

SUMMARY REPORT

Findings from an evaluation of the
Mental Health Awareness Initiative (MHAI)
for primary schools



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Young people's
health in mind

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Overview

Evaluation of the Mental Health Awareness Initiative (MHAI) for Primary Schools training involved administering surveys to primary school teachers before they attended a train-the-trainers workshop delivered by Jigsaw (Time 1) and immediately after this workshop (Time 2). At Time 2, teachers also completed a brief session feedback form. At Time 1, 29 teachers completed the survey. At Time 2, 41 teachers completed the survey and 39 completed the session feedback form. The findings of the evaluation are outlined below.

Participants

Demographic details were gathered from the 29 teachers who completed the Time 1 survey. The majority were female (79.3%, $n = 23$; male 17.2%, $n = 5$; missing $n = 1$) and taught in a school located in Dublin (48.3%, $n = 14$). Other counties in which schools were located were Cork and Kildare (each 10.4%, $n = 3$), Kildare, Kilkenny and Meath (each 6.9%, $n = 2$), Waterford, Wexford and the Carlow/Wicklow border (each 3.5%, $n = 1$). The majority of teachers had been teaching for over 20 years (37.9%, $n = 11$). Figure 1 displays a breakdown of the twenty-nine teachers' length of time teaching.

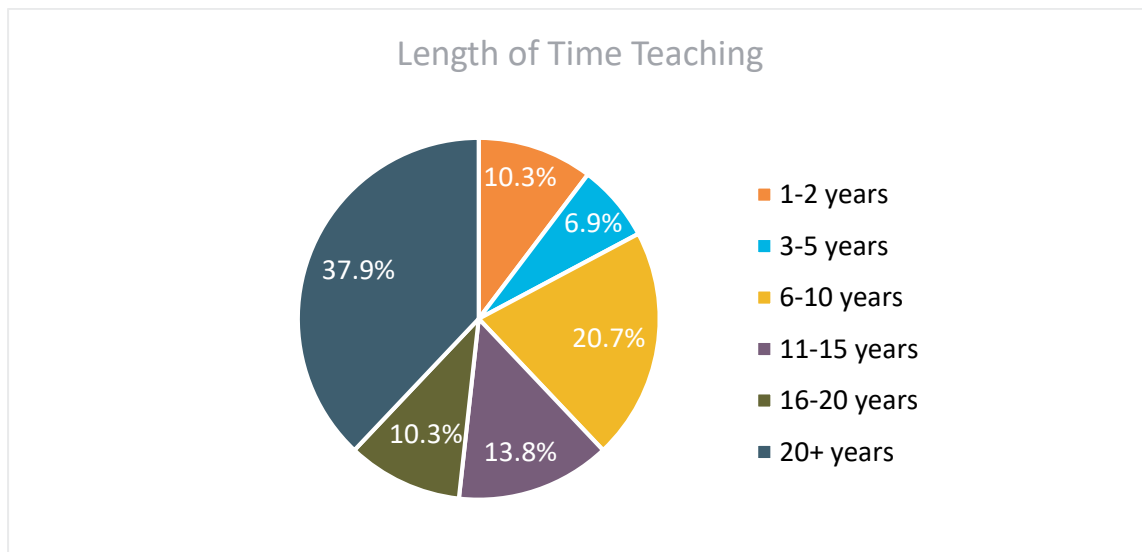


Figure 1. Length of Time Teaching

The classes that teachers mainly worked with are displayed in Figure 2 below. 6th class was the class with which most teachers worked (55.2%, $n = 16$), followed by 5th class (37.9%, $n = 11$), 4th class and Junior Infants (24.1%, $n = 7$). Five teachers added that they worked with Learning Support or Resource classes ($n = 17.2%$). Thirteen of the twenty-eight teachers who answered this question worked with more than one class, including Learning Support/Resource.

