



Mental Health  
Ireland



Healthy  
Mayo

# CONNECT CAFÉ TOOLKIT



Coiste um Fhorbairt Pobail Aitiúil Mhaigh Eo  
Mayo Local Community Development  
Committee



Comhairle Contae Mhaigh Eo  
Mayo County Council



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland



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# 1. ABOUT

## Who are Mental Health Ireland?

Mental Health Ireland is the longest established Mental Health Charity in Ireland, founded in 1966. The aim of Mental Health Ireland is to promote mental health and wellbeing for all and to support people with lived experience of mental health challenges in their recovery.

**OUR MISSION** is to promote and enhance mental health and wellbeing and work to create a national culture where we are all respected and supported in our recovery & wellbeing when our mental health is challenged.

**OUR VISION** is for an Ireland where mental health is valued and supported as an essential part of everyone's health so that individuals, friends & family, and communities can thrive.

## About Healthy Mayo

The Healthy Mayo Connect Café Mental Health Fund aids community and voluntary groups with 'Health and Wellbeing' projects to promote and protect mental health, reduce health inequalities, and contribute to a healthier Mayo.

The purpose of the Healthy Mayo Connect Café fund is to improve population Health and Wellbeing in Mayo, by supporting and encouraging targeted action in relation to mental health in the form of hosting Connect Cafés.

The Healthy Ireland Fund is supported by the Department of Health.



## 2. WHAT IS A CONNECT CAFÉ?

Connect Cafés are organised events that bring people together to connect and start conversations. Their goal is to open conversations, strengthening the connection with ourselves, with others and with our communities.

Research shows that connecting is one of the simple things you can do as part of your daily life to protect your mental health (The Five Ways to Wellbeing are simple actions you can do in your everyday life to feel good and function well (NEF, 2008).)

Healthy Mayo is encouraging you to organise a Connect Café event in your community room/hall, workplace, or after a sports event! It can take place as a coffee morning/evening with a little more structure. You can get creative with it and think of different ways to bring people together to really connect.

### BENEFITS OF A CONNECT CAFÉ

- Enhance connections with others
- Make new connections
- Create a sense of community and belonging
- Create a space to have open meaningful conversations
- Learn about the importance of connecting with others
- Reduce isolation and loneliness
- Learn about yourself and others



## HOW TO RUN A CONNECT CAFÉ

To run a Connect Café you just need people, topics to start a conversation and/or some questions. It can be a face-to-face or virtual event, and can be as simple or as complicated as you like.

You can get creative with it and think of diverse ways to bring people together to connect and start conversations.



You will need questions to start conversations. We have provided questions based on the 5 Ways to Wellbeing. You may want to use your own questions on topics or issues relevant to your group.



# 3. CONNECT CAFÉ IDEAS



**Coffee Mornings**- Organise a group of people to come together with some refreshments and time to chat

**After a walk** or run – take some time after your walk or run to meet up, hydrate and have a chat.



**With your colleagues** – have a catch up during your morning tea break or at lunch time.

**With family members** – try some of our sample questions. You may learn something new about one another!



**Community Group** – add a Connect Café to your next agenda.

**At school or university** – include a Connect Café in your timetable, in the cafeteria or students' union.



**Online** – host a virtual Connect Café for people who cannot attend in person.

**Public event** – organise a Connect Café somewhere in your community. E.g. local park, community centre, etc.



# 4. CONNECT CAFÉ CHECKLIST

## Face-to-face Connect Café



Chose a venue to host your Connect Café e.g. a community hall or local coffee shop. Keep in mind the size of the space and accessibility.



You may need to rent the space and organise refreshments.



Invite your audience- community, colleagues, friends etc. using local media, posters , word of mouth, email, social media etc.



Print out the conversation questions provided in this toolkit or make up your own questions relating to the topic you want to discuss.



Use the merchandise provided to you by Healthy Mayo, to order more contact [epieterse@mayococo.ie](mailto:epieterse@mayococo.ie)



When people arrive, ask them to sit with someone they do not know, if possible.



