

# Teaching primary-aged children about mental health and wellbeing

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## Linking to existing approaches

- Consider how the mental wellbeing lessons for primary pupils already link to school-wide approaches in place around social and emotional learning (e.g. character education, zones of regulation) and make these links where possible to embed and strengthen learning.

## Habit forming activities

- Many of the small things children can do to support their wellbeing such as mindfulness, breathing, movement and creativity are most effective when practiced regularly.
- Throughout the lessons, there are different ideas for habit forming activities. Where possible, try to embed these ideas in classroom routines to provide regular opportunities. Suggestions for embedding these techniques are provided in each lesson plan.

## Normalising feelings with children

- Normalising different feelings for children is an important way of helping them learn that it is okay to feel different things. Try to find regular opportunities to normalise different feelings and, where possible, offer problem solving opportunities to children to help them build a sense of agency (e.g. coming up to the summer, explain that it is normal to feel a range of emotions about changing classes and ask pupils for ideas about managing transitions).

## Ensuring awareness of difference

- Awareness of cultural differences is important. Some children will talk regularly about feelings in their families, whereas others may not have this experience at all. In addition, different cultures may have different ways of expressing feelings. Let children know this is okay – validating children's experiences is an important part of teaching mental health and wellbeing.

- Let children know that it is normal to have a range of feelings and have times where we feel sad or worried. We all have different feelings at different times, they can get bigger or smaller and some change over time.
- Positive mental health is not about never feeling sad or worried, as these are normal and healthy feelings. Positive mental health and wellbeing is about being able to express a full range of feelings, seek support when it is needed and do small things regularly that help give us tools to bounce back when challenges do come.

## Awareness of the context of mental health

- There are sometimes wider systemic issues that may cause individuals or classes to feel very sad or worried, e.g. grief, local and national events. Whilst having an awareness of strategies to help can be very important in these times, it is also important that children can express their fear or sadness. In addition, the impact of poverty and injustice can significantly impact mental health and wellbeing and it is important not to minimise worries about societal issues.

## Safeguarding and signposting

- It is always possible (particularly when teaching more sensitive subjects such as emotions) that safeguarding disclosures may occur. It is vital that all children know who they can talk to in the school, and that staff know who the designated safeguarding lead is and the school policy and process for managing disclosures.
- If these lessons prompt teachers to feel that certain children would benefit from further support, ensure signposting is available for possible sources of support (e.g. local mental health services, local Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs), school nurse, GP, third sector organisations, ChildLine) and that children and families are supported where possible to access support.

## A whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing (MHWB)

- Whilst these lessons will support some learning about mental health and wellbeing, the more conversations and strategies around mental health and wellbeing can be embedded across the school, the wider the preventative impact possible.
- The Department for Education in collaboration with Public Health England published **a whole school approach to MHWB** – encourage school leaders to access and read this document.
- Consider opportunities for including parents and carers in conversations around mental health and wellbeing. Find out what opportunities there are for signposting parents to mental health support for children (e.g. council parenting courses,

third sector organisations, local GP) alongside signposting for any parents who might be struggling with their own mental health such as GP, local Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) services. A range of mental wellbeing tips and support can be found on the **Every Mind Matters website**.

- The **Every Mind Matters Mind Plan** offers a free online action plan, approved by the NHS, that can provide personalised, practical tips to help take care of mental health.
- If the school has support from a local Mental Health Support Team (MHST), school counsellor/therapist, school nurse or pastoral lead, find out how they can support with mental health and wellbeing, particularly around signposting or holding any parent and carer events on mental health and wellbeing.

