Salesian Secondary College

School Statement of Support for Students on their Identity Journey.

Mission Statement.

Salesian Secondary College is a voluntary, catholic, secondary school under the trusteeship of the Salesians of Don Bosco. Our school dedicates itself to educational excellence, taking into account the uniqueness and complexity of each individual pupil. We strive to create an atmosphere where pupils are happy and thrive in an environment imbued with St. John Bosco's three educational principles of Reason, Religion and Loving Kindness.

Preamble

"To thine own self, be true."

Hamlet, William Shakespeare

The question of identity is central to the experience of being a human being; we are each unique and, in the eyes of God, each of us is a new creation, into whom God has breathed life. The challenge to know who we are is centuries-old.

"Who am I?" is the fundamental question impacting our sense of identity.

Our identity is established by a coming together of countless elements of our person and our life experience. As life unfolds, although we might develop a contented sense of self, we continue to learn from and reflect on our life experiences. Our life is an adventure of self-discovery.

The answer to the question "who am I?" is complex. To fully know and love myself, I must honour the many aspects of "me" that make me "me"; the good and the bad, the inherited and the learned, the chosen and the unwanted.

In Salesian Secondary College, we understand that adolescence is a time of questioning the world and the self. It is a time when young people strive to be independent and autonomous adults. It is a time when young people assert their identity and mark themselves out as new adults, ready to be part of the world in a way that is developed beyond the character of their childhood. This is a challenging and exciting time, full of complex questions about the self and one's relationship with the world.

The greatest challenge for a young person may be the unanswered need for immediate answers to these complex questions. The school has a role to play in helping the young person understand that immediate answers are not always available, and adolescence is, by nature, an impatient time. While the young person searches for answers, the school plays a role in supporting the young person and respecting the struggles that the realisation of identity may entail.

Identity Based Bullying: Prevention and Response

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Salesian Secondary College has a ratified Anti Bullying Policy which states that prejudice-based or identity-based bullying is unacceptable in our school. The Policy outlines the school's response to all bullying behaviour. The Student Council has ratified our Student Anti-Bullying Charter also.

This policy document is a statement of support for young people in all aspects of their search for identity.

The school promotes the following, as influential over the creation and maintenance of an ethos and environment which is welcoming for all:

- Our Mission Statement
- Teaching programmes, such as our SPHE and RE programmes, study of rights and responsibilities, community and citizenship through CSPE, managing relationships and the self in RSE
- A committed Guidance and Counselling policy
- Pastoral Care Team reaching out to Vulnerable Students
- The carefully managed delivery of programmes designed to support students who are struggling eg Friends for Life, Nurture, Check and Connect
- Ceangail mentoring; Adult mentoring
- Year Head structure underlying our pastoral support structures
- Anti-Bullying Policy and Student Charter
- Post of Responsibilities managing the areas of Diversity / International Students, Special Educational Needs, Programme for students with ASD, Student Wellbeing, Student Council
- A tradition of listening to Student Voice, through the Pastoral Care structure, Student Council and regular Wellbeing initiatives
- Clubs and Societies for students: Treo Eile, Lunchtime Club, International Students gatherings etc
- Parents' Council
- The school also provides pathways to support services outside school (see appendix)

Where does my sense of identity come from?

The ebb and flow of different elements of the self is what makes me "me." A true sense of "who am I?" blossoms from my experience of my entire life story and may be influenced, but is not necessarily confined to:

My birth story

My family of origin

My family members

My family life

My place of birth

My ethnicity

My family history

My parish

My club

My sexual orientation

My sex (the question of being male or female)

My gender (the question of being masculine or feminine)

My team

My culture

My appearance

My talents

My strengths

My weaknesses

My school

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My school life

My friends

Conflict in my life

Love in my life

My relationships

My successes

My fitness

My failures

My disappointments

My choices: healthy and unhealthy

My education

My health

My bodily limitations

My work

My intelligence

My faith

My religion

My neuro-divergence

My dreams for the future

What impedes the development of my identity?

Like many things, sense of identity lives on a spectrum; we may feel more, or less, confident about who we are, according to what is happening in our life at any given time. The influences over our sense of self are stronger or weaker at different times of my life also. An authentic sense of self develops over time and fluctuates.

Negative or disproportionate influence can come from the media, the internet, popular culture, or unreasonable comparison of myself with others.

Prejudice, bias, impatience, lack of trust, lack of understanding or acceptance, disrespect, ignorance, misrepresentation, misinformation (either in myself or in others) of any of the elements, which inform my sense of self, may lead to confusion in my identity and conflict or pain within myself.

The misuse of language can impede my sense of growth.

Inconsistent messages in popular culture, misinformation, unregulated internet content, computer generated content and the changing influences of social media may contribute to confusion in myself or in those around me.

How can I support someone who is struggling with questions of identity?