If applicable, start with an icebreaker (some ideas are included in the appendices), this may make 10 minutes to complete.



Start the conversation by someone asking one of the questions. Try to allow time for everyone to answer, and then go onto the next question.



Keep the chat informal and open.



# 5. CONNECT CAFÉ CONVERSATION QUESTIONS



1. What is the best piece of advice someone has ever given to you?
2. What are the three qualities you value most in a friend? What are the three qualities you value most in yourself?
3. Think of a relationship that is important to you. What do you do to nurture that relationship?

1. What is your favourite way to get active?
2. If you could take part in any Olympic event, which would it be?
3. What activity did you do as a child that you would like to try again?



1. What is your favourite flower or plant?
2. Is there a smell that takes you back to a specific memory?
3. When and where do you feel most at peace?

1. What is your favourite random fact and do you remember how/from where you learned it?
2. Which book/film/tv show/podcast that you recently read/saw/listened to would you recommend to me and why?
3. If you could become an expert on something, what would you choose?



1. If you could give a million euro to any one charity, group, team etc., which would it be and why?
2. Can you tell me about a time that you did something nice for a stranger or that a stranger did something nice for you?
3. Tell me about a group or organisation that you are involved with or might like to get involved with?



# ICEBREAKERS



An icebreaker can be a great way to kick off your Connect Café! It will help participants get to know each other a little better before the main event.

## 'Two Truths, One Lie' icebreaker! Good for Face-to-face events or Virtual

Time required: 10 minutes

How to:

1. Ask each team member to prepare a list of three interesting "facts" about themselves, one of which must be made up. This could be anything from a hobby they love to a famous person they say they've met, and so on.
2. Then, get other team members to decide on the facts they think are true.
3. The team member who receives the most incorrect votes "wins"

## One Good Thing One Not So Good Thing

Time Required 10 mins:

1. Get each team member to write out One Good Thing that happened today and One Not So Good Thing that happened today.  
Note: It can be anything at all, as trivial as you want.
1. Once all are written scrunch up all the papers and throw them into the middle of the room.
2. Once all are on the floor each team member then picks one random piece of paper and each team reads out some Good Things and some Not so Good things that happened today.

# Listening skills

Listening is an important skill. It helps build relationships with others. 'Active Listening' helps improve your ability to listen well.

## MINIMISE DISTRACTION

- Take a break from what you are doing and try to focus on the other person.
- Put away your phone and turn off the TV.
- Invite the person to chat in a quiet place.



## ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

- Open-ended questions (ones that don't just need a yes/no answer) help keep the conversation going.

Why do you think that is?

- They show the person that you are interested in what's being said.
- Sometimes yes or no answers can close a conversation down.



## GIVE ATTENTION

- Look towards the person, make eye contact or stand shoulder to shoulder, whatever is more comfortable.
- Be aware of the other person's body language, posture and tone of voice. These can provide clues as to how they are feeling.
- Mirroring body language can help build connections.

1

2

3

4

5

## ENCOURAGE THE PERSON TO SPEAK

- Use prompts to show that you have heard what is being said. For example: 'ok', 'mmm', 'uh-huh', 'I see' or nodding your head.
- You don't have to have an answer, give an opinion or a solution to what's being shared.
- Let the person lead the conversation.
- Give the person a chance to express their thoughts and feelings.
- Silences and pauses are ok.



## REFLECT

- Summarise what you have heard.
- Ensure you understand what the other person has said.
- Reflecting gives the opportunity to clarify.



# CONNECT CAFÉ



# Get involved!

## EVENT

## DATE & TIME

## VENUE



Tag Mental Health Ireland and Healthy Mayo when you advertise your Connect Cafés on X, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn .  
Use the hashtag [#MentalHealthIreland](#) , [#ConnectCafé](#) and [#HealthyMayo](#)





[www.mentalhealthireland.ie](http://www.mentalhealthireland.ie)



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