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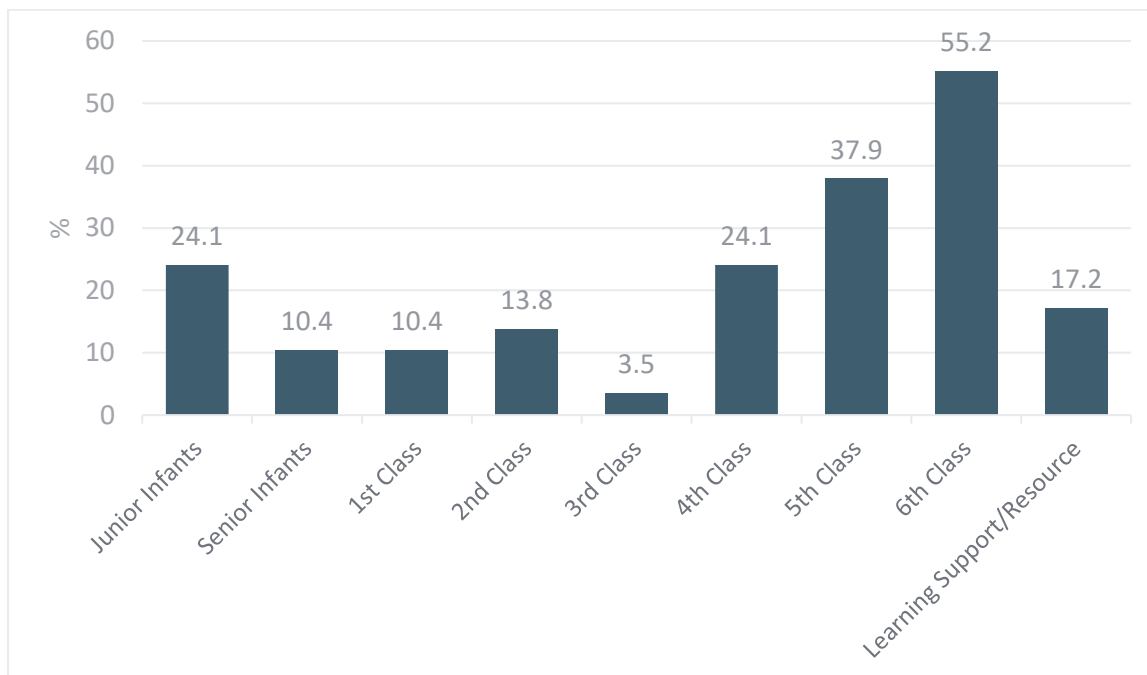


Figure 2. Main Class for Teachers

The majority of the 29 teachers had not attended youth mental health training before the MHAJ workshop (60.7%, $n = 17$) while 11 reported that they had (39.3%). Despite this lack of training, most had experience of working with students with mental health difficulties (77.8%, $n = 21$). This included work with students experiencing bereavement, anxiety, emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD), depression, and suicidal thoughts. Some also worked with students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD, autism, Asperger's Syndrome), ADHD, foetal alcohol syndrome, and a history of abuse. Teachers also liaised with child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and the national education psychology service (NEPS), and were involved in school programmes and broader support roles.

Materials

The Time 1 and Time 2 (Appendix A, p.7 and B, p.9) used both open-ended questions and scales to explore teachers' understanding of youth mental health in terms of definitions, knowledge and awareness, and who has responsibility for student mental health. Questions also explored teachers' confidence in supporting student mental health and promotion of mental health in schools, ability to recognise students who are struggling, and knowledge of how to support both students' mental health and their own self-care needs. A session feedback form was also included with the Time 2 survey (Appendix C, p.11) examining teachers' opinions on workshop facilitation, content, and usefulness.

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Results

Knowledge and Awareness of Mental Health

Respondents were asked to define youth mental health in their own words at Time 1 and Time 2. Teachers' definitions of youth mental health prior to the workshop varied. Many described youth mental health as "a state of wellbeing" and frequently referred to resilience. While one teacher understood mental health to be more negative in terms of "feeling down, depressed, sad, worried, self-harm" most viewed it more like a spectrum, "how the young person is feeling about themselves" and their ability to function in daily life when faced with adversities. At Time 2, teachers again referenced the spectrum of youth mental health, describing it as a young person's ability to regulate and respond to their emotions and "to function daily to deal with life's ups and downs". Teachers noted that relationships and sense of connectedness, self-esteem, and resilience all contribute to youth mental health.

