

# Supporting staff wellbeing in schools



**Anna Freud**  
National Centre for  
Children and Families

# The importance of staff wellbeing



“Over the last few years the world has woken up to a simple fact: the best correlate of adult life satisfaction is not income, but physical and mental health. Early intervention focused on child emotional wellbeing is probably the most effective social investment any society could make, both from economic and moral perspectives.

The new emphasis on promoting child mental health in schools is a welcome move to help us realise this ambition, and one that the teaching profession has consistently supported.

This raises a key issue. Teaching is a tough job. It can be immensely rewarding but also physically and emotionally draining. Safeguarding and mental health issues can be intense and complex. Children’s behavioural and emotional problems are increasing. Many schools recognise this and provide support for their staff. The new focus on children’s mental health, though, serves as an important reminder to us that we must couple support for school staff with the ambitions we have for children’s wellbeing. If we don’t we will be letting down all school staff.

If we want our school staff to do what’s asked of them, then we need to make sure that their mental health and wellbeing is effectively supported.”

**Professor Peter Fonagy,**  
**CEO of the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families**

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# What do we mean by staff wellbeing?

The term “wellbeing” can be used to describe our holistic health, including our physical, mental and emotional 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 and are able to show resilience and “bounce back” from life’s challenges.

School staff often juggle multiple tasks and demands, so a focus on staff wellbeing has become increasingly important. Taking good care of staff both emotionally and practically helps them to perform to the best of their ability and ensures that they are better able to support pupils. Workloads, deadlines and challenging behaviours can all impact negatively on the wellbeing of school staff.

Poor mental wellbeing may impact on their ability to manage during key moments of stress in the classroom or at school. Staff who have good mental wellbeing are more likely to have the necessary resources to be able to manage and plan during or after stressful episodes whether with a pupil, a class, a colleague, an inspector or a parent.

Good staff wellbeing can have a number of benefits for schools including:

- Positive impact on pupils, including improved educational outcomes, as both staff and children and young people are more engaged
- Increased productivity of staff members
- Reduced absences from work in relation to sickness (both short term and long term)
- Staff being able to manage stress better and develop healthier coping strategies
- Improved job satisfaction, which can support retention
- Staff feeling valued, supported and invested in

# What can support staff wellbeing?

The diagram below outlines universal, targeted and specialist support services which can be incorporated into a school's staff wellbeing strategy.

## Specialist Support

- Employee Assistance Programmes
- Crisis support
- Referrals to occupational health
- Education Support Partnership

## Targeted Support

- Supervision
- Training around mental health
- Regular mandatory wellbeing check-in meetings for all staff using a personal or peer support model
- Wellbeing events for staff

## Universal Support

- Staff wellbeing policy
- Dedicated staff rooms
- Drop in sessions for any concerns
- Staff wellbeing team established and supported to offer regular events
- Staff education on child and family mental health
- Culture of no blame and stigma for mental health needs of school community
- Feedback boxes where staff can share (anonymously) ideas for improvement of school ethos and model good working practices

# What can impact on staff wellbeing?

The ethos and environment of the school will have an impact on staff wellbeing. It is important to build a culture of trust where school staff feel valued and know how to access support. Some things to consider when thinking about the school environment and your staff wellbeing strategy are:

1.

The physical environment – do staff members have a space which is dedicated to the staff team and where they can go and take some time out? Is the staff space appealing and comfortable?

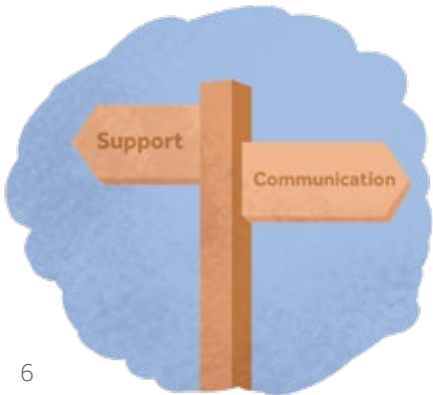


2.

Policies and procedures – are there clear policies and procedures around staff wellbeing, and are the same processes and expectations applicable to all staff? Are policies and processes implemented clearly and equitably?

3.

Is there clear communication to staff about both internal and external pathways to support? Do staff members know how to access support (both personal and professional) and where they can go to find out more information?



4.

