



# **YOUNG PERSONS' SUPPORT PROGRAMME**

A programme for young people living  
with substance misuse in the home



# FOREWORD

## BY THE NATIONAL FAMILY SUPPORT NETWORK

Dear Reader,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for taking the time to read this resource designed to support young people living with substance misuse in the home.

For many years now the National Family Support Network (NFSN) has been supporting adult family members living with substance misuse and we are pleased to be able to present this programme specifically designed to meet the needs of young people under the age of 18 that are living with a relative's addiction.

Initially the need for an under 18's sibling support programme was identified through research and policy but perhaps most importantly through the informal networks within the NFSN. Many parents were coming to us saying that their non-drug using children had suffered as a result of their brother or sisters drug use. When parents thought back to the years they spent worrying about their drug using child they regretted the lack of time and attention they paid to their non-drug using children during that time. This lack of time and attention led to feelings of guilt, anger, resentment, hurt and regret on the part of both parents and their drug using and non-drug using children.

Some areas, with the support of the NFSN, were running locally developed programmes specifically designed for young people affected by a relative's addiction. However the need was identified for an evidence based programme that could be implemented throughout the country.

With the support of Quality Matters we secured funding for this programme through Tusla, Electric Ireland and the Community Foundation of Ireland. We then set up an advisory group to support the programme development. Members of this advisory group included representatives from the Child and Family Agency, Foróige and representatives from local community youth groups and the HSE.

After some research had been conducted the NFSN decided to work within the structure of the American Sibshop model developed by Don Meyers. This is a programme that has been shown to be effective when working with siblings who have a brother or sister with

an intellectual and/or physical disability; we were then able to adapt aspects of this programme to an Irish addiction context.

At the early stages of this development we came to realise by targeting siblings we were omitting a large target group, namely children living with parental substance misuse, it was then agreed by the advisory group that the sibling support programme would also cater to children living with parental substance misuse. This was the start of the Young Persons Support Programme.

The Young Persons' Support Programme is a ten module activity based programme that supports the development of coping skills in young people living with problem drug or alcohol use in their homes. The resource is the result of two years of research, piloting and evaluation of this innovative programme. I am delighted to say this programme is now available to all Youth Projects, Drug Projects and Family Resource Centres.

We are very grateful to and would like to thank Aoife Dermody and Caroline Gardner of Quality Matters who in conjunction with the National Family Support Network developed this programme, the young people and facilitators who piloted the programme and played a vital role in the evaluation process.

I would like to extend our thanks to the project advisory group who were involved in the development, delivery and evaluation of the pilot programme including: Linda Creamer (Child and Family Agency), Debbie Gary (Foróige), Ann Campbell (Yoda), Sineád Leydon (Blakestown Mountview Youth Initiative, Fergus McCabe (North Inner City Youth Services), Jimmy Norman (Ciall Project, Addiction Response Crumlin), Siobhan Maher and Robert Browne (National Family Support Network).

We hope that this programme is a helpful resource that Youth Projects, Drug Projects and Family Resource Centres can use to reach out and support this vulnerable yet resilient group of young people.



Best Wishes,  
**Sadie Grace, Co-ordinator,  
National Family Support  
Network**

*Sadie Grace*

# INTRODUCTION TO THE PROGRAMME

## BACKGROUND TO THE PROGRAMME

This programme was developed as a result of contacts made by a number of groups across Ireland working with families of people with problem drug or alcohol use, to the National Family Support Network. They identified a need for targeted support for young people living with problem substance use. While a number of groups were working with these young people, it was felt that a more formal and structured approach to supporting them would be helpful.

This Young Persons' Support Programme is delivered in 1.5 hour sessions over ten weeks through a variety of methods including group discussion, individual reflection, role-play, creative play, arts and crafts, and games. It was developed as a pilot by the National Family Support Network in conjunction with research charity Quality Matters, using an evidence base and drawing on established models used with other groups. The different approaches and models that fed into the programme are detailed in the literature review<sup>1</sup>.

