Transition Year micro-module
Communication skills
for healthy relationships
SPHE

Contents

Transition Year

Transition Year (TY) is a one-year optional programme available to all post-primary schools and is offered as part of the senior cycle experience. During senior cycle students develop a stronger sense of their identity, learning with and from their peers, teachers, other adults, and various media. Senior cycle educates the whole person. Students' experiences in senior cycle should contribute to their intellectual, social and personal development and their overall wellbeing. During TY, students can develop more mature relationships with teachers and other adults and become active agents in designing their own educational experiences and their own contribution to society.

TY programmes offer a unique opportunity in senior cycle where schools and communities can collaborate to encourage young people to thrive now and into the future. TY offers time, space, and autonomy to create enjoyable and meaningful educational experiences that support students in senior cycle while facilitating their engagement with a broader range of pathways and possibilities. It equips young people with the supports and experiences to develop a greater capacity to respond to uncertainty, manage complexity, and become agents of positive, ethical change in society.

Key competencies of senior cycle

Key competencies is an umbrella term which refers to the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions students develop during senior cycle, which helps them to become more engaged, enriched and competent learners.

Further information on key competencies of senior cycle can be found on **ncca.ie**.
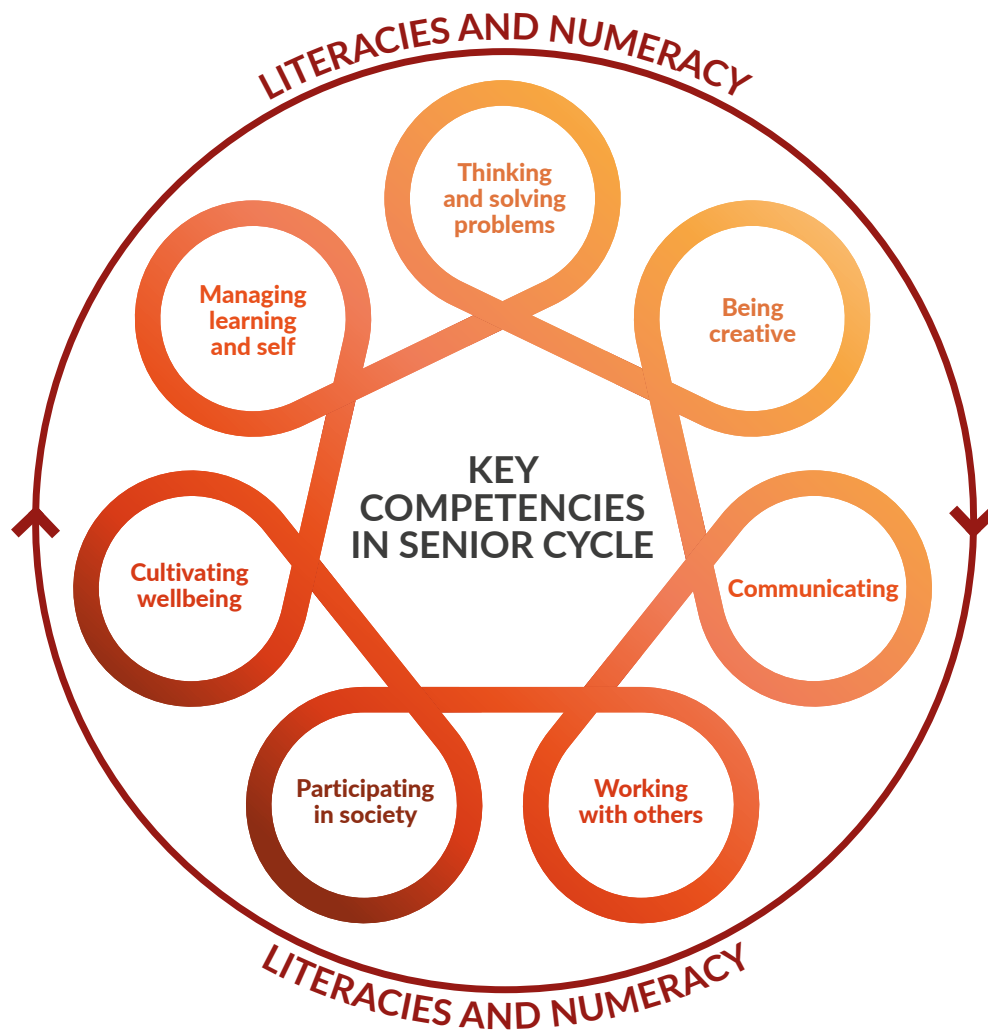
Figure 1: Key Competencies in Senior Cycle, supported by literacies and numeracy.

