

USING TESTED PROGRAMMES FOR SECONDARY PSHE

Richard Layard, John Coleman and Dan Hale

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AIM

Schools are about character and not only about competence. We want young people to learn how to live in ways which are satisfying for them and helpful to others. These “skills for life” include the ability to

- understand and manage your own emotions
- understand and help others
- develop loving sexual relationships
- become a responsible and effective parent
- understand mental illness
- avoid unhealthy behaviours.

Most of these skills are included in the existing national curriculum for Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE). The problem is how to teach them. The previous government’s SEAL programme is an attempt to point teachers in the right direction. But a recent scientific evaluation of secondary SEAL concludes that “it failed to impact significantly upon pupils’ social and emotional skills, general mental health difficulties, pro-social behaviour or behaviour problems”.¹ They conclude that the failure is due to not using a fully evidence-based approach, where well-defined and highly structured programmes have been scientifically evaluated and teachers trained to use them.

Such an approach is quite feasible. There are hundreds of programmes world-wide which address the skills we are concerned with, and which have been scientifically evaluated. Some were found to be ineffective (which is common), but others made a real difference to emotional wellbeing, behaviour and academic performance. So in this paper we show how secondary PSHE could be taught using only programmes which have been shown to be effective.

Each individual programme involves less than 20 hours, but the combined package will involve 120 hours. This could conveniently be taught over 4 years (Years 7, 8, 9 and 10), with 30 hours a year taught within a regular weekly PSHE slot. Our hope is that some schools would wish to pilot this package of programmes. We would arrange access to the programmes and the brief training of teachers to use them.

Each of the programmes has been evaluated on its own and on the basis of those evaluations, we would expect the package to lead **on average** to

- lower teenage depression and anxiety
- less bullying and better relationships at school
- less premature, unprotected sex
- less use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco and less obesity
- better academic achievement.

However it would be important to evaluate how the programmes actually worked when put together into a single package. So we would also conduct a questionnaire-based assessment of the impact of the package. If this were favourable we would expect the experience of the pilot schools to be copied rapidly across the country.

CONTENTS OF THE PACKAGE

The package aims to cover all the standard topics listed in the national curriculum for Personal Wellbeing within PSHE. For our purpose, we gather these topics into three groups

- emotional and social wellbeing
- sex and relationships
- healthy lifestyle (including drugs, alcohol, tobacco and eating).

The following table shows how we propose covering these topics, using 10 different tailor-made programmes of proven effectiveness (with their hours in brackets). The later programmes include elements of overlap and reinforcement of themes already introduced, but applied in a different context in a way that is appropriate at that age. This complementarity is an advantage because it brings out the key point – that how you behave will ultimately reflect what kind of person you want to be. So the central task is to develop a wholesome idea in every child about who they want to be. This is a central theme in every programme but its implications are developed in each programme in different, interesting and challenging ways. Whenever possible, the programme begins with “dos” rather than “don’ts”, because this has a far better chance of reducing undesirable behaviour.²

In the table the names in the boxes are the programmes, and Annex 1 gives a description of each of them and evidence of their effectiveness. In each year the courses on the right side of the table would follow those on the left. We believe that, taken together,

	Emotional and social wellbeing	Sex and relationships education	Healthy living
Year 7	The UK Resilience programme (18)	Life skills training (12)	
Year 8		Parents Under Construction (14)	Media Ready (15)
Year 9	Friends for Life (9) Science of Mental Illness (5)	Safer choices (10)	SHAHRP (6)
Year 10	Mood Gym (4)	Relationship smarts (13) Safer choices (10)	SHAHRP (4)

these programmes will have a major impact on the young people exposed to them – unlike, quite possibly, much of what now goes on in PSHE.

The Centre for Economic Performance has considerable experience of this type of work, having successfully introduced into England the Resilience Programme, developed by Martin Seligman, the father of positive psychology at the University of Pennsylvania. This is now used in 60 schools in England. Some 500 teachers have been trained to use the programme (5-10 days training) and 6,000 11-year olds are now benefitting from the programme. Our evaluation shows that on average young people who take the programme (especially those at greatest risk) have shown much reduced depression and better school attendance and academic performance.³ We have also found that adapting materials first developed in the U.S. is a relatively minor problem.

LOGISTICS

Our aim would be to make the whole project as easy as possible for the schools. So we would organise access to the materials and the training for the teachers. The plan would be to focus on the cohort of young people beginning Year 7 in September 2011 (or 2012), and have them taken through this curriculum over the following four years. Ideally only half the children in the cohort in each school would take the programme, so that we could compare their progress with that of the other children.