Does the culture and ethos of the school encourage open communication, particularly when it comes to talking about concerns? Are all staff members concerns given equal weight?

## Case example: Lessness Heath Primary School

We created a change team of stakeholders throughout the whole school community, who drove our vision and strategy of positive mental health and wellbeing across the school.

Our staff and pupils have yearly emotional health screening, which becomes part of proactively identifying needs and creates plans for future strategies. We follow the five ways to wellbeing, which includes a diet of Learning, Giving, Taking Notice, Connecting and Being Active. We have also created a wellbeing policy for staff and pupils.

Our focus on whole school wellbeing extends to:

- Developing a team of Wellbeing ambassadors from across the school to learn and champion the school's vision of a holistic setting
- A wellbeing menu for staff with social prescription
- Anti-stigma awareness training and workshops for pupils, staff and parents
- Shared lunches and breakfasts to build on connecting relationships
- Staff rewards and celebrations on a half termly basis
- Mindfulness and yoga - which are becoming part of the weekly curriculum
- Regular supervision

We're very pleased to be recognised for our work in this area by the National Children's Bureau, who have made us the first school to receive the Wellbeing Award for Schools.

“

*I have been able to take on board lots of tools that we have given children and use them in my own life. In particular mindfulness and being aware of how I am feeling and how I can change that. This is having a positive impact on my leading capacity and has enhanced my personal life.*

”



# Leading a school that prioritises wellbeing

In order to change the culture and ethos of a school it is vital that any strategies to support staff wellbeing are led by the senior leadership team. Below are things to consider when leading a school that prioritises staff wellbeing.



**1.** Model good working practices and self-care to encourage a work/life balance. This can include encouraging and taking regular breaks, finishing on time, regular meetings with line managers, not taking work home and asking for help and support when needed. It is not enough for SLT to talk about doing these things, they need to model that they do them too.

**2.** Communicate clearly with staff, particularly around any changes that might be taking place at school. If possible, consult with staff about changes and offer reassurance. Remember to also feedback on the positives and things that are going well!





**3.** Encourage a sense of community. This can be done by allowing opportunities for all staff to get together (reinforcing that all staff are important) and having non-work related activities and clubs for staff.

**4.** Keep staff wellbeing and development on the agenda. Offer resilience-based workshops for staff to help normalise the process of speaking about wellbeing. This can be done via lunch time seminars and inset days and can include topics such as managing stress. It can also be useful to provide opportunities for colleagues to debrief with each other on a regular basis.

**5.** Provide school staff with regular opportunities to feedback on any thoughts or concerns regarding staff wellbeing and how to improve it. This can help to develop a more inclusive culture.

# What can supervision look like in schools?

Supervision is a core element of health service practice but has been less widely developed in schools. Pastoral care teams and specialist staff working with pupil behaviour may have established methods of providing staff with supervision, but the idea of supervision may be unfamiliar for some teachers and school staff.

- There are many approaches to supervision. The word supervisor may give an impression of directing a staff member's work, however, most models of supervision also emphasise the supportive function of supervision as much as the directive function.
- In general, the aim is for supervision to provide an opportunity to think about the needs of pupils who staff have concerns about, or to consider an area of work that the teacher or staff member is finding especially challenging and difficult.
- Supervision works best if it is part of the planned meetings of the staff member rather than being something that happens in response to specific situations that arise. The frequency of supervision may be less important than ensuring it happens in a predictable and reliable way.
- Supervision is different from staff support or staff counselling, which focuses on the member of staff's experience of his/her job. In this process the staff member is the focus of the discussion whereas in supervision the aim is to support the staff member with work tasks and challenges. However, in supervision, it is recognised that staff stress may impact on the capacity of a member of staff to manage their work well.
- One of the key benefits/aims of supervision is that it reduces the feeling of being alone in managing a problem. Isolation can cause a great deal of work stress if someone feels that they are carrying something on their own. For school staff who are dealing with stressful circumstances around the needs of children and young people, isolation can compound this feeling. In this way, regular, planned supervision can play a role in ensuring that staff have appropriate support.

## Case example: Fair Furlong Primary School

**“** *Reading my own and others notes has amused me and made me smile on a daily basis. It has brought a lot of laughter to the staff.* **”**

We offered staff the opportunity to engage with a succession of ACT (Acceptance, Commitment Therapy) sessions, which explored ways to support us in acknowledging negative feelings, gave us models to support keeping our key values in line with the way we were living our lives, and ways to support in overcoming trickier situations or challenges we may have.