- ✓ Listen with an open mind and an open heart. This is loving kindness in action.
- ✓ Respect the questions that your friend or family member ask.
- ✓ Don't feel that you must provide all the answers: direct your friend or family member to a trusted adult or to recommended organisations. If someone is in crisis or you are worried about someone, tell a trusted adult.
- ✓ Only give advice if it is requested. Often, a troubled person just needs to be listened to, not "fixed".
- ✓ Help your friend or family member to understand that the struggle itself is part of that person's personal development. Their questions, wonderings, confusion and searching is part of who they are and who they will become. Immediate answers or "fixes" may be a hindrance to developing a true and deep sense of identity.
- ✓ Try not to concentrate on one single element of identity as being more important than another. This can confuse or deflect from the development of the whole self. Remember, we are complex people, made up of many wonderful parts. Some parts of our identity are easy to understand;

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others are not. When there is confusion or pain, look to the easier parts of the "who am I?" question for reassurance that you are developing in your own time.

- ✓ Respect someone's right to make choices that are different to your own. Be careful with advice and information; an individual deserves to look for answers in a safe place, without undue influence or bias.
- ✓ Encourage your friend or family member to make choices that are healthy for their mind, body and spirit.
- ✓ Try to learn from your friend or family member's experience and respect where they are in their own development of "self".
- ✓ Do not put pressure on another person to assert any element of their identity before they are ready or willing and do not take on this role yourself.

How can the school support someone who is struggling with questions of identity?

We identify as a Salesian School. This means we foster reason, faith and loving kindness. We encourage our students to develop a sense of belonging to the school and its long history. Each student plays their part in our history and each is a valued and cherished member of the school community.

- ✓ We understand a student's right to affirm their sense of identity, as it grows.
- ✓ We encourage students to be open-minded to the experience of others and to the development of their own person.
- ✓ We promote a climate of acceptance and respect for all.
- ✓ We create opportunities for a young person to feel a sense of belonging and support.
- ✓ Where issues of identity arise, management and teachers take time with the student and his / her parent / guardian, to find the right solutions for their individual context, rather than rushing to a standard, catch-all response. (Being LGBT in School, 2016.)
- ✓ Where, following these conversations, agreements are made in respect of a student's own personal journey, eg in the use of a specific name / pronoun, that these agreements are respected and abided, in good faith and to the best of one's ability
- ✓ We seek advice and direction from appropriate sources, when this is necessary

What can I do, if I am struggling with asserting my identity?

Remember, you are a student of Salesian Secondary College and you belong in our school.

Try not to be afraid of the confusion you might be feeling or the questions that are troubling you. This is a school that cares about how you feel and how you grow.

Please be patient. Establishing and asserting identity is, for many, a lifelong effort. And other people around you may need time to give your journey the respect it deserves.

Consider that identity is not a perfectly defined thing; it exists on a spectrum. Some days, we are more one thing than another. That is the wonderful, complex, extraordinary nature of human beings.

Be wary of the impact of language. Language can empower, but it can also entrap you and impede progress. Know that language that is considered "correct" changes and that it is not always easy to keep up with these changes, nor is it right to do so. Challenge the language in the same way as you challenge prejudice.

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Look at argument critically and challenge yourself and others to consider all sides of an argument.

Explore the source of influential material; where does it come from? Is it authenticated? What is the agenda behind it? Where is truth?

Know that your sense of who you are is yours and yours alone. It should not depend on others' opinions of who you are or what you should be.

Be kind to yourself and to others. Kindness is universally understood and is something with which we can all identify.

Review: This statement is reviewed cyclically. Observations from staff, students and parents / guardians made through the channels outlined about are considered regularly, as part of this review.

Signed: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 1: Support Agencies of note.

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Support services that offer general and outgoing support

- Childline Confidential phone line for children and young people 1800 666 666 (Free) 24hrs Text: Talk 50101 (Free) 10am-4am www.childline.ie

- Aware Helpline 10am to 10pm Listening service for people with depression or those concerned about family member or friend. 1800 804 848 (Free) www.aware.ie

- Teenline (ISPCC) Confidential phone line for teenagers 1800 833 634 (Free) www.teenline.ie - listening service

- Jigsaw, Arthurs Quay, Limerick. 061 974510. Support services offered online also from online clinical team. Live chat available Monday to Friday - Jigsaw is not a crisis service

- GOSHH and Gender Wise, Limerick. The Limerick Trans Youth Group, GOSHH, Redwood Place, 18 Davis St, Limerick, Phone 061 314354 or Text 087 4447368

- Gay and Lesbian Equality network: glen.ie

- www.shoutout.ie

Crisis Services for immediate or urgent support

- Emergency Services 999 or 112 . Emergency Department, University Hospital Limerick

- GP services, Shannon doc out of hours service

- Samaritans Emotional support service 116 123 (Free) Text 087 260 9090 email: jo@samaritans.ie www.samaritans.org

- Crisis Text Line. Text 50808 is a free 24/7 text service, where you connect with a trained Crisis Volunteer. The Crisis Volunteer will introduce themselves, reflect on what you've said, and invite you to share at your own pace. You'll text back and forth, only sharing what you feel comfortable with. Text HELLO to 50808.

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- Pieta House, Free therapeutic approach to people who are in suicidal distress and those who engage in self-harm. Mid West: 061 484 444 Helpline 1800 247 247 (Free) - 24hrs Text HELP to 51444 - 24hrs email: mary@pieta.ie www.pieta.ie

- Spunout.ie, text message support service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They provide in the moment anonymous support and problem solving. Text SPUNOUT to 0861800280 to begin

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