Wicklow Youth Service	The Vault, Coomie Lane, Arklow, Co. Wicklow	0402 39646
Foroige WAY Youth Diversion Project	South Quay, Wicklow Town	086 8590866/ 086 0405513
West Wicklow Youth Project	West Wicklow Youth Project, St. Joseph's Hall, Blessington, Co. Wicklow	083 4445074/ 083 4467007
KILDARE AND WICKLOW EDUCATION AND TRAINING BOARD Youth Advocacy Service for young people aged 16-20 years. Career guidance and counselling for early school leavers aged 15-21 years.	Youthreach Advocate, KWETB The Murrough, Further Education and Training Centre Wicklow Town	087 2049031/ 0404 64053

Appendix D: Step by Step Meitheal Guide

STAGE 1: PREPARATION

- Consider whether a Meitheal is necessary. Talk to the young person/parents using the *Parent's Information Leaflet* and *Children and Young Person's Information Leaflet* as a guide.
- Secure written consent by completing the Meitheal Request Form and return to Senior Child and Family Support Network (CFSN) Coordinator.
- Liaise with CFSN Coordinator for support.

STAGE 2: DISCUSSION

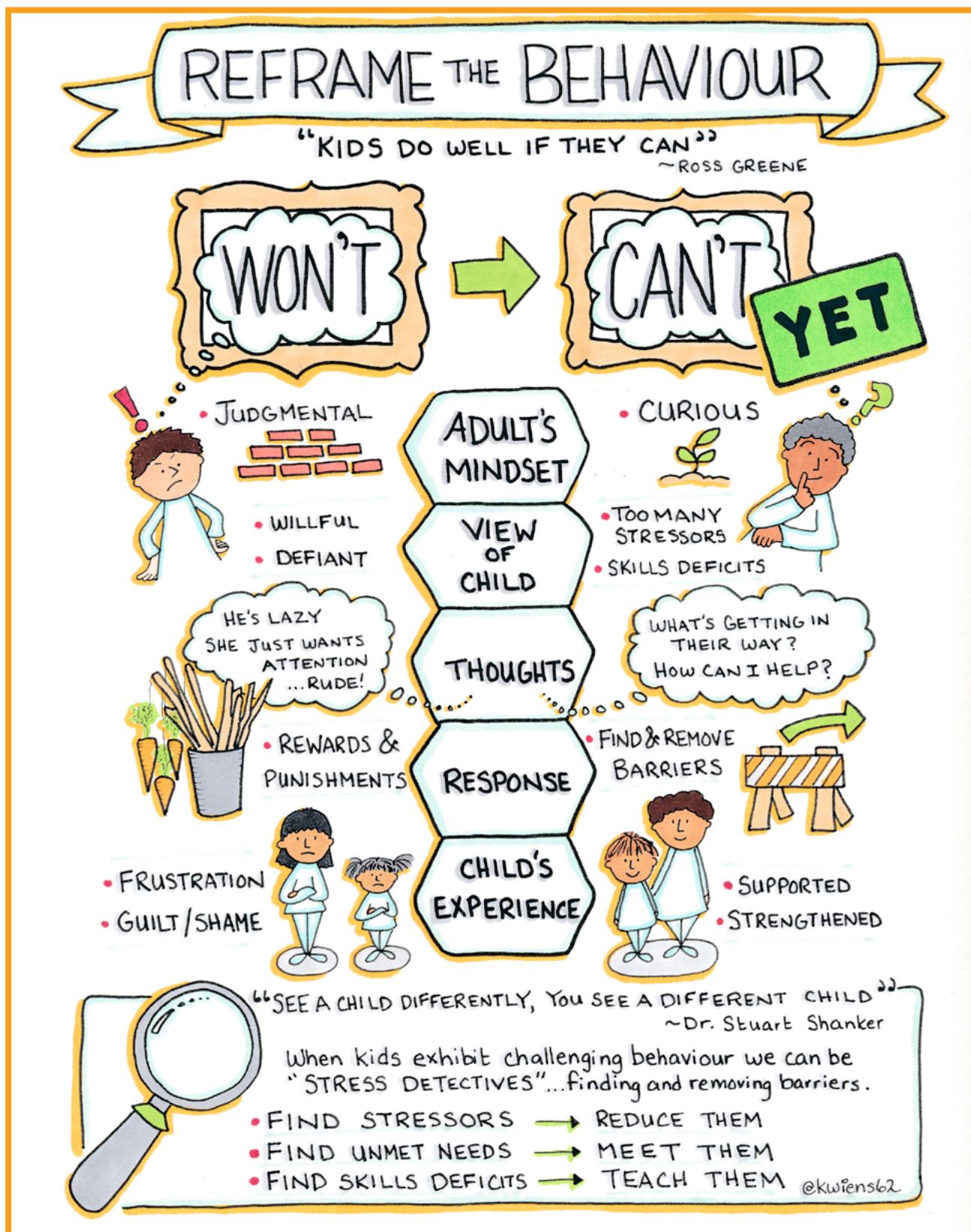
- With the parent and young person, complete the *Strengths and Needs Form* identify strengths and needs and desired outcomes which will inform an outcomes-focused action plan for the child/young person.
- Use the "my world triangle" to guide the discussion.
- Keep the identification of strengths and needs concise and use clear, simple, plain English.
- Parents and young person will identify who they want to attend the Meitheal meetings, e.g. Representatives from school (Year head, guidance counsellor, SCP, HSCL, Principal etc.), EWO, Family support worker, CAMHS, addiction support workers etc.

