

Guidance Notes

Teacher Information



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*“Empower young people
to manage their thoughts
and feelings”*

*“Create an emotionally
literate environment”*

WHY USE THIS RESOURCE

Our Let's Talk videos encourage conversations about key mental health topics.

Talking about mental health in a creative way will dispel unhelpful myths and break down the stigma that prevents young people seeking support.

You can use this resource to create an emotionally literate environment in which young people can learn about the basics of their own, and others', mental health.

You will be giving young people essential knowledge about how our brains work with our bodies. This psycho-education will empower them to manage their thoughts and feelings in a healthy way, and/or recognise when to seek further support.

The following information will equip you with enough knowledge to confidently teach a lesson, lead an assembly, or even just start a discussion, on the topic of mental health misconceptions.

DEFINITIONS

Wellbeing is a condition whereby an individual feels happy, healthy and successful. Wellbeing can be described as having the sufficient internal resources (emotional, physical and mental health) to meet the challenges of life.

Wellbeing is also dependent on external resources, such as an individual's economic and social conditions. Therefore, a variety of wide-ranging factors need to come together in order for an individual to experience wellbeing.

STATISTICS

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CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Physical Health

Physical ill health may affect wellbeing, particularly if it restricts an individual's mobility or his/her ability to see or hear. This contributes to a sense of isolation. In addition, experiencing pain (migraines/backache/arthritis) can be life-limiting.

Income

If an individual has a secure and sufficient income, then s/he is more likely to experience wellbeing because s/he has access to life's necessities (food, shelter, electricity). Work (paid or unpaid) is also likely to increase an individual's sense of wellbeing because s/he is likely to experience a sense of purpose and fulfilment in life.

Relationships

A supportive network of family and friends is crucial to wellbeing. Equally, being socially isolated and/or feeling lonely contribute to poor wellbeing

Genes/Personality

Positive emotions are, to a certain degree, passed on in an individual's genetic make-up. But these genes may or may not be 'expressed', depending on the individual's environment. So there is a complex interplay between nature and nurture when it comes to experiencing wellbeing.

Some personality traits are more strongly connected with wellbeing than others. For example, optimistic people are more likely to experience wellbeing, as are extroverts and people with a positive sense of self.

THE SCIENCE

Research from across different disciplines (for example, psychology, neuroscience, economics, social care) points towards 5 ways to improve wellbeing. The NHS advocates these 5 methods, and our Let's Talk video focuses on two of them.

The 5 'ways to wellbeing' are:

Connect

Connect with the people around you. Smile at a neighbour, laugh with your siblings, give your friend a hug, talk to your parents. Intentionally try to strengthen your close relationships (baking a cake for your sister, calling your grandparent) and also try to broaden your social network and connect with your community, perhaps join a club or volunteer for a charity

Be active

Physical activity increases the levels of serotonin and dopamine in the brain. These are chemicals that improve mood and protect against mental health problems. Therefore, being more physically active will improve experiences of wellbeing. Walking, instead of driving or taking the bus, is a simple way to increase physical activity. Other ways of increasing physical activity include joining a fitness or dance class, riding a bike or going swimming, or setting yourself a challenge, like running 5k using a programme like CouchTo5K.



Be mindful

Mindfulness is a term to describe 'being in the moment' – noticing how you think and feel right now, and noticing the things around you. Being mindful means you are not think^{ING} about the past or the future, but simply enjoying the current moment.

Keep learning

Learning new things increases a sense of success and achievement. People who keep learning 'report a greater ability to cope with stress, and a higher degree of self esteem, hope and purpose' (NHS). Perhaps focus on a hobby or an interest and get stuck into it! Or ask a friend to teach you something they know a lot about (e.g. a different language or how to play an instrument).

Give to others

Being generous towards other people can increase feelings of wellbeing because the act of giving stimulates the reward areas of the brain which produce positive feelings. Generosity also strengthens relationships with other people. Writing a thank you letter to a relative, or giving compliments to friends/strangers is a way to increase generosity.

A final way to wellbeing, not included in the NHS guidance, but one advocated by The Children's Society, is creativity and play.

Young children are naturally imaginative and playful, and creativity is a natural instinct which needs an outlet as we get older. Perhaps music, pottery, construction, acting, story-telling/writing could be creative hobbies to pursue in teenage life. Or just getting outside to some open space (to climb a tree, or to imagine the clouds as objects, or to jump in puddles) is a powerfully creative activity.

