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Thursday, 20 December 2018

Dear parents/guardians,

As you know, we are all saddened by recent tragic events in our community. We are conscious that many people have been affected by the recent tragic deaths of two young people who were post-primary school students in Wexford town. This letter, which has been drafted in consultation with the psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the HSE Suicide Resource Office, is being sent by each post-primary school in Wexford to the parents of all students. It aims to give you an update on what schools have done to date and provides advice on how best you can support your children, in particular over the Christmas period.

Over the past few weeks, schools have been following the best practice guidelines as issued by NEPS. Teachers in each of our schools have been offering support to students where needed. Where young people have been upset or distressed, we have been encouraging them to talk to each other, to members of staff or to their parents. We have support systems in place to help us to identify and assist any students who are experiencing significant difficulty. We have made contact with parents where we feel it is necessary. For those who are not comfortable talking directly to someone in the school setting, we have given advice and information about appropriate helplines where they can connect with someone in order to seek advice and support. We have encouraged young people to attend class as much as possible as the advice is that some routine is important in helping young people cope in these difficult times.

While the majority of our young people will not need counselling support, it is important that they have opportunities to talk to people whom they know and trust. We continue to encourage you as parents/guardians to create opportunities for your children to talk about any worries or concerns which they may have. Remember, often times when young people are upset or troubled, they just want someone to listen without judging or offering advice. Just knowing that they have someone to listen to them and to acknowledge what they are saying can be hugely supportive. As already mentioned, best practice is that it helps to continue with normal routines as far as possible and we are encouraging young people to continue doing some of the normal activities which they enjoy. Eating healthily, getting regular sleep and engaging in physical exercise are really important at this time. It is also really important to encourage young people to spend time engaging in activities with friends and family. It is good for them to take time out to do something fun with friends and family

such as playing sport, listening to music, going to the cinema, going for a walk, etc. When stress levels are high, there may be a temptation for older students to try to numb the feelings perhaps with alcohol or drugs. This is something you need to monitor carefully as we all know that it simply complicates matters rather than bringing relief.

As schools, our primary focus has to be on the education of our students. Over the coming months, the staff in our schools are committed to looking at ways in which we can continue to promote the mental health and wellbeing of our young people. We want to assure you that schools will continue, as best we can, to support you as parents/guardians as you support your children. We also look to you as parents/guardians, to the HSE and other mental health services to work with us in this vital task. While schools have a role to play in suicide prevention, we also have to be mindful of the advice and guidelines from NEPS and the HSE Regional Suicide Resource Office that we continue our current focus on programmes that promote mental health and wellbeing.

If you have concerns about your son or daughter and if you think that they are in distress, reassure them that help, support and advice is available. In the first instance, you should contact your GP. If it is a weekend or out of hours and you cannot contact your family GP, you should call CAREDOC on 1850 334 999. In an emergency, you can also go to the Emergency Department in Wexford General Hospital.

You can also call:

- Samaritans on Freephone 116 123; email jo@samaritans.ie or text 087 2609090
- Pieta House (Wexford) 053-9122787; 24 Hour Suicide Helpline 1800 247 247 or text 51444

Other useful websites include:

www.yourmentalhealth.ie
www.spunout.ie or www.reachout.com or www.reachout.com/parents

With best wishes to you and your families at this Christmas time,

Yours sincerely,

Michael McMahon,
Coláiste Eamonn Rís

Billy O'Shea
Loreto Secondary School

William Ryan
Presentation Secondary School

Eimear Ryan
Selskar College

Robert O'Callaghan
St. Peter's College