Before the beginning of each year we would train the teachers on the programmes to be used in the following year. This could involve the following number of days training and estimated costs of training per school (see also Annex 2)

Year 7	8 days	£5,700
Year 8	3 days	£1,700
Year 9	3 ½ days	£2,100
Year 10	3 days	£1,500

There is also the issue of the licensing costs of using some of these programmes. It seems likely that any organisation funding activity on this scale would negotiate reductions in the standard stated charges. But, for the record, these are currently per school. (See also Annex 3.)

Year 7	£400
Year 8	£500
Year 9	£500
Year 10	£300

There is one important final issue of logistics. These programmes only work well if they are done in groups of 15, rather than 30 young people.

CONCLUSION

There is clear evidence that young people are more disturbed than they were forty years ago.⁴ They are subject to major pressures, and everyone of good will would wish to see them helped. But many forms of help seem to have little effect and may be unjustified in an over-crowded timetable. But the issue is too important to be left there. For evidence-based programmes of help do exist. It is in the interest of schools to use them for sufficient hours to make a real difference. We very much hope some schools will rise to the challenge.

ANNEX 1

The programmes

YEAR 7

- **The Resilience Programme** (18 hours)

This aims to help young people understand their own emotions and to develop the tools to manage them. It helps them interpret better the attitudes of others and to become more optimistic and resilient. The programme has been scientifically evaluated in 18 schools in the U.S., Australia and China and found on average to reduce depression by .1 to .2 standard deviations.⁵ It is now being evaluated in 22 English schools, and shows significant effects on depression, attendance and academic attainment.⁶

- **Life Skills Training** (12 hours)

This addresses not only substance abuse but also school violence and bullying, using a common set of skills and values. Students are taught skills for problem-solving and decision-making, including understanding and resisting media influences, effective communication, managing anxiety and stressful situations, relationship skills and self-assertion. The programme also delivers specific information about the prevalence and danger of substance abuse and violence. The programme has demonstrated effectiveness in reducing violence, bullying and aggression, by around .35 standard deviations.⁷ And substance use by .1 and .2 standard deviations.⁸ The programme was developed in the U.S. by Gilbert Botvin.

YEAR 8

- **Parents Under Construction** (14 hours)

This programme approaches sex through the responsibilities of being a parent. It begins with child development, a subject of great interest to 12-year olds, and how positive mental health can be fostered from a young age. The next unit focuses on nurturing self-esteem in children and the influence that parents have on its development. The third unit focuses on the skills needed to raise children effectively, including different parenting and disciplinary techniques and communication skills. The last unit is on how to solve problems and get help. Teaching students about parenting is expected to have an impact on parenting skills in the future and, more immediately, increase empathy. The programme has significant effects for parenting knowledge and attitudes towards discipline and parenting practices.⁹

- **Media Ready** (15 hours)

This approaches healthy living through a scrutiny of the messages from the media. It consists of two programmes:

- (1) On body image, weight and exercise (from Australia)
- (2) On alcohol and tobacco (from the U.S.)

- (1) The first programme aims to develop a healthy sense of identity, physical self-concept and body shape. This has important implications for the establishment of healthy eating behaviours and physical exercise, as well as the prevention of eating disorders. A key aim is improved media literacy skills regarding media portrayals of body-image. Students are taught to interpret these messages and gauge the extent to which they are realistic and apply to real life. This helps students understand the pressure placed on young people in regards to body image from the media and elsewhere. The programme has been found to reduce weight concerns in students, increase self-esteem and foster a feeling of efficacy in regards to constructing a positive body image, with effects of around 0.3 standard deviations.¹⁰
- (2) The second programme is designed to enhance students' ability to apply critical thinking to media messages, in general, and alcohol media messages in particular, with the specific aim of delaying or preventing the onset of underage alcohol use. Students are taught to understand the purpose of media messages including who made the message and why. Additionally, techniques used in advertising are discussed and deciphered with a view to assessing the realism of media messages. The programme reduces intentions to use tobacco (by .35 standard deviations) and to use alcohol (by .25 standard deviations).¹¹

YEAR 9

- **Friends for life** (9 hours)

This revisits many of the issues in the Resilience programme but in a more adult style and with a special focus on anxiety. It helps adolescents cope with feelings of fear, worry, and depression by building resilience and self-esteem. Friends for life contains a series of activities designed to teach students the relationship between thoughts and feelings, relaxation skills, and how to cope with worries, develop positive self-regard and build positive relationships. The programme has been extensively evaluated and is demonstrably effective in reducing adolescent anxiety (by up to .35 standard deviations) and depression (.22) as well as increasing coping skills (.53).¹² It is being used widely in Scotland.