Student Dimensions of Transition Year

The Student Dimensions describe how students can develop in TY and the experiences that can support this development. The four Student Dimensions are:

- Personal Growth
- Being a Learner
- Civic and Community Engagement
- Career Exploration

Each Student Dimension contains a set of developmental indicators and related student experiences. The four Student Dimensions are designed to interlock in such a way that together they intersect with all seven key competencies of senior cycle.
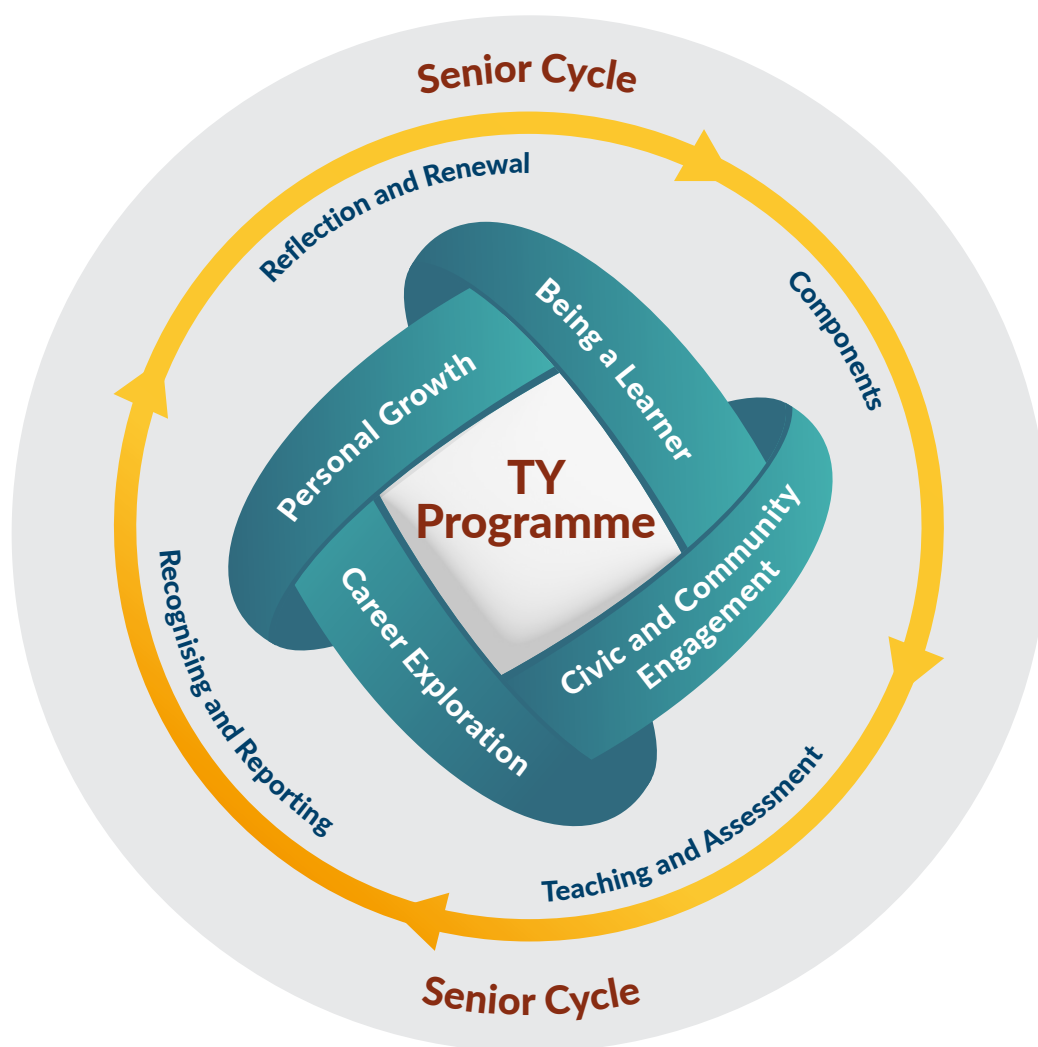

Figure 2: Overview of the Transition Year Programme Statement.

