

# SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOL - TIPS FOR PARENTS

## WHAT IS SPHE?

**Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)** provides particular opportunities to foster the personal development, health and wellbeing of the individual child, to help them to create and maintain supportive relationships and become an active and responsible citizen in society. Through SPHE, children can develop a framework of values, attitudes, understanding and skills that will inform their decisions and actions both now and in the future. Since SPHE has a moral and a spiritual dimension, its development and implementation are influenced significantly by the ethos or characteristic spirit of the home as well as the school



### The SPHE curriculum...

- fosters children's wellbeing, self-confidence and sense of belonging
- develops children's sense of personal responsibility for their own behaviour and actions
- promotes children's self-awareness and understanding by helping them to manage their own feelings, to recognise and appreciate individual abilities, and to cope with change of various kinds
- supports children to become active and responsible citizens.

### Shared Responsibility

SPHE does not begin or end in school. Children's understanding of the world, their own role and place in society and ways of behaving are significantly influenced by the family and the home environment. While this continues throughout their lives, other factors, such as the media, friends, peers and individual experiences, become increasingly influential.

An SPHE programme is most effective when it is based on a consistency in approach and where the responsibility is shared by parents, teachers, children, board of management, health professionals and relevant members of the community.

The SPHE curriculum can be viewed on the following link:  
<https://www.pdst.ie/sites/default/files/SPHE%20Curriculum.pdf>

## WHY TEACH SPHE?

As a parent, you are the primary educator of your child. Just as you help your child to grow and develop in other ways, consciously supporting the development of your child's wellbeing will help them achieve the skills, attitudes and values they need in order to have healthy relationships with themselves and others. SPHE is a lifelong process that begins before the child comes to school and will continue long after they have left.



### **The broad objectives of teaching SPHE both at home and in school are to enable the child to**

- be self-confident and have a positive sense of self-esteem
- develop a sense of personal responsibility and come to understand their sexuality and the processes of growth, development and reproduction
- develop and enhance the social skills of communication, co-operation and conflict resolution
- create and maintain supportive relationships both now and in the future
- develop an understanding of healthy living, an ability to implement healthy behaviour and a willingness to participate in activities that promote and sustain health
- develop a sense of safety and an ability to protect themselves from danger and abuse
- make decisions, solve problems and take appropriate actions in various personal, social and health contexts
- become aware of, and discerning about, the various influences on choices and decisions
- begin to identify, review and evaluate the values and attitudes that are held by individuals and society and to recognise that these affect thoughts and actions
- respect the environment and develop a sense of responsibility for its long-term care
- develop some of the skills and abilities necessary for participating fully in groups and in society
- become aware of some of the individual and community rights and responsibilities that come from living in a democracy
- begin to understand the concepts of personal, local, national, European and global identity
- appreciate and respect the diversity that exists in society and the positive contributions of various cultural, religious and social groups
- promote the values of a just and caring society in an age-appropriate manner and understand the importance of seeking truth and peace.

# 10 TIPS FOR PARENTS TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD'S LEARNING IN SPHE

Here are some practical tips on how parents can help develop SPHE at home

## 1. Encouragement, Love and Learning

Build up their self-esteem, and confidence at every opportunity. Love each child unconditionally, regardless of ability, achievements or behaviour. Affirm and praise all efforts. Provide opportunities for them to develop new skills and expand on their interests and abilities. Include them when you are doing housework, cooking, baking etc. Reassure them when they doubt themselves.

## 2. Development of Key Life Skills

Resilience and coping skills are a necessary requisite for wellbeing. Based on data from the International Resilience Project, which is a large-scale study of child resilience (Yates & Masten, 2012), it may be useful to consider the following three sources from which children draw resilience: I have, I am and I can. Remind children of the sources and resources already available to them when they are worried or anxious e.g. I have a family, a home, friends, health etc. I am kind, caring, capable, hard-working etc. I can do my best, ask for help etc.

Young children may be exposed to constant news updates and displaying anxiety and worries around the Covid19 virus. You might find this book beneficial. It is written especially for primary school children and is available online at: <https://nosycrowcoronavirus.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/Coronavirus-ABookForChildren.pdf>

**Along with effective parenting styles, the following list contains a number of more concrete and specific ways in which parents and caregivers can promote resilience in children (Brooks and Goldstein (2003):**

**Build Empathy:** Help your child develop empathy by teaching them how to really consider and visualise the struggles faced by others.