This introductory chapter gives a background and outline to the whole programme, and includes some facilitators' tips for running the programme, as well as detailed overview of each module.

## PROGRAMME RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES

Children living with problem substance users are likely to experience a number of unique challenges and risks as a result of living with problem substance use in the family. These challenges include stress, mental health problems, behavioral problems such as aggression and disobedience, problems in school and physical health problems. As well as this, young people living with familial substance misuse are also more likely to become problem substance users themselves.

There are a number of factors that can help a young person build resilience and prevent the development of serious problems, or help them to cope with stressors in their family lives. A comprehensive report on children and families in Ireland recommended that to help children cope with stress in their families, organisations should provide child focused programmes which develop children's skills for building relationships, regulating their emotions, and coping with stress (15). Research has shown that a number of approaches can help a young person develop better coping skills: providing targeted, specific programmes that address the particular risks the young person is facing; fostering positive peer environments and social supports; developing resilience and coping skills in young people; using evidence-based approaches such as emotional intelligence and mindfulness, and promoting a positive and supportive relationship with adults, including mentors or support workers.

The aim of the Young Persons' Support Programme is to support young people to develop improved awareness and understanding of the challenges they face and positive ways to cope with them, and to teach skills for resilience and coping, in a supportive and non-judgemental environment.

<sup>1</sup> A comprehensive literature review, which details existing knowledge on young people living with familial substance misuse and all models and approaches used in this programme, is available on request from the National Family Support Network

## EVIDENCE AND GOVERNANCE

The programme has drawn on a number of approaches and resources:

APPROACH	DETAIL	RESOURCE
SibShop	Programme for supporting siblings of people with disabilities	<a href="http://www.siblingsupport.org/sibshops">http://www.siblingsupport.org/sibshops</a>
Cognitive behavioural therapy: Pesky Gnats	A range of effective psychological interventions for over-coming emotional and behavioural difficulties	<a href="http://www.peskygnats.com">www.peskygnats.com</a>
Emotional intelligence	An approach which supports recognition, understanding and regulation of emotions	Hughes, M., Patterson, L Bonita, & Bradford Terrell, j. Emotional Intelligence in Action. Wiley: San Francisco; 2005
Mindfulness	Mindfulness refers to the practice of being fully-present and attentive in body and mind, as opposed to being absent-minded. There is increasing evidence linking mindfulness practice to a number of mental and physical health benefits.	<a href="http://mindfulnessinschools.org/">http://mindfulnessinschools.org/</a>

A comprehensive literature review was developed to inform programme approach, structure and content. Modules were developed, and were reviewed by the steering group over a number of months. The steering comprised of people with expertise in the areas of youth work, family support and drug and alcohol services<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Sadie Grace, Siobhán Maher and Rob Browne, National Family Support Network; Sinéad Leydon, Blakestown Mountview Youth Initiative, Fergus McCable, HSE Neighbourhood Youth Project; Ann Campbell, HSE Youth Drug and Alcohol Service; Debbie Garry, Foróige; Jimmy Norman, Addiction Response Crumlin

## FACILITATOR REQUIREMENTS

Facilitators for this programme should be employed in a client facing social or community support service and be supported by their organisation to run this group. Facilitators should have experience in group facilitation, working with children and young people, working with individuals or families affected by problem substance use. Facilitators should be Garda Vetted and have recent training in Child Protection.

## PARTICIPANT REQUIREMENTS

Participants for this programme should be young people aged 11 - 17 who are living with familial problematic drug or alcohol use. The programme exercises may be adapted to suit younger or older groups as appropriate. Participants can be recruited through existing family support programmes, schools, advertising in libraries or other public areas.

## STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAMME

The sessions are titled as follows:

- **Session 1:** Getting to Know Each Other
- **Session 2:** My Future
- **Session 3:** Managing Stress
- **Session 4:** Communication and Conflict
- **Session 5:** Assertiveness and Saying No
- **Session 6:** Drugs and Alcohol
- **Session 7:** Group Outing
- **Session 8:** Coping Skills
- **Session 9:** Straight Thinking
- **Session 10:** What We Have Learned

## THE ORDER OF THE SESSIONS

In the first three sessions, there is a focus on establishing trust between facilitators and young people, and among participants in the group (session one). There is also a focus in the early part of the programme on the young people's strengths, and establishing a positive and proactive environment (session two). Providing a general overview of stress and some basic stress management skills establishes the primary focus of the programme by the third session.