Prior to the workshop, most teachers felt that they would "know what to look out for as signs that a student is experiencing mental health difficulties" with 57.1% agreeing ($n = 16$) and 10.7% strongly agreeing ($n = 3$) with this statement. However, 17.9% disagreed ($n = 5$) that they would know what to look out for and 14.3% neither agreed nor disagreed ($n = 4$) suggesting they were unsure. Following the workshop, the vast majority felt they would know what to look out for as signs that a student is experiencing mental health difficulties with 92.7% agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement ($n = 38$). Three teachers were still unsure at Time 2 (7.3%). At Time 2, teachers were asked to list two signs that students may be struggling with their mental health. Signs cited by the respondents included changes in behaviour, irritability, anger/aggression and outbursts, anxiety, withdrawal/isolation, and poor attendance or school performance.

In terms of knowing "what to do if a student was experiencing mental health difficulties" at Time 1, the majority of teachers felt they would know what to do with 63% agreeing with this statement ($n = 17$). Only one respondent strongly agreed (3.7%). There were three respondents unsure (11.1%), with four disagreeing ($n = 14.8%$) and two strongly disagreeing (7.4%). At Time 2 only one teacher was unsure (2.5%), while the remaining 40 teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they knew what to do if a student was experiencing mental health difficulties (97.5%).

At Time 1, most teachers were "aware of the supports available within the school context for students experiencing mental health difficulties", with seventeen of the twenty-nine agreeing (58.6%) and two strongly agreeing (6.9%) with this statement. However, 20.7% disagreed ($n = 6$), reporting that they were not aware of the support, while 13.8% were unsure ($n = 4$). At Time 2, 97.5% of teachers ($n = 40$) agreed or strongly agreed that they were aware of the supports available within the school context, while only one teacher remained unsure (2.5%).

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Before the workshop, teachers varied in the ways they felt they could support students. These included listening and “being there” for students, using techniques such as exercise, mindfulness and other extracurricular activities such as music and drama. Teachers also referenced promoting positivity in the classroom, creating a safe environment, and letting students “know that it is ok not to be ok.” Other methods teachers noted involved delivering class programmes such as *Friends for Life*, and liaising with parents, psychologists, and other services for further support. At Time 2 having attended the workshop, most respondents cited the ‘REAL’ technique and its various components as a way in which they could support students. There was a particular emphasis on listening and recognising student difficulties. A number of teachers also noted that they can be a One Good Adult for students.

- **Key Message:** Teachers had a good baseline understanding of mental health this did improve further following attendance at the workshop, particularly around identifying a student who is struggling and knowing what to do in response to this.

Confidence in Supporting Students

In terms of confidence in supporting students with mental health difficulties, before taking part in the workshop three participants felt a little confident doing so (10.3%), 11 felt moderately confident (37.9%), ten felt quite confident (34.5%), and only one felt extremely confident (3.4%). However, four teachers (13.8%) did not feel in any way confident support students with mental health difficulties. At Time 2, all teachers felt in some way confident in supporting students with mental health difficulties. The majority felt quite confident (56.1%, $n = 23$), with 22% ($n = 9$) feeling extremely and 22% ($n = 9$) feeling moderately confident.

When asked at Time 1 about levels of confidence in accessing supports for students with mental health difficulties, three felt a little bit confident (10.3%), thirteen felt moderately confident (44.8%), ten felt quite confident (34.5%) and again one felt extremely confident (3.4%). There were two teachers (6.9%) who did not feel confident in accessing supports at all. Having attended the workshop, the majority of teachers felt quite confident in accessing supporting for students with mental health difficulties (57.5%, $n = 23$), with 22.5% feeling extremely ($n = 9$) and 20% feeling moderately confident ($n = 8$).