**Identify a Go-To Person:** Make sure your child has a close and supportive adult they feel comfortable confiding in.

**Listen:** Ensure that your child feels like you aren't simply hearing, but are truly tuned-in to what they have to say.

**Accept Children for Who They Are:** Avoid pushing your child in a direction they don't want to go; but instead, celebrate the person they are.

**Identify Strengths:** Find out what your child is really good at and offer encouragement and support.

**Do-Overs:** Make sure your child knows that mistakes along the way are okay; present them as learning experiences and areas where they can try to do better next time.

**Develop Responsibility:** Give your child opportunities for developing mastery and responsibility, this will encourage self-esteem and efficacy.

**Offer Meaningful Participation:** Offer your child opportunities to engage in activities they really care about.

**Teach Problem-Solving:** Show your child ways to deal with problems, providing both role modelling and encouragement.

**Optimism:** Foster a sense of optimism...I know it is difficult now but things will get better in time  
The Family Wellbeing Toolkit offers tips and information on how to nurture relationships and support family near and from afar and is available here:

<https://www.mentalhealthireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Family-Wellbeing-Toolkit-Reduced-Size.pdf>

### 3. Development of Safety Skills

Teach your children the importance of Safety Skills that are relevant in your home environment: personal safety, water safety, road safety, farm safety, fire safety and safety in the home. Remind children of the limits and boundaries that are in place to keep us safe. Teach about safety when cooking, using appliances, substances and medicines. Make sure children know how to get help in an emergency. More information at <https://www.agriaware.ie/farmsafety.html>

### 4. Friendships and Relationships

This lockdown is an opportune time to cultivate, develop and enhance your own relationship with your children. Give them as much time as you can. Involve them in activities with you at every opportunity. For ideas about play, visit <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/lets-play-ireland/>. Children are really missing their friends, family members and relatives at this time. Facilitate their continued friendships by enabling them to keep in touch, by phone, email, letter and postcard writing, or online video conferencing. Parents can get more information on suitable online apps at <https://www.webwise.ie/category/parents/explainers/>

### 5. Grief Support

If children have been bereaved at this time, encourage them to express their feelings. Acknowledge and empathise with how they feel. Depending on their age, they might draw, write, paint to express memories of the person who has died. Further support available from the Irish Childhood Bereavement Network <https://www.childhoodbereavement.ie/>

### 6. Transitioning to New School

Children who are leaving junior school or moving on to secondary school, check with their new school if any supports are being offered online. Make contact with other families who have children in these schools and arrange a phone/online chat where questions can be asked. Some useful tips and information can be found at the following two links.

<http://www.npc.ie/training-and-resources/training-we-offer/transition-from-primary-to-post-primary>

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/NEPS-Guides/Transfer-from-Primary-to-Post-primary/>

### 7. Balancing Screen Time

While TV programmes and online devices have been a welcome distraction, there needs to be a clear delineation between screens and other activities. Allocating time to doing homework tasks, practising sport, taking exercise, reading, helping with chores, being creative and pursuit of hobbies and interests is worth factoring in. Structure, timetables and routines are worth creating.

### 8. Healthy Eating

Regular meal times with good proportions of fruit and vegetables is advised. The temptation to snack while understandable, is recommended only for occasional treats. The Food Pyramid and Eat well Guide is available at <https://www.safefood.eu/Healthy-Eating.aspx>

### 9. Physical Exercise and Movement Breaks

Follow the PDST Beyond the Classroom Activities to support the development of fundamental movement skills during school closures: [www.scoilnet.ie/pdst/beyond](http://www.scoilnet.ie/pdst/beyond)

**10. Internet Safety:** It is never too early to start thinking about online safety, parental controls, amount of time online, respectful communication, privacy settings etc. Webwise have devised online safety tips to help support parents and children at this link: <https://www.webwise.ie/parents/covid19-online-safety-advice-for-parents/>

Webwise also has an excellent Parents hub which includes updated information on apps such as Zoom, TikTok, Houseparty, Fortnite. Age appropriateness and risks are explained clearly. Click on this link: <https://www.webwise.ie/category/parents/explainers/>

**A range of further supports are available on our website**

[www.pdst.ie/primary/healthwellbeing](http://www.pdst.ie/primary/healthwellbeing)