The middle part of the programme becomes more focussed on communication, assertiveness and the issue of drugs and alcohol.

The final section of the programme provides the young people to further develop coping skills, and skills in managing negative thinking. There is also an opportunity to engage in pro-social activities with their fellow participants, and to reflect on learning on the programme.

## DURATION OF SESSIONS AND PROGRAMME

The general guide is that sessions should last for about two hours, including warm ups and wind downs. There is material for between 1 hour and 1 hour and twenty minutes for most sessions. Prior to evaluation, there had been two hours of material with specific warm up and wind down exercises, however facilitators and participants said that they need some time that was less structured for the group so this is reflected in the modules. The ten-week duration for the programme was chosen because the key areas of coping skills, stress management, shared learning, social opportunities could all be achieved in this time period.

# PROGRAMME CONTENT

The sessions cover the following topics:

#	TITLE	OBJECTIVES
1	<b>Getting to Know Each Other and Sharing our Stories</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To get to know each other</li> <li>To discuss what brings everyone together in this group</li> <li>To look at some of the things that are hard about having a sibling in addiction</li> <li>To set out what the group is about and how we will work together</li> </ul>
2	<b>My Future</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For participants to discuss their dreams and goals</li> <li>To learn more about their own talents and skills</li> <li>To review the hurdles that can stop us reaching our goals we how to manage these</li> </ul>
3	<b>Managing Stress</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To learn what stress is and how it feels for us</li> <li>To develop some new ways of helping ourselves when we feel stressed</li> </ul>
4	<b>Communication and Conflict</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To learn about how to be a better communicator when we're not happy</li> <li>To learn how to manage conflict in a positive way that gets the best results</li> </ul>
5	<b>Assertiveness and Saying No</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To be able to recognise when we have trouble saying no</li> <li>To practice saying no to situation in a way which does not upset others – 'this is being assertive'</li> </ul>
6	<b>Drugs &amp; Alcohol</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To understand drug and alcohol use and explode some myths about it</li> <li>To explore when and how drug or alcohol use becomes a problem for some people and their families</li> </ul>
7	<b>Group Outing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To provide an opportunity for the participants to have a good time and build relationships from a different perspective</li> <li>To support the group to reflect on each other's talents and qualities</li> </ul>
6	<b>Coping Better</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To be able to name emotions and discuss how everyone responds differently to different situations</li> <li>To be able to identify when we need some help and how asking can be hard</li> <li>Everyone can identify what kind of help they works for them and how to get it</li> <li>How to talk to with friends who are depressed, anxious or upset</li> </ul>
9	<b>Straight Thinking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To understand and respond to negative thinking patterns</li> </ul>
10	<b>What We Have Learned</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To recap on what has been learned over the last 10 weeks</li> <li>To reflect on the qualities of individuals within the group and show appreciation for these</li> <li>To celebrate the achievements of the group</li> </ul>

## EVALUATION

An evaluation of three pilot programmes was undertaken in 2015. It focussed on both outcomes for the young people and the process of programme delivery. It included

- 1 Outcome Evaluation:** Pre and post assessment of youth participants to measure each participant's perception of stress, self-esteem, coping skills and other identified qualities, using validated tools.
- 2 Process Evaluation:** Surveys and interviews with participants and facilitators to evaluate programme content and delivery.