CAUSES AND OUTCOMES OF WELLBEING

	WELLBEING	LACK OF WELLBEING
PERSONAL TRAITS	Self Confidence Optimistic Outlook Sense of fulfilment Stable relationships Resilience Good mental health Extroversion	Low self confidence Pessimistic outlook Sense of being unfulfilled Social isolation (actual or perceived) Stress Neuroticism
ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS	Employment/enjoyable work Secure income Secure housing Access to basic resources (food/water/electricity) Supportive relationships Good physical health	Unemployment/poverty/homelessness Lack of social support Stressful relationships; (bullying/discrimination) Bereavement Poor physical health Inactive lifestyle Poor diet Insomnia



RELATED ISSUES

Self-efficacy

The degree to which an individual believes s/he can perform well in any given context has an impact on their wellbeing. If an individual believes they have the capacity to overcome challenges and succeed, then they are more likely to experience wellbeing. However, if they believe they have no control over the situations they face, they are likely to experience a lack of wellbeing.

Holistic approach

Wellbeing incorporates the entirety of an individual's life. There are no quick fixes for a lack of wellbeing and working with young people to improve their wellbeing will require perceiving them as complex and unique individuals with their own personal experiences and histories. Improved wellbeing will look different for every young person, therefore it is vital to equip them with all the information they need to make their own choices/lifestyle changes.

Family relationships

A young person's wellbeing is likely to be entwined with their family relationships. A happy home life will be more conducive to experiencing wellbeing than a fractious home life, or a home life that's going through a transition (a new sibling, a new home, parental separation).

Diet and health

Healthy eating is important for wellbeing and for maintaining a healthy body. A good diet has long-term benefits (increasing life-span, protecting against illness/disease, aiding quick recovery from illness) but young people may perceive a healthy diet to be boring and labour-intensive.



IDEAS FOR DIFFERENTIATION

High ability

Some questions for discussion:

To what degree do you make your own wellbeing? To what degree do environmental factors determine how much wellbeing you have?

How easy is it to 'be mindful'? What kinds of things prevent you being mindful in every day life? How can you encourage each other to be more mindful? How will you notice if practising mindfulness improves your wellbeing?

Low ability

Have a go at 'being mindful'.

What can you hear? Spend some time noticing all the sounds you can hear.

What can you feel? Spend some time noticing your physical sensations. Are you hot/cold? Are you relaxed/tense? Are you hungry/full?

What can you see? Spend some time recognising all the sights around you.

What are you worrying about? Recognise the thoughts that are causing you to worry, or causing you to get distracted from the here and now, and then put them to one side.

Simply enjoy being in the present moment.

Those affected

Before delivering this lesson, let your school's pastoral support team know. Perhaps they can provide a drop-in on the same day for anyone who feels they need to talk more about their mental health.

If you have a TA in your class, make sure you give them advanced warning of your lesson's content, as they may have their own personal experiences which could impact your lesson. Your TA may also be the best person to support any students who are affected by the lesson's content.

If a young person appears to need more support during your lesson, perhaps you could offer them a quiet corner of your classroom and ask them to write a description of their self-harm, perhaps a poem or a story, or an analogy. Or maybe they could draw what self-harm feels like to them. This could then be used as the basis of discussion if/when that young person seeks further support.

SIGNPOSTING

Useful websites

Phase is a schoolswork charity based in Hitchin, Hertfordshire. Phase is on the frontline working with children and young people to promote their wellbeing. Check out their blog.

Shelf Help is a scheme which offers book suggestions for people struggling with mental health issues. For example, the books suggested for relieving anxiety are listed here. It also offers a reading list of books which will lift your mood. The books are available in local libraries, and so is free and easy to access.

AyeMind is a thoroughly detailed website which aims to improve mental health and wellbeing for young people. They have a page which links to a wide range of other websites too (this is where the link takes you), so you can explore the best the web has to offer on young people and mental health.

NHS Ways to Wellbeing

Find all the information about the 5 Ways to Wellbeing on the NHS website. There's plenty of easily accessible information and handy tips and suggestions for getting started.

The Children's Society

The Children's Society has resources for young people, professionals and families about wellbeing. It also has evidence to suggest that imagination, creativity and play improve wellbeing.



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