Last year we appointed a Head of Wellbeing, and have since developed an action group of Teachers and Teaching Assistants (and children) to support in holding mental health and wellbeing at the heart of our school. From this we have developed various initiatives that support daily with wellbeing.

For example, we introduced adult peer mentoring. At the beginning of each term every staff member chooses another staff members name, anonymously. They are then the secret mentor for that person, for that term. We have encouraged staff to write positive messages to one another, and these are then displayed in a communal area. It has proven to give staff a little smile when they are having a tricky day, or to support them in keeping their values in sight. When speaking with staff they felt it was positive:

**“** *Being able to read something positive about you, when you are having a difficult day, is great. It makes you remember why you are here and sometimes (not all the time) makes you re-evaluate and go back in with a positive mindset.* **”**



# Looking after your own wellbeing

Research indicates that taking the following steps can be important in the promotion and maintenance of mental wellbeing:

1.

Knowing personal limits and having the ability to say 'no' when necessary. This helps you to have more balance in life and will enable you to take better care of others.

2.

Identifying supportive people that you have in your life. If you would like to increase your support networks then you might consider taking up new hobbies or activities. You can also speak to a professional for more support.

3.

Talking. There are times when challenging situations affect us emotionally. If you have had a difficult day at school, try to speak to someone before you leave school as this can then help you to process how you are feeling, ask for support and separate your work and home life.



4.

Being flexible around change. Even with the best plans, sometimes unexpected events or situations occur. Our ability to accept change and plan and adapt can help us to manage any potential feelings of stress and anxiety and cope better overall.

5.

Self-compassion. If you take some time to stop and reflect on the thoughts in your head, are they more positive or critical? Once you have identified any negative thought, you can begin to introduce more positive thoughts and 'turn the volume down' on the critical voices.





## Case example: One Degree Academy

One way in which we attempt to look after our staff is our termly Golden week. During Golden week, there are no meetings, either before or after school; staff are encouraged to leave school early. Each member of staff is assigned a wellbeing partner.

Partners are responsible for 'checking in' with and supporting each other during the week (and beyond). Partners can frequently be found making well-timed cups of tea for each other, exchanging small gifts, writing notes of thanks or praise, covering duties, and generally engaging in random acts of kindness. The knock-on effect of this is striking.

During Golden week, other activities are put on for staff as a mark of thanks and a recognition of the stressful nature of the work we do. For example, we book a masseuse who provides massages for teachers throughout the day while SLT members are covering their classes.

We also have a staff social or sporting event one evening during the week. Staff psychotherapeutic supervision is offered to all staff on a bi-weekly basis but this also coincides with Golden week. Feedback is gathered through the termly staff survey which is used to assess staff wellbeing and morale and make necessary improvements.



# Where can I find advice and guidance?

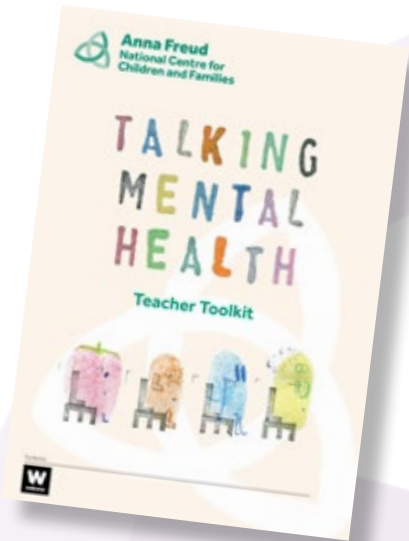
- [Schools in Mind](#)
- [www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk](http://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk)
- [www.mindfulteachers.org](http://www.mindfulteachers.org)
- [www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk](http://www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk)
- [NHS – Five steps to mental wellbeing](#)





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# Schools in mind

**Schools in Mind is a free network for school staff hosted by the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families.**



**The network shares academic and clinical expertise regarding wellbeing and mental health issues for schools.**

**By joining you can access a range of events, training, consultation and resources to support the mental health and wellbeing of your school community.**

**For free sign up please visit [www.annafreud.org](http://www.annafreud.org)**

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