

Getting started

Teaching and support staff



10 tips

for teaching and school staff on supporting mental health and wellbeing

Promoting good mental health and wellbeing in schools relies on every member of staff playing their part. Every interaction between a child and a staff member has to help, because anyone can hold a part of the jigsaw that could support a struggling child to move forward.

Around three children in every primary school class has an identifiable mental health condition – and among this age group, boys are twice as likely as girls to have a mental health problem.

We know the factors that can put a child more at risk of developing a mental health problem can often be identified from an early age. If a child who is at risk isn't given early support, they may go on to develop a mental health problem.

As children spend so much of their time in schools, teachers and support staff are in a prime position to help children build strong mental health and wellbeing - and also spot if something is wrong.

There are lots of things that schools can do to support children's mental health and wellbeing. This is through strengthening children's ability to cope with day-to-day difficulties – and helping them to feel good about themselves. Schools can do this through developing children's social and emotional skills to help them understand and manage their feelings, develop empathy, establish positive relationships, set goals, build resilience and boost self-esteem and confidence.

We know school staff are stretched for time, and that when it comes to poor mental health the needs of a child can often be complex. To help get you started in promoting and supporting the mental health of the children in your school, we've provided 10 useful tips and pieces of advice to help you feel informed in the decisions that you make, and also guided on where to seek support if needed.

1 Read our introductory pages on mental health and wellbeing

Read our pages on [social and emotional skills](#) and [risks and protective factors](#) to understand how to build the emotional foundations that children need to thrive, be mentally healthy and learn successfully. This includes having resilience and self-confidence, being able to handle difficult situations and manage their own feelings; as well as being aware of the kinds of things that affect – and improve – children’s mental health, and the importance of identifying early children who are struggling.

2 Let pupils know you’re happy to talk about how they’re feeling

Encourage children to talk about how they’re feeling and let them know that you are there to listen if they need to discuss anything. Build confident, open, healthy and trusting relationships with pupils to help them feel safe. Positive relationships with a trusted adult are an important protective factor for children helping them thrive, remain resilient and learn effectively.

Recommended resource: [Talking to children about feelings](#)

3 Help children know how to manage their emotions

Help children understand and manage their emotions by using concepts that get them thinking about how feelings and thoughts are linked to behaviour, and that some emotions may result in changes in their body, like a fast-beating heart if they’re nervous or scared. Help pupils develop coping skills so they build resilience and also learn how to calm themselves.

Social and emotional skills should be developed from an early age and integrated across the curriculum and school life. This can be during PSHE and broader curriculum lessons, assemblies, through whole-school programmes, circle time or children’s books focusing on aspects of mental health and wellbeing. Check out our resource library for hundreds of free, practical resources.

Recommended resources: [Six lesson plans on wellbeing](#)
[PSHE lesson plans](#)

4 Get children talking about mental health

Help children understand that mental health is something that we all have, and that we should be aware of it and learn skills to look after it. It's helpful for children to know that it's normal for their mental health to fluctuate - some days they may feel sad or struggle, and other days they may feel confident and calm.

Use the resources on Mentally Healthy Schools to help generate discussions about mental health in the classroom and around school, i.e. during assemblies, and focus on why it's important to listen to others and also seek support if they're struggling. If a topic triggers difficult feelings and thoughts for a child, make some time to listen to them and talk through their feelings – and link them up with any additional help they might need.

Recommended resource: [Talking Mental Health – animation and assembly plan](#)

5 Be alert to signs that a child may be in distress

It's important to intervene early if you think a child is in distress, struggling or becoming disengaged. Look out for those children who may need extra support; start a conversation to see how they are. If you are concerned, speak to your designated safeguarding lead and talk about what support may be helpful – this may involve giving them a buddy or providing peer support, counselling or other school-based help.

Recommended resource: [Conversation starters](#)

6 Feel confident about having a conversation with a pupil you're worried about

Ideally conversations will be opened up by a classroom teacher, a sensitive teaching assistant or a playground staff member who is well-known to children. Every school should make sure that anyone working or interacting with children understands safeguarding procedures and has the necessary training.

Recommended resource: [A letter about how I'm feeling](#)

7

Know what to do if you're concerned about a child

Sometimes it may feel difficult to know if a child has a difficulty that might need further follow up and action. The resource below can help guide you on when more support might be needed. If you are worried that a child is at risk, involve your designated safeguarding lead as a matter of priority who will contact the parents or carers and other services as necessary. If the child is at immediate risk, make sure they are taken to their general practitioner (GP) or accident and emergency (A&E) as a matter of urgency, depending on the severity of the concern.

Recommended resources: [Should I be concerned?](#)
[List of helpline numbers](#)

8

Be patient and persist with children least engaged in school

Children with a mental health problem are more likely to be absent from school without permission – this is especially true for children with an emotional or behavioural problem. There are many reasons why a child might be absent from school, but where a child is struggling with being interested and engaged in school, think about more creative and interactive strategies for maintaining their interest. Help them feel that they belong, and work together with families to problem-solve solutions.

Recommended resource: [Childline toolbox – games and activities](#)

9

Support children who are more likely to be excluded

It is more common for children with mental health needs or special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) to be excluded from school, than those without. Be aware of which children in your class are more at risk of being excluded from school and screen early to explore whether they might have unmet mental health needs. Look at what additional support or alternative provision might be needed for those children. Repeating these screenings over time can also help you evaluate whether the child's mental health improves following any action you have taken. This can also be used as accompanying evidence to strengthen a referral made to local services.

The most common reason for children being excluded from school, either permanently or for a fixed period of time, is for persistent disruptive behaviour – and boys are far more likely than girls to be excluded from school. Studies show that parenting support strategies are often the most effective in helping children make progress when they are stuck in patterns of challenging behaviour. Help parents to link up with support programmes which can provide parents with techniques to support their child. Different local areas run different programmes - contact your early help team to find out what ones are available in your area.

Recommended resource: [Strengths and difficulties questionnaire](#)

10 Look after your mental health

When we have good levels of wellbeing we feel that life is in balance and that we can generally cope well. We feel motivated and engaged, we're resilient and able to deal effectively with daily troubles, as well as bounce back from life's challenges.

As school staff, you're likely be juggling a multitude of different tasks and demands. It's important that you're given the right emotional and practical support so that you can, in turn, best support your pupils. Good staff wellbeing can also improve performance and job satisfaction.

Recommended resource: [How to look after your mental health](#)

Read more:

[Concerned about a child?](#)

[Mental health needs](#)

[Whole-school approach](#)

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