Roscommon Herald

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Adolescence and Beyond Conference bringing parents and professionals together

Gina Dermody

These are the words of a young adolescent girl and are the catalyst behind the Adolescence and Beyond conference taking place in Galway on April 8th for parents and professionals organised by Gina Dermody of Adolessence and Beyond, a family therapy organisation based in Tuam.

The conference is providing a platform for parents and professionals to collaborate and find solutions to the issues facing children from 11 years of age right up to those in their 30's.

The conference offers parents the chance to speak with each other while also touching base with professionals and finding solutions and answers to some of the problems that they encounter. It offers people the opportunity to engage, to chat and to have questions answered, Gina outlined.

Offering 150 spaces it will provide an intimate space to have those conversations, while also offering professionals the chance to see what is happening in other fields, outside their specialty and give them a unique sharing experience.

Now in its second year the conference is focusing on offering tips and guidance and having parents' questions answered. It is the first ever parents and professionals conference focusing solely on adolescent mental health and during the day attendees will also be given the opportunity to hear 'the adolescent voice' and learn of the issues and problems they face. "It is creating a space that benefits all those who care," said Gina.

According to the World Health Organisation adolescence is a crucial period for developing social and emotional habits important for mental well-being. These include adopting healthy sleep patterns; exercising regularly; developing coping, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills; and learning to manage emotions. Protective and supportive environments in the family, at school and in the wider community are important.

Multiple factors affect mental health. The more risk factors adolescents are exposed to, the greater the potential impact on their mental health. Factors that can contribute to stress during adolescence include exposure to adversity, pressure to conform with peers and exploration of identity. Media influence and gender norms can exacerbate the disparity between an adolescent's lived reality and their perceptions or aspirations for the future. Other important determinants include the quality of their home life and relationships with peers. Violence (especially sexual violence and bullying), harsh parenting and severe and socioeconomic problems are recognized risks to mental health.

Gina Dermody has a wealth of experience in dealing with issues young people face today. She is an adolescent and family psychotherapist based in Tuam, Co Galway and runs her own private practice, providing services to the local community as well as to those further afield, in collaboration with three other therapists. Gina's approach is straightforward: she emphasizes maintaining contact and connection as the core focus in both professional interventions and parenting.

"Hear my voice, because I want to tell you so much. Instead I stay stuck in the dark with a voice that tells me I'm no good, I'm fat, I'm ugly, I'm stupid. I'm not even going to make it. Help me to hear the voice that says: I'm good, I'm happy, I'm smart. Please take me out of the dark and hear my voice."

Gina began her career as a social worker, gaining experience in a variety of settings before finding her niche working with parents and adolescents, in palliative care and hospice work. Her desire to work in a more therapeutic capacity led her to specialise in bereavement counselling, family therapy, and psychotherapy, ultimately focusing on adolescent Psychotherapy training. Becoming a parent herself has meant, like so many others, there is a balancing of the responsibilities of parenthood with the demands of a career.

Gina works directly with adolescents and families at her clinic, facilitates the Life Space Program in secondary schools, and works as a supervisor for therapists and other professionals. Her passion for learning is evident in her continuous pursuit of further education, attending courses both in Ireland and abroad.

"I believe we can never know enough about parenting or adolescent development. It's an ever-evolving field, full of growth and challenges. As parents and professionals, we are constantly striving to keep up with a world that often seems intent on influencing adolescents in ways that stray from values and narratives that support their growth. Risk is increasing, while self-worth and a true sense of self seem to be diminishing. As a parent, you want to do everything possible to ensure your child and adolescents well-being, and as an adolescent therapist, I aim to support the development and sense of self in adolescents, while also supporting parents in their roles."

Other speakers who will be joining Gina on the day include:

Dr. Richard Hogan, Family Therapist and author of 'Parenting a Screenager' and 'Home Is Where The Start Is.' He regularly appears on RTE, Virgin Media, Newstalk and has also appeared on 'It Takes A Village' on RTE.

Dr. Mary O Kane is a lecturer in Psychology, Early Childhood Studies and Education with the Open University.

She is the author of two bestselling books 'Perfectly Imperfect Parenting' and 'Anxious Children In An Anxious World'. She presents 'Perfectly Imperfect Parenting' on Dublin City FM and is a regular guest on the Anton Savage show on Newstalk.

Dr. Malie Coyne is a Clinical Psychologist, author of 'Love In Love Out' and is the Co-Founder of Lust for Life.

Dr. Joanna Fortune, Psychotherapist is the author of '15 Minute Parenting 0-7 years, 8-12 years and The teenage years', and is a regular contributor for the Irish Examiner.

Stella O'Malley, Psychotherapist is the author of 'Cotton Wool Kids', 'Fragile, Bully Proof Kids' and 'What Your Teen Is Trying To Tell You.'

Adam Harris, if a founder and CEO of ASIAM, Ireland's Autism Charity.

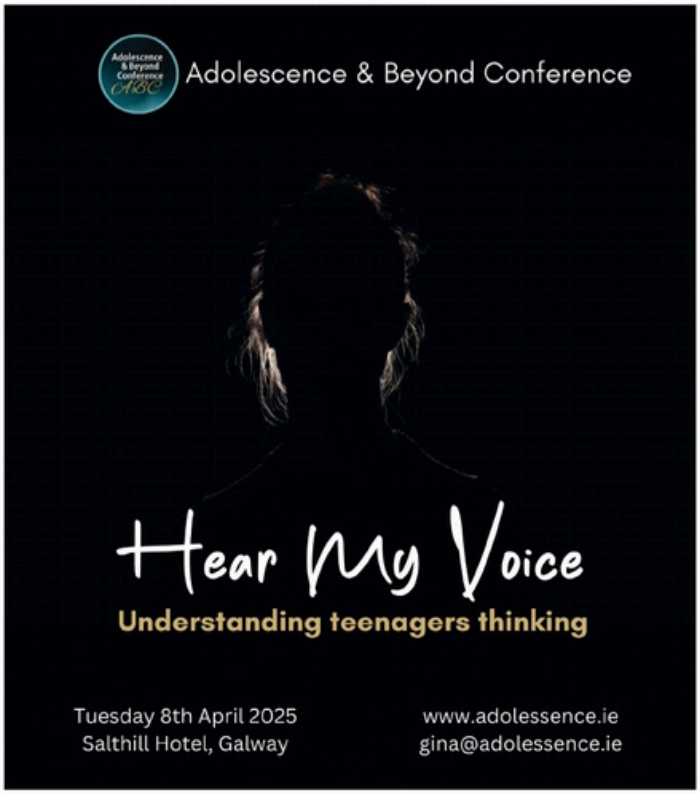
Those interested in attending the conference on Tuesday, April 8th at the Salthill Hotel, Galway can find out more information on www. Adolessence.ie or by contacting Gina on 087 991 3179.

Dr. Malie Coyne

Dr. Joanna Fortune

Dr. Richard Hogan

Adam Harris

Dr. Mary O'Kane

Stella O'Malley