A number of changes were made to the process and content, as a result of suggestions by facilitators in the pilot sites. To measure outcomes for the young people, pre and post data were collected from 16 young people across three sites. The aim was to see the difference in a number of key areas. Items from four tools were used:

**CERQ:** The Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ) is a multidimensional questionnaire constructed in order to identify the cognitive emotion regulation strategies (or cognitive coping strategies) someone uses after having experienced negative events or situations<sup>3</sup>. The results indicated statistically significant differences in this domain with an increased mean of 12.5 to 15.5%. An increased mean indicates a positive change over time. The reason that this is very important in this instance is that there was enough change, for enough young people, that it was unlikely that this was a coincidence. At the first point, a higher proportion of children reporting really low scores in this area, but when it got to the second point, there was an increase in children reporting high scores.

**The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS):** this is the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring the perception of stress. It is a measure of the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful. Items were designed to assess how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded respondents find their lives to be. The scale also includes a number of direct queries about current levels of experienced stress. Moreover, the questions are of a general nature and hence are relatively free of content specific to any sub-population group. The questions in the PSS ask about feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, respondents are asked how often they felt a certain way<sup>4</sup>. In this domain, there was a change, which was almost statistically significant. It is likely that if there data was collected on just a few more young people that we would have seen a similar statistical significance as in Domain A. Again, in this domain, at the 'pre' stage, a higher number of children had low scores, however at time point 2, we noticed that some children were moving into much higher scores (higher scores means they appraise situations as less stressful than they would have previously). Interestingly, the scores at the first point were already quite high, which is why there may be less statistical significance and less change observed.

While it is hopeful that these important changes occurred simply because the young people participated in the programme, there may be other potential explanations for the changes in the programme including:

- Just being around other people in the same situation
- Being around 'one good adult'<sup>5</sup> and the changes that can occur from this
- The changes may have happened regardless at that time in the children's lives

We also measured changes using the UCLA Loneliness Scale and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale, but did not notice statistically significant changes here. There are a number of reasons why change may not have been observed in some areas which include:

- The programme did not adequately support these outcomes
- The programme was run over a short time, which may not have been enough time to support these changes
- There were not enough pre and post data collected to record change

3 <http://www.socialsciences.leiden.edu/psychology/organisation/clinical/research/instruments/cognitive-emotion-regulation-questionnaire-cerq.html>

4 <http://www.mindgarden.com/132-perceived-stress-scale>

5 According to the My World Survey, the presence of One Good Adult in a young person's life has a positive influence on their mental health <https://www.headstrong.ie/headstrong-support-advocacy/one-good-adult/>

# INTRODUCTION FOR FACILITATORS

## USING THIS RESOURCE AND RUNNING THE COURSE

This course is designed to be delivered in 1-1.5 hour sessions over ten weeks. There is a module each per session, with aims, materials needed, suggested exercises and times. The resources, exercise sheets or templates for each module are contained in the relevant module section, and in some cases alternative exercises are available in the appendix section of this resource.

The course is designed to be delivered by two facilitators: roles and responsibilities for various tasks should be agreed in advance by facilitators to avoid confusion and ensure capacity to respond to difficult issues arising (e.g. agreeing in advance who should leave the room with a young person if they need intervention or support).

## TRICKLE IN WARM UP CLOSING EXERCISES

In this introductory section of the manual, there are a selection of exercises that can be used at the beginning and end of each session. In each session module descriptor, there is a list of suggested exercises to be used in that session, however, facilitators are welcome to use whatever they feel is useful for their particular group of young people, in order to get them ready for the session, and get the ready to leave again at the end.

## TIMING AND CHANGES TO THE COURSE STRUCTURE

This course is designed for delivery over ten 1 – 1.5 hour sessions. This may be changed at the discretion of the provider, although the core exercises should be followed in order to achieve the stated objectives of the session.

## ENCOURAGING POSITIVE GROUP DYNAMICS AND THE ROLE OF TRICKLE-IN EXERCISES

Experienced facilitators will know that starting a group at an agreed time can be difficult, and when participants have very varied arrival times this can cause stress and tension in the group. It is a reality that for a variety of personal or other reasons some participants will not attend the group at the agreed starting time.