None of the teachers reported that they did not feel confident in promoting mental health activities in school at Time 1. Most felt quite confident (69%, $n = 20$), with three feeling a little confident (10.3%), four feeling moderately confident (13.8%) and two feeling extremely confident (6.9%). Level of confidence in promoting mental health activities in school rose even further at Time 2, with 51.2% of teachers ($n = 21$) feeling quite confident and 43.9% ($n = 18$) feeling extremely confident. The remaining two teachers reported that they were moderately confident in promoting mental health activities (4.9%).

- **Key Message:** Teachers’ levels of confidence in supporting students with mental health difficulties and in accessing supports for these students were enhanced having attended the workshop, while promoting mental health activities in school

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was something teachers had a good baseline confidence that was also enhanced following the workshop.

Responsibility for Supporting Students

In terms of who teachers feel have responsibility for the mental health of primary school students, at Time 1 responses varied. While some teachers stated class teachers and principals had responsibility, others felt the larger school community had responsibility including teachers, principals, SNAs, Department of Education, NEPs and students themselves. Most teachers also referenced parents and families. Responses at Time 2 were not vastly different. The majority of teachers stated that the responsibility for student mental health lies with the whole school community, as well as parents/guardians.

Teachers were asked to describe the characteristics of a One Good Teacher following the workshop. Active listening, being a good listener, was the most frequently cited characteristics. Teachers also noted the importance of being non-judgemental and fair, caring, down to earth, and open/approachable. Caring was also a frequently mentioned characteristic of a One Good Teacher.

- **Key Message:** The workshop further consolidated teachers' understanding that the whole school community and parents/guardians have responsibility for student mental health, and highlighted the characteristics of One Good Teacher for participants.

Self-care and Boundaries

At Time 1, teachers noted they looked after their own self-care needs and mental health in a variety of ways. The activities cited were similar for both survey times. Most teachers acknowledged the importance of talking to others and seeking support from family or friends. Most engaged in mindfulness, meditation and exercise activities. Other activities included music, reading, relaxing or "take time out", and spirituality. Responses at Time 2 also reflected teachers' acknowledgement of their boundaries and professional parameters. As one teacher noted, they "can't solve the problems of the world". Teachers understood the importance of working within their "scope" and knowing their limits.

This was further reflected in teachers' responses about what they learned from the workshop about the parameters of their role in supporting student mental health. Respondents acknowledged the importance of knowing their boundaries and to look after their own mental health. Some respondents also indicated that they should refer on when a child's needs is beyond their scope of practice.

- **Key Message:** While teachers were able to cite ways in which they looked after their own self-care needs prior to the workshop, Time 2 responses indicated that teachers were now aware of the importance of working within their professional boundaries and recognising the scope and limits of their role when supporting student mental health.

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Session Feedback

The feedback provided by 39 teachers following the workshop was extremely positive. Overall, 97.5% found the workshop to be enjoyable or very enjoyable ($n = 38$). Only one teacher (2.5%) answered that they found it ok. All participants reported that the workshop was well or very well facilitated, that the content will probably or definitely be useful to them in their work, and that they understood most or all of the material covered. The facilitation, content and materials were further praised in the open-ended responses.

The most useful aspects of the workshop as noted by respondents were the facilitators themselves, the content of the workshop, the resources provided, working with other teachers, and the skills and learning gained from the workshop. In terms of the learning, self-care, boundaries and limitations of teachers, and the REAL technique were highlighted by multiple respondents. Additional comments further highlighted the one criticism teachers had, that the workshop was held on a Saturday in December. Respondents suggested that the workshop be held on a school day. One teacher also suggested a summer course, feeling that people would be interested in taking part, and another suggested including more background research in the workshop.

- **Key Message:** The feedback from teachers about the workshop facilitation, content and learning was extremely positive, with the only prominent criticism being the day and month on which the workshop was held.

