

Dear Parent,

"I learned to never hold myself back, learned new skills to cope with anxiety as well as learning how to control my own thoughts and flip them to be more positive where I can." – Words from a 2nd-year student who attended one of our 2022 school workshops.

Today we carried out a workshop with the young women in 3rd year in Coláiste Muire, and we hope that through our unique, honest and open approach, we have lit a spark of change. We know through listening to these incredible girls, that they need support to face the challenges that today's society places on them, and working with you, together we can help deliver that support.

We are [The Shona Project](#) and we work to nurture the self-esteem of girls, while educating, empowering and inspiring them to embrace their abilities.

As we are all aware, teenage girls in Ireland face a specific set of challenges including the societal pressure to look perfect, which leads to low self-esteem, mental health issues and often results in their potential not being realised. 1-3 young people in Ireland struggle with anxiety or depression contributing to the shocking fact that Ireland has the highest rate of death by suicide among teenage girls in Europe.

Our workshop is focused on ensuring Irish girls have the skills, tools and self-esteem they need to achieve their potential. During the hour and a half, Judith spent getting to know the 3rd year girls and worked on the following:

- Building a Positive Mindset: It's not what happens to us that defines us, it's how we respond to it. Go ahead and ask your daughter about flipping our thinking, you might find it useful!
- Using Our Voice & Building Self-confidence: Pushing ourselves outside of our comfort zone can be an incredibly scary thing, but today we learned about all of the powerful things that can happen when you put even a toe outside that comfy little bubble of yours. We also learned how risk can be a good thing, how speaking up for things that matter to you can help enact change and how important it is to be your own cheerleader.
- Our Anxiety Toolkit: Did you know the best way of dealing with anxiety is by understanding it? We identified triggers and common responses, but we also ensured every girl walked away with effective yet simple coping strategies they can use any time they need them.

We work on breaking down barriers and believe through early intervention we can avoid the possible downhill spiral many young teens in Ireland unfortunately face. But we only have a short time with them, so your role as the parent/guardian cannot be underestimated and you can and should continue these conversations with your child once they come home from school.

We understand it is hard to find the right words to start these conversations, and a part of our goal here at The Shona Project is to create an ecosystem for the young people of Ireland to thrive. So, we wanted to give you some tips and talking points to encourage positive and healthy conversations.

- Tip 1: Don't say you need a chat. This will heighten their insecurity and anxiety. Just ask them how their day went, or how they feel about a certain topic. Avoid the sneak attack.
- Tip 2: Eye contact can be difficult when having important or deep conversations. Why not go for a drive or a walk? This way, you are beside your child, rather than face to face.
- Tip 3: Kids don't need you to solve all their problems. If you do, they will never know what they are capable of. As parents, our number one goal is to listen, and to validate how they're feeling. When young people struggle, they feel like it's their failure. Use terms like "that is tough", "I hear you", "This is not a normal situation, be gentle with yourself while you work through it." Work together to come up with solutions, but always hear them first.

We hope that these ideas and tips are useful and may have helped you and your child with additional tools to encourage positive conversations and communication. We share the goal of wanting them to grow into a strong, resilient, and confident young person.

Tammy, our founder, has also recently published a book that you might be interested in to continue the conversation with your daughter. *You've Got This!* is a positive and empowering guide designed to help girls find their place in the world and grab life with both hands. Full of practical information on handling the challenges of the teenage years with a healthy mindset, it covers topics like finding your friendship tribe, handling peer pressure, healthy body image, periods, love, sex and relationships, exam pressure and navigating the online world. *You've Got This!* is a supportive companion that will boost self-esteem, inspire positive thinking and build resilience while encouraging you to see the amazing potential in yourself. You can purchase this book €15.95 (including delivery) via our website.

We are currently developing tools and workshops for parents, carers, coaches, and teachers – if you are interested in learning more about our work, the SHINE Festival, our future projects, how we might help you and your child, or indeed how you might support us, why not visit our website or social media channels to continue the conversation or sign up to our newsletter to stay up to date with all things Shona while we also share our recommendations for books, music, podcasts, TV shows, movies, self-care items, and everything in between.

"It's important for young women to feel like they matter, that their opinions matter, that their achievements matter - the Shona Project gives young women that platform to equality, positive representation and making their voices heard" - Katie, Youth Ambassador for The Shona Project

Kind Regards,
The Shona Project Team