Trickle-in exercises are exercises run at the beginning of a group. They are designed to ensure that those who arrive first are engaged and active from the start (instead of having to sit around, wait and make polite conversation) and can be joined by others as they arrive too. In order for this programme to be successful for those who attend it, participants must from the first minute of the first session feel welcomed and must not feel judged.

In order to minimize the risk of stress and to promote positive group dynamics each session begins with a trickle-in exercise. The facilitators may use this, or they may adopt a more informal approach with the same objectives of minimizing anxiety, stress and tension at the beginning of the group.

# RISK MANAGEMENT

## MANAGING DISCLOSURES

It is possible that a young person may make a disclosure of abuse regarding themselves or another member of their family. Before beginning any group, the service should have the following in place:

- A child protection policy which outlines how the organisation manages disclosure of child protection issues.
- A nominated child protection officer who is available to be contacted at the times of the course.
- Staff who are Garda Vetted and trained in managing child protection issues and issues relating to disclosure of self-harm or suicide.

If the young people participating are not already familiar with the organisation's policy on this issue, it may be useful in the first session to explain it in clear in simple terms.

## MENTAL HEALTH, COPING, SELF-HARM & SUICIDE

This programme contains frequent discussions and exercise that relate to coping mechanisms, stress and similar topics. These exercises may create a space where young people discuss serious mental health concerns, self-harm, suicide etc. Ensure that facilitators are familiar with their organisation's policy regarding disclosure of self-harm, and are ready to respond to any challenging situations around this issue should they arise.

## LIMITS OF THE FACILITATOR AND REFERRING ON

The main focus of this group is around issues that are deeply personal in nature and may be a source of considerable distress or upset for participants. It is important that facilitators recognise the limits of their role and that of the group in relation to these issues. This group focuses on personal development and development of resilience and coping skills in the face of a shared challenge. It is not a therapeutic space and where it is clear that more intensive supports around this issue are needed for the young person, the facilitators should clarify the following prior to starting any course:

- If a young person is distressed on a specific issues, how will we provide quick appropriately trained 1-2-1 support.
- If a young person wants counselling how can we access this?

## TIPS FOR DOING MINDFULNESS EXERCISES<sup>6</sup>

Mindfulness means paying attention, on purpose and without judgment, to whatever you are experiencing in the present moment (BC Mental Health and Addiction Services, 2011).

Mindfulness exercises are included in a number of sessions in this programme. The purpose of these exercises is to provide a dedicated time for relaxation, help the young people to increase their awareness of their feelings and experiences, and to help reduce stress. Some recorded benefits include reduced stress levels, enhanced concentration and problem-solving, increased self-awareness, greater acceptance of thoughts and feelings without self-judgment and greater enjoyment of life (Halliwell, 2009).

Some facilitators will be comfortable with the idea of mindfulness, others less so. Please consider the following points:

- Be open to the benefits of mindfulness and ensure you are familiar with some techniques before beginning.
- Read through activities in advance to understand their purpose and flow.
- Consider making it a 'special time', and if there are candles, mats or cushions that can help to create a peaceful atmosphere, consider using these.
- If participants are uncomfortable with the exercises, that is ok and not unusual. Do not reject their negative feelings... they live in an over-stimulated society and may not be used to silence or quiet.
- Explain to participants that with practice, they may look forward to and come to appreciate this time of quiet, calm and reflection.

## TIPS FOR CBT

Session 9 is a session that looks at challenging negative thinking patterns. It draws on the work of Dr. Gary O'Reilly of UCD who has developed specialised cognitive behavioural therapy resources for young people.

It is recommended that facilitators take time to refresh their knowledge of this area. A useful starting point may be the resource from which session 9 was drawn available at [www.peskygnats.com](http://www.peskygnats.com).

<sup>6</sup> These tips are adapted from the facilitators notes from Foróige's Be Healthy, Be Happy Programme



National Family Support Network  
5 Gardiner Row, Dublin 1

Phone: 01 -898 0148

Email: [info@fsn.ie](mailto:info@fsn.ie)

Website: [www.fsn.ie](http://www.fsn.ie)

**THANKS**

To the funding agencies who have supported the development of this resource.