Conclusion

Teachers attending the MHAI for Primary Schools training reported relatively high levels of knowledge and awareness of youth mental health, and confidence in supporting students, prior to engaging in the workshop. The workshop reinforced these factors, particularly confidence in supporting students with mental health difficulties. Furthermore, teachers demonstrated a good understanding of youth mental health and who has responsibility for student mental health, following the workshop. The most beneficial aspect of the learning gained from the workshop related to teachers' own role in supporting student mental health, and the parameters of that role. The workshop highlighted for teachers that there are limits to their role, and that it is beneficial for teachers' own self-care needs to acknowledge these boundaries and seek further support for students when needed.

The main criticism of the workshop related to the day it was held, and that it was in December. Teachers noted they would prefer to attend the training on a school day with substitution arranged in a different month. Aside from this, teachers were greatly satisfied with the workshop, facilitators, content and resources, and learning gained.

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Appendix A: Time 1 Questionnaire

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS INITIATIVE FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS

T4T EVALUATION

TIME 1: PRE QUESTIONNAIRE

Consent

Thank you for completing this evaluation form. The anonymous information you provide on this form will be used in an evaluation report about the training for trainers process of the MHAi initiative for primary schools. Please tick if you give permission for this information to be used in this report.

What is your gender? Male Female Other, please state _____

How long have you been teaching?

Less than 1 year 1-2 years 3-5 years 6-10 years
 11-15 years 16-20 years More than 20 years

What school year(s) do you mainly work with? (Tick all that apply)

Junior Infants Senior Infants 1st Class 2nd Class
 3rd Class 4th Class 5th Class 6th Class

In what county is your school located? _____

Have you attended any youth mental health training before? Yes No

Have you had any experience of working with students with mental health difficulties?

Yes No If so, please describe briefly:

Can you define in your own words what mental health is?

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Please tick to indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I know what to look out for as signs that a student is experiencing mental health difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know what to do if a student is experiencing mental health difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am aware of the supports available within the school context for students experiencing mental health difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Who do you think has responsibility for the mental health of students in primary schools?

How confident do you feel in:

	Extremely	Quite a bit	Moderately	A little bit	Not at all
Supporting students with mental health difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accessing school supports for students with mental health difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Promoting mental health activities in your school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

List two ways, if any, that teachers can support student mental health:

1.

2.

List two signs that a student may be struggling with their mental health:

1.

2.

List three ways in which you look after your own self-care needs and mental health:

1.

2.

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3.

Many thanks for taking part in this evaluation.

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Appendix B: Time 2 Questionnaire

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS INITIATIVE FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS

T4T EVALUATION

TIME 2: POST QUESTIONNAIRE

Can you define in your own words what mental health is?

Please tick to indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I know what to look out for as signs that a student is experiencing mental health difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know what to do if a student is experiencing mental health difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am aware of the supports available within the school context for students experiencing mental health difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Who do you think has responsibility for the mental health of students in primary schools?

How confident do you feel in:

	Extremely	Quite a bit	Moderately	A little bit	Not at all
Supporting students with mental health difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accessing school supports for students with mental health difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Promoting mental health activities in your school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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List two ways, if any, that teachers can support student mental health:

1. _____
2. _____

List two signs that a student may be struggling with their mental health:

1. _____
2. _____

List three characteristics of One Good Teacher:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What have you learned about the parameters of your role in supporting students' mental health, from today's workshop?

List three ways in which you look after your own self-care needs and mental health:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



Appendix C: Session Feedback form

Session Feedback

1. How **enjoyable** did you find the workshop?

Not at all enjoyable Not very enjoyable OK Enjoyable Very enjoyable

2. How well do you think the workshop was **facilitated**?

Very poorly facilitated Poorly facilitated OK Well facilitated Very well facilitated

3. Do you think the content of the workshop will be **useful** to you in your work?

Absolutely not Not likely Don't know Probably Definitely yes

4. How much of the material covered in the workshop did you **understand**?

None of it Not much of it Not sure Most of it All of it

5. What aspects of the workshop did you find most useful?

6. Any other comments or suggestions (including anything you didn't like about the workshop)?

Please complete the session feedback form.

Many thanks for taking part in this evaluation.

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