Further details can be found in the **Transition Year Programme Statement**.

The four Student Dimensions are the foundations upon which TY programmes are designed. They describe how students can develop during TY. Table 1 lists the developmental indicators that are most likely to be supported by student participation and engagement with this micro-module.

Table 1. Student Dimensions supported by the micro-module.

Student Dimension	Developmental Indicators most relevant to the micro-module
Personal Growth	• Becoming more assured and confident about themselves as a person • Adapting to groups and new social environments • Interacting with others with more empathy, both in person and online

Rationale

Learning to communicate effectively is a key element of social and emotional learning and a foundational skill for building positive and healthy relationships with family, friends, peers, teachers and others. Interpersonal communication encompasses a range of skills such as active listening, clear and effective communication, awareness of and capacity to manage one's emotions, coupled with awareness of the emotions and perspectives of others. These skills underpin good relationships and are relevant in all our relationships – in classrooms, homes, workplaces and with friends.

This module has a practical focus, enabling students to build and practise the communication skills needed across a range of scenarios. Social media reduces young people's face-to-face interactions, sometimes leaving them unsure and lacking confidence in interpersonal interactions. This module builds young people's skills so that they can engage with more comfort and confidence, for example, in social conversations and other interactions which they may find challenging or awkward.

Disagreement and conflict are an unavoidable part of life and learning to communicate in a clear, assertive and empathetic manner can help us to manage challenging and sometimes conflictual conversations and scenarios. This module builds the awareness and skills to help students communicate effectively and mind themselves in such conversations, as well as signalling wider supports available if they are experiencing ongoing conflictual relationships.

Finally, this module builds upon the learning in Junior Cycle SPHE, enabling students to deepen the knowledge, understanding, skills, values and dispositions needed for building and nurturing healthy relationships.

This module aims to enable students to develop and practise the core communication skills needed to build and maintain healthy relationships within family, school, work and social settings.

Aim

This module aims to enable students to develop and practise the core communication skills needed to build and maintain healthy relationships within family, school, work and social settings.

Time allocation

The micro-module has been designed for 10 hours of class contact time. Teachers' professional judgement can be used to adapt the number of hours to take account of the nature of student engagement to include class contact time, reflection and self-directed, independent learning.

Learning Outcomes

The learning outcomes below are designed to promote teaching and learning that develop students' knowledge, skills, values and dispositions incrementally. The right-hand column contains learning outcomes which describe the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions students should be able to demonstrate after a period of learning. The left-hand column outlines specific areas that students learn about. Taken together, these provide clarity and coherence with the other sections of the micro-module.

The learning outcomes are numbered to support teacher planning. It does not imply any hierarchy of importance across the outcomes themselves.

Table 2. Learning outcomes.

Students learn about	Students should be able to
• Skills of active listening • Verbal and non-verbal communication	**1.1** Demonstrate awareness of and practise a variety of communication skills associated with active listening and effective verbal and non-verbal communication
• Different communication styles • Passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive and assertive communication • Family patterns and communication styles	**1.2** Explore the influence of personal and family patterns of communication and recognise their own communication style
• Ways to communicate when dealing with conflict within different settings – family, peer group, work, school. • How to give and receive critical feedback, how to say no and establish boundaries, how to communicate when feelings are hurt • Common communication traps	**1.3** Recognise helpful and unhelpful ways of engaging in or responding to difficult or conflictual conversations
• The art of small-talk – ways to handle meeting new people or mixing in awkward social settings • Communication skills for expressing gratitude, appreciation, sympathy, asking for help/support, etc.	**1.4** Recognise scenarios and events where they find communication can be challenging and consider practical ways to communicate effectively in these scenarios

Teaching for student learning

Teaching for student learning in TY requires a dynamic approach that prioritises student engagement, exploration, and development. In particular, teaching approaches in TY should develop the student as a learner and encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning. The aims and learning outcomes of the micro-module will strongly influence the choice of teaching pedagogies.

