

# Seizing the Awkward

Addressing Youth/ Student  
Mental Health

Dean Kenny , President of  
University of Galway Students'  
Union



# Disclaimer

01

I am not a researcher,  
nor am I a mental  
health professional.

02

Anything said in this  
presentation, although  
evidence and research  
based, should not be  
taken as fact.

03

I'm just a maths  
teacher.

# Background

- We know that there is a massive problem.
- Demand for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (Camhs) increased by 33 per cent between 2020 and 2021, while simultaneously seeing 21 per cent more cases during the same period.
- Camhs has waiting lists as long as 2 years for an appointment.
- On University campuses right across Ireland, counselling services are under severe pressure. The provision of counselling services to meet the growing numbers and diverse needs of students has not kept pace. There are long waiting lists, especially as exams draw closer.



# How to address it



For some people, approaching their GP or seeking help from a professional is not what they want, nor what they need.



Specifically with males, research carried out by Samaritans showed that less than 20% of men over the age of 18 experiencing mental health difficulties will seek help from a mental health professional.



We need to start talking.



# The conversation

- The face to face conversation, in my humble opinion at least, cannot be replicated.
- Social support is key in the mental wellbeing of students. In a project funded by the HSE, USI surveyed over 3,000 students across the island of Ireland on all aspects of their experiences with mental health in third level education. Some of their findings were that - Working impacted on student's ability to socialise with classmates, and those who were involved in activities outside of their coursework had better mental health.
- While in many cases, students experiencing difficulty require professional help, campaigns like this can open up the conversation, normalise speaking about mental health, and help to break the stigma surrounding it.



# Seize the Awkward

- Despite all the great campaigns and initiatives that have ran over the past few years, the conversation is still an awkward one for many people.
- How do we break that stigma?
- Throughout this week, our Students' Union have been distributing information, advice and some practical tips on how to have that awkward conversation.

# How will you Seize the Awkward



We can all make an attempt to Seize the Awkward in our own lives.



This could be as simple as checking in on a friend who isn't doing so good lately, who hasn't been taking part in their usual hobbies, who's maybe drinking more or relying on substances heavily. The best person to notice a change in someone else's habits isn't a mental health professional, it's a close friend.



To broach the subject, we need to push past the initial "I'm grand", "Would ya stop", "Leave me alone", without making the person uncomfortable. "How are you really", "I've noticed you haven't been going training much lately", "You don't seem yourself", "I'm just worried for you is all", can be good places to start.

# Men

- Although this messaging works right across the board, we are focusing it on men.
- Men, as mentioned earlier, are far less likely to seek help or speak out when experiencing a mental health difficulty.
- Many male students feel that even if they were to speak out, no one is there to listen.
- In a UK based survey of 1,000 men, 40% of men polled had never spoken to anyone about their mental health, and 40% said it would “take thoughts of suicide or self harm to compel them to seek professional help.





# Seize the Awkward

- We are experiencing a silent pandemic of people, primarily young men, that are suffering but do not have the tools, the means to talk about it or to seek out the help they need.
- Within our own communities, families, friend groups, relationships, workplaces, schools, University's, we can champion this and be advocates for change.
- For someone that feels like the world doesn't listen, be the person who does.
- Will you Seize the Awkward?

