

Section 1: Exploring attitudes and feelings to change

This section of the toolkit explores young peoples' attitudes towards change and their feelings about this upcoming change to post-primary school.

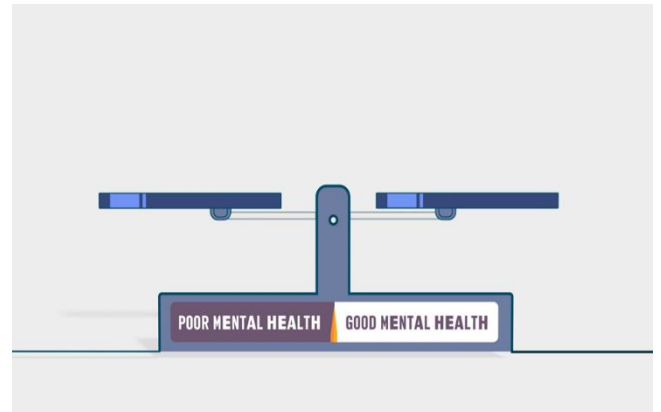
It will give them the space to explore what the change will mean for them and the feelings that might accompany this change.

What is mental health?

Mental health is something we all have. In Jigsaw, we often describe mental health as being similar to our dental health. We all have teeth and therefore we all have dental health; this is accepted as a fact of life and we don't feel shame about admitting we have dental health. It should be the same with our mental health, as every one of us has mental health.

Just as we all need to look after our dental health with regular tooth brushing and trips to the dentist, there are also things we can do to look after our mental health. Section 3 explores strategies that young people can use to look after their mental health, including five simple things they can do every day, known as the 5-a-day for mental health. Another way of looking after our mental health is by talking and reaching out for support when we need it. Section 4 will support young people to identify supports in their lives and encourage them to access support if they need it.

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Over the course of our lives our mental health fluctuates. In Jigsaw, we like to describe our mental health as existing on a scale. There's good mental health on one end of the scale and poor mental health on the other end of the scale.

Where we are on the scale can change depending on what's going on in our lives. For young people, this may mean that their mental health and wellbeing can change depending on what's going on with friends, family or school at that time.

Exploring attitudes to change

We all experience changes throughout our lives. It is important that we learn strategies and ways to cope with these changes. Being flexible and able to adapt to the challenges and changes that life brings is a useful skill, which can help promote and support our mental health and wellbeing.

Young people may need support developing some of these coping skills. Exploring attitudes to change and developing young people's self-awareness can be useful starting points. Being aware

of our feelings and being able to identify them can be a useful step in dealing with difficult emotions that we all experience from time to time.

Changes and uncertainty can have an effect on our mental health and wellbeing, particularly if a young person finds that they have a tough time dealing with this change.

Everyone experiences change in different ways?

We will all experience change in different ways. For some, they may transition to post-primary school and experience few challenges. They may experience excitement and joy at the thought of starting a new school and meeting new friends.

For others, this change to post-primary school can seem more daunting and may bring with it certain challenges which can cause difficult emotions including worry, stress or sadness. Most young people will likely experience all of these emotions to varying degrees as they navigate this change.

What can I do in my role as a teacher?

As young people prepare for this change, some may appear more outwardly distressed than others. Some will be more likely to talk about their feelings and others will bottle up how they feel. However, it is likely that all young people will spend time wondering about the

changes that lie ahead of them as they leave primary school.

Allowing young people to have space to reflect on their feelings about this change and normalising conversations about how they are feeling can support them with this transition.

Let young people know they are not alone – there are others who will be feeling the same way as them. There will be lots of other young people in the same boat as them starting their new schools.

When speaking about feelings and emotions in the classroom attitudes to change

Try to do more of:

- Taking a neutral stance on their feelings – what might worry some young people, may fill another with excitement. You can do this by asking open questions such as ‘How do you feel about making new friends?’ rather than ‘Are you nervous about meeting new friends?’
- Accepting, acknowledging and normalising the variety of emotions young people may be experiencing

Try to do less of:

- Expecting young people to feel a certain way about this change
- Assuming that just because a student does not outwardly appear worried or daunted, that this change is not daunting for them

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Active listening

Changes can bring up a range of feelings, sometimes all at once. It's important to acknowledge whatever young people are experiencing; be it excitement, fear, worry, confusion or curiosity. Let them know it's ok to feel any or all of these things.

You can support young people to feel more at ease by actively listening while having an open conversation about their thoughts and feelings.

Quick tips

- Try reflecting back what has been said, summarising and paraphrasing what the young person has told you. Statements like "I hear you, you're scared about how you'll manage with more homework" or "I can see that you're worried about meeting new people"
- Let them finish speaking before you respond and do not rush to

provide solutions or advice unless they ask for it. Often, young people just want their worries to be heard

- Use a positive tone of voice. It may be difficult for the young person to share these worries with you
- Let them know you're listening using your body language – nodding your head and maintaining eye contact
- Let them know you're listening using your voice – ask clarifying questions. If they have been speaking for a long time, saying 'yes' or 'hmm' lets the person know you're still engaged

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