Features of effective SPHE teaching and learning include:

- consultation with students to ascertain their needs, questions and concerns and using this information to plan teaching and learning aligned with the learning outcomes
- a focus not only on sharing strategies for building social and emotional skills but also on providing students with opportunities to practice these skills, reflect on their learning and grow in awareness of self and others
- fostering students' sense of self-efficacy by affirming their capacity to think critically and act responsibly
- providing opportunities to discuss values, attitudes and beliefs that support self-awareness, positive self-image and healthy relationships and behaviours
- modelling respect and empathy for a diversity of viewpoints and life-experiences
- the use of cooperative and experiential learning methodologies and scenarios that relate to the experiences of students.

For guidance on teaching SPHE and suitable methodologies see: **SPHE Toolkit (curriculumonline.ie)**.

Table 3. How learning outcomes are supported by the micro-module

Note: These activities can be adapted and are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive.

Learning Outcomes	Aligned activities
Students should be able to **1.1** Demonstrate awareness of and practise a variety of communication skills associated with active listening and effective verbal and non-verbal communication	• Facilitate individual reflection and group discussion on this: Think of a time when you really felt listened to, understood and respected... What did the person do that made you feel listened to? How did you feel? What can you learn from this? • Demonstrate listening in paired activities using body language and non-verbal responses • Invite students to practise observation of listening and communication and give feedback on what they observe • Role-play scenarios using passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive and assertive communication
1.2 Explore the influence of personal and family patterns of communication and recognise their own communication style	• Use examples from TV, films or books that illustrate different family communication styles, to generate discussion about the influence of family on how we learn to communicate • Students reflect on their most common communication style – passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive or assertive and does this change depending on context

Learning Outcomes	Aligned activities
1.3 Recognise helpful and unhelpful ways of engaging in or responding to difficult or conflictual conversations	• Students create and reflect upon scenarios relevant to young people their age in which there is a challenging or possibly conflictual exchange and discuss ways to manage this. (Scenarios might include family, peers, work, club or school settings) • Use scenarios to practise using helpful language and phrases to communicate feelings and emotions • Brainstorm, in groups, common communication barriers (such as not listening, pre-judging, attack/defend communication, use of criticism, sarcasm, stonewalling) and possible responses. • Create an advice sheet for how to manage conflictual conversations –e.g. pressing pause, time-out, moving from blame and attack to empathy, considering other perspectives, etc. • Discuss ways to establish boundaries and protect themselves in situations of conflict; communicate when you feel hurt and where to reach out for help or support if needed
1.5 1.4 Recognise scenarios and events where they find communication can be challenging and consider practical ways to communicate effectively in these scenarios	• Students share and compile practical tips to help make social interactions or meeting new people feel less challenging/awkward • Role-play communication skills needed in different challenging situations, such as expressing gratitude, appreciation, sympathy, asking for help, talking to a health professional or teacher or other relevant situations identified by the students

Assessment

Assessment in senior cycle involves gathering, interpreting, using and reporting information about the processes and outcomes of learning. It takes different forms and is used for a variety of purposes. Assessment supports and improves learning by helping students and teachers to identify next steps in the teaching and learning process.

As well as varied teaching strategies, varied assessment strategies will support student learning and provide information to teachers and students that can be used as feedback so that teaching and learning activities can be modified in ways that best suit individual learners. By setting appropriate and engaging tasks, asking questions and giving feedback that promotes learner autonomy, assessment will support learning and promote progression, support the development of student key competencies and summarise achievement.

Assessment Methods

The assessment methods listed below are those most closely aligning with the aims, rationale and learning outcomes of the micro-module and also with the Teaching and Assessment section of the TY Programme Statement.

Ways of assessing learning in this module include:

Reflection: Recording and gathering reflections on their learning enriches students' learning and enables them to recognise what they are learning, and how it might apply to their lives now or in the future. When encouraging student reflection, it is important to point out that this will not be marked or ranked and its main purpose is to support self-assessment of learning.

Classroom activities: Learning can be assessed by peer and teacher feedback on students' participation in classroom activities, such as role-plays, discussion of different scenarios and case-studies.

Pieces of work: More formal assessment is facilitated through the students' completion of pieces of work as part of ongoing classroom teaching and learning. This will facilitate the selection of two pieces of work, linked to this module, for inclusion in their TY portfolio. One piece might be a written reflection on a significant insight or skill gained through their learning and the other piece might be an item of classroom work –in written, digital, audio-visual or other mode – that marks significant learning for the student.

Guidance on supporting reflection and assessment within SPHE can be found at **SPHE teaching approaches (curriculumonline.ie)** and also at NCCA's **Focus on Learning webpage**, in particular the **Formative Feedback** and **Student Reflection** booklets.