STAGE 3: DELIVERY

- Assign a facilitator/ chair/ minute taker. Contact your CFSN coordinator for support if needed.
- Meitheal support meetings provide an opportunity for practitioners and families to discuss and identify additional needs and develop an action plan to meet them.
- It should lead to less duplication of services and more effective integration of services.
- The plan will be monitored and reviewed at regular intervals appropriate to the needs of the young person's progress (usually every 6-8 weeks).
- Planning and Review Form* will be completed and distributed following each meeting.
- The number of meetings will depend on the needs of the young person and the *Closure and Feedback Form* will be completed at the final meeting.



Appendix E: Tips/Resources for Teachers



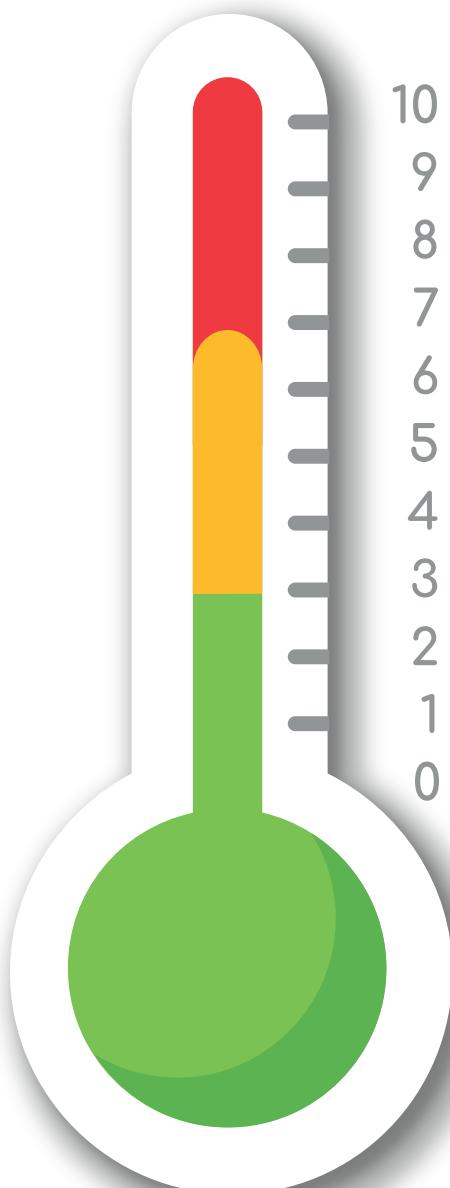
Appendix E: Tips/Resources for Teachers

FEAR THERMOMETER

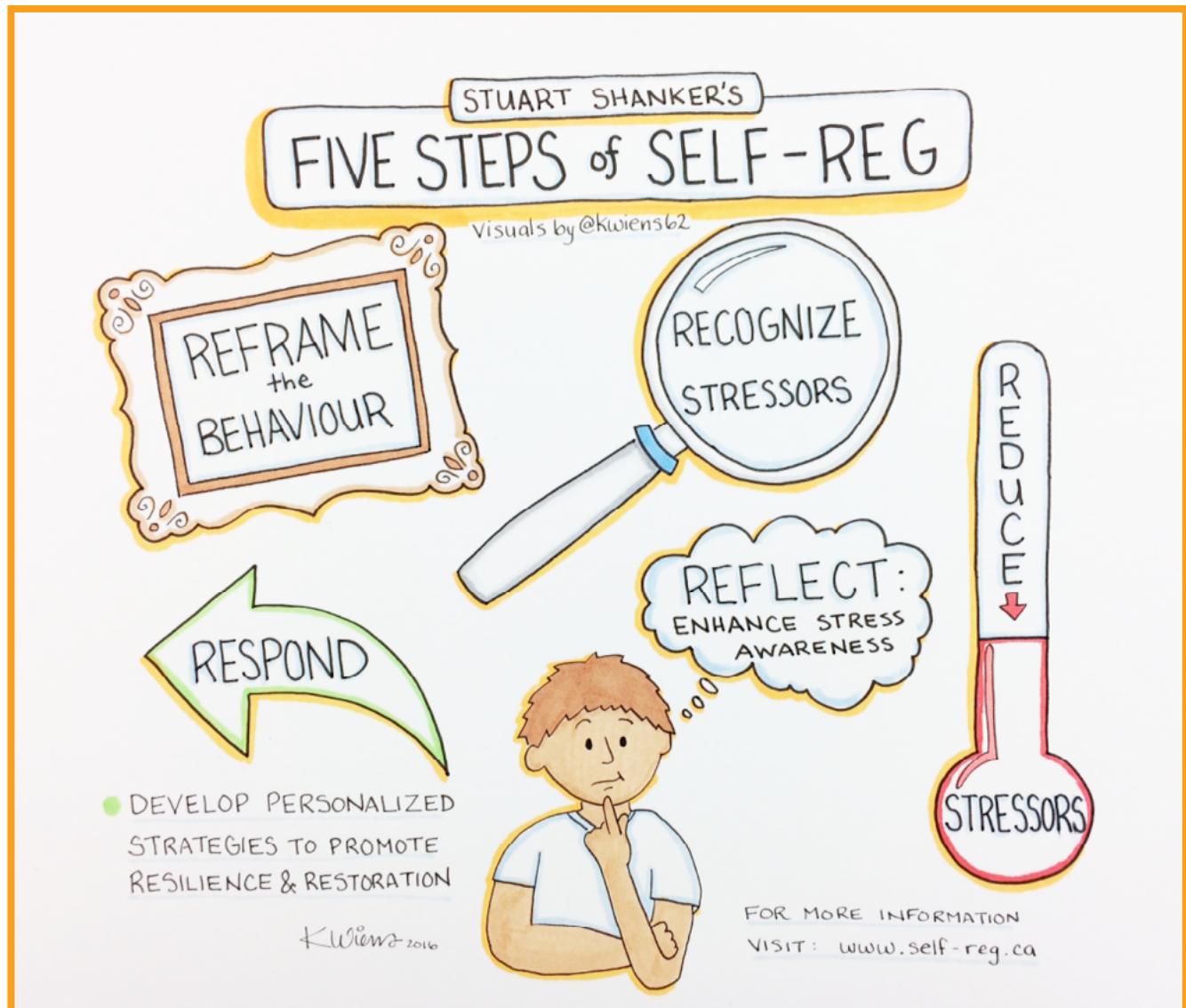
FEELS THE WORST/
VERY SCARY



FEELS THE BEST/
NOT SCARY AT ALL



Appendix E: Tips/Resources for Teachers



References & Bibliography:

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<https://self-reg.ca/infographics/reframe/> (as amended)



An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige
Department of Children
and Youth Affairs