- **Science of Mental Illness** (5 hours)

This aims to increase awareness and understanding of mental illness, to reduce stigma and to increase help-seeking behaviour. Programme content is available online but requires teacher direction. The programme introduces the key mental illnesses and describes their course, effects and treatment. The programme is explicit about the biological factors contributing to serious mental illness. Activities are designed to

increase understanding of people with mental illnesses. Illnesses covered include depression, schizophrenia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Evaluation results suggest that it leads to a greatly increased knowledge of mental illness (effect size of 1.22) as well as reduced stigmatisation (.16).¹³

- **Safer Choices** (10 hours in Year 9; 10 hours in Year 10)
This programme (split between Years 9 and 10) aims to reduce sexually risky behaviour, to prevent HIV and other STDs, and pregnancy among high school students. The programme provides students with knowledge about sexual norms, STDs, pregnancy and safe sex techniques. It aims to change attitudes towards unsafe sex and promote the benefits of delaying the onset of sexual behaviour. It also teaches the skills of refusal and negotiation in sexual situations. The programme is demonstrably effective in increasing knowledge and healthy attitudes in regards to safe sexual behaviours.¹⁴ Importantly, the programme also has effects on self-reported behaviour by reducing the frequency of unsafe sexual behaviours (including unprotected sex).
- **SHAHRP** (6 hours in Year 9; 4 hours in Year 10)
This programme is targeted at alcohol and resulting harmful behaviours. It teaches students the skills necessary to identify situations in which alcohol-related risks may arise, how to avoid them and how to deal with risky situations. It includes decision-making skills, assertiveness training and alcohol-specific information. The programme has been trialled recently in Northern Ireland, with significant effects on knowledge and attitudes, including actual harm caused to self and others by drinking.¹⁵

YEAR 10

- **Mood Gym** (4 hours)
This is a totally computer-based programme that revisits the fundamental lessons on resilience developed earlier. It is designed to reduce anxiety and depression by increasing emotional awareness and skills to manage emotions effectively. These skills include identifying biased and unhelpful thought patterns and altering them to be more accurate and productive. The programme explores the effect of negative and biased thought patterns on emotions. Students are encouraged to consider situations that give rise to negative thoughts and feelings and how they can be handled effectively. Finally, the importance of relationships to emotional health is discussed as well as skills for coping with relationship breakdowns and other problems. The most recent evaluation found significant programme effects for anxiety (.2 standard deviations) and depression for males (.31 to .43).¹⁶

- **Relationship Smarts (13 hours)**

This is focussed on romantic relationships, rather than on sex as such. Initial sessions deal with students' personal identities, what they value in a relationship and the importance of maturity in relationships. This is followed by lessons about the indicators of healthy (and unhealthy) relationships, as well as strategies for establishing and developing healthy relationships. The programme also focuses on the development of communication skills. Finally, the programme deals with issues that students may face in the future such as marriage and child-rearing. An initial evaluation suggests that the programme significantly improves attitudes conducive to healthy and safe relationships and leads to more accurate and realistic beliefs about romantic relationships.¹⁷ It is not suitable until Year 10.

ANNEX 2

Training: days needed and cost per school

There are three ways of delivering training. In order of preference they are:

- 1) “Official” training sessions, organised by the programme developers
- 2) Online training sessions
- 3) “Bespoke” training sessions developed by an experienced PSHE trainer.

We propose to deliver the following. The costs per school have been calculated on the assumption of an average of three teachers per school.

Programme	Type of training	Days	Cost (£ per school)
<u>Year 7</u>			
UK Resilience Programme	Official	6	4,275
Life Skills Training	Online	2	1,435
<u>Year 8</u>			
Parents Under Construction	Bespoke	1	560
Media Ready (Body image)	Bespoke	1	560
Media Ready (Substances)	Bespoke	1	560
<u>Year 9:</u>			
Friends for Life	Official	1	800
Science of Mental Illness	Official	½	470
Safer Choices	Bespoke	1	375
SHAHRP	Official	1	470
<u>Year 10:</u>			
Mood Gym	None required	n/a	0
Relationship Smarts	Bespoke	1	560
Safer Choices	Bespoke	1	470
SHAHRP	Official	1	470

ANNEX 3

Costs of licensing per school

We assume that on average 100 students per school receive the programme. The figures of costs are maxima (see text)

	Cost (£)
<u>Year 7</u>	
UK Resilience Programme	0 (included in training)
Life Skills Training	429
<u>Year 8:</u>	
Parents Under Construction	77
Media Ready (Body image)	310
Media Ready (Substances)	62
<u>Year 9:</u>	
Friends for Life	476
Science of Mental Illness	0
Safer Choices	59
SHAHRP	0
<u>Year 10:</u>	
MoodGym	0
Relationship Smarts	227
Safer Choices	59
SHAHRP	0

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