Reporting

The Transition Year Programme Statement describes the three elements to reporting in TY programmes:

- The TY portfolio
- Student reflection
- School reporting.

This module facilitates reporting on student learning in the three modes listed above. When reporting in SPHE, it is better to avoid marks or ranking, and instead provide feedback on the students' engagement in the learning and on the level of competency shown in completing classroom tasks and pieces of work.
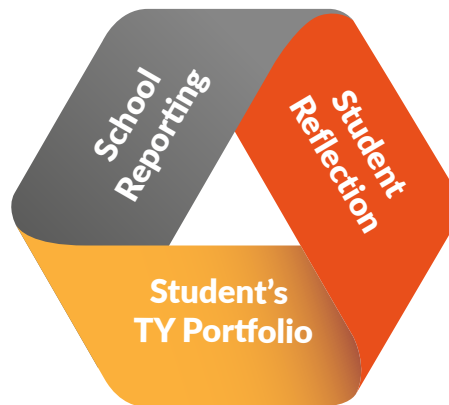

Figure 3: The three elements of reporting in TY.

Evaluating

Reflection and Renewal is a Curriculum Dimension that speaks to the importance of ongoing evaluation of the TY programme and of the components that comprise the programme. The purpose of evaluating the micro-module is to find out, from both the students' and teacher's perspective, the success or otherwise of the module and how it can be improved for the future.

The evaluation of this micro-module may be achieved through a mix of verbal feedback, online evaluation, evaluation based on teacher feedback as part of TY programme evaluation, or other methods that may be suited to the school.

Resources

Resources to support this micro-module are listed on the following page. **These suggestions are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive.** They are provided to stimulate ideas about possible ways to engage with the learning outcomes.

For further guidance and resources to support planning for Transition Year SPHE **www.curriculumonline.ie**

Resources

LO 1.1 Demonstrate awareness of and practice a variety of skills associated with active listening and effective communication

Sample links and resources

- **How to be a good listener** (2 min animated video created by Amaze)
- **The Office:** Teaching Dwight active listening (1 min 20 sec video clip)
- **Empathy as demonstrated in INSIDE OUT** (10 mins)
- **How to Practice Active Listening: 16 Examples & Techniques (positivepsychology.com)**
- **Assertive communication Advice for Young People Jigsaw**
- Social Empathy resource for TY –available from **NUIG Activating Social Empathy project**

LO 1.2 Explore the influence of personal and family patterns of communication and recognise their own communication style

Sample links and resources

- **Video resources and information for teenagers on how to communicate effectively and tackle tricky conversations**
- **Understanding Your Communication Style** (3 min read)
- **Passive Aggressive Pam – Saturday Night Live** (3½ min video clip)
- **The Big Bang Theory: Comedy sitcom** (1 min video clip)
  Search '*Modern Family* clips showing family conflict' to find clips to stimulate discussion
  or use other relevant and appropriate examples suggested by your students.

LO 1.3 Recognise helpful and unhelpful ways of engaging or responding to difficult or conflictual conversations

Sample links and resources

- **PERSONAL SAFETY RESOURCE PACK** (See topic 1 Anger and conflict and topic 3 Managing conflict)
- **Five methods for managing conflict.pdf**
- **Five Keys to Good Communication During Conflict Psychology Today**
- **How to resolve conflict** (2 min animated video by Amaze)

If you/your school is familiar with the principles and practice of restorative practice, this can provide some helpful approaches Restorative Practice

LO 1.4 Recognise scenarios and events where they find communication can be challenging and consider practical ways to communicate effectively in these scenarios

Sample links and resources

- **The Relationship SCALE (Smile, Connect, Ask, Listen, Engage) approach for creating positive interactions**
- **8 Steps to Teaching Teens How to Make Conversation**

Note: It is important to remind students of supports available (both within and outside of school) if they need help coping with any relationships

Further resources
(to be added by the school)

Demonstrate awareness of and practise a variety of communication skills associated with active listening and effective verbal and non-verbal communication

Explore the influence of personal and family patterns of communication and recognise their own communication style

Recognise helpful and unhelpful ways of engaging in or responding to difficult or conflictual conversations

Recognise scenarios and events where they find communication can be challenging and consider practical ways to communicate effectively in these scenarios