

Classroom wellbeing toolkit

Simple ways to support secondary students' mental health

Anna Freud
National Centre for
Children and Families

EARLY
INTERVENTION
FOUNDATION

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The Anna Freud Centre is a children's mental health charity bringing together research, clinical expertise, and training. Building on 70 years' experience, we turn research into practice to give more children and young people the help they need, when they need it.

At the Anna Freud Centre, neuroscientists and practitioners in mental health, social care and education work together with children and young people to transform mental health for children, young people and their families.

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ABOUT THE EARLY INTERVENTION FOUNDATION

The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) is an independent charity established in 2013 to champion and support the use of effective early intervention to improve the lives of children and young people at risk of experiencing poor outcomes.

EIF is a research charity, focused on promoting and enabling an evidence-based approach to early intervention across the developmental issues that can arise during a child's life, including their physical, cognitive, behavioural and social and emotional development.

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Available to download for free at: www.annafreud.org/resources/schools-and-colleges/classroom-wellbeing-toolkit/

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WHAT DOES THIS TOOLKIT COVER?

We are all familiar with the saying 'mental health is everyone's business', but what does this really mean for school staff outside of the pastoral team? How can subject teachers and support staff best support young people's mental health and wellbeing? How can they respond to students with mental health difficulties?

This toolkit aims to answer these questions by providing guidance on practical steps that teachers and other adults in school can take to promote and support mental health through their everyday interactions with students. It is not about asking teachers to be mental health professionals or designed to add to already-overstretched workloads, but instead focuses on enhancing the quality of the classroom environment and staff–student relationships.

HOW WAS THIS TOOLKIT DEVELOPED?

This toolkit was developed by the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) and the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families. The toolkit has been informed by the latest evidence on what works. It was designed with both teachers and young people to ensure that it reflects the reality of school life and the wider social context.

You can find out more about the development process and the evidence informing this toolkit in the appendix.[1]

WHO IS THIS TOOLKIT FOR?

This toolkit is primarily aimed at secondary-school subject teachers, but will also be useful for teaching assistants, librarians and other support staff. The aim is that a wide range of staff can pick up the toolkit, read about effective strategies, and take steps to improve students' mental health and wellbeing through everyday practices.

This toolkit will also be useful if you are part of your school's pastoral or special educational needs teams, a senior leader or mental health lead. It can be used informally with colleagues, or in planned professional development activities.

1 For more go to p.80

WHY IS THIS TOOLKIT NEEDED?

Mental health difficulties are increasingly common.[1] More than one in seven young people (15.3%) aged 11–19 in England had at least one mental health disorder in 2017. Follow-up data collected in 2020 and 2021 suggests a further increase in the proportion of 11–16-year-olds with probable mental health disorders, from 12.6% in 2017 to 17.6% in 2020 and 17.7% in 2021.

Mental health in adolescence is linked to educational success[2] and young people with persistent mental health difficulties are at a greater risk of negative outcomes throughout adult life, including where these difficulties remain below clinical thresholds.[3]

Schools, in conjunction with other more specialist services, are well placed to provide effective support that enables young people to thrive. The school environment is not only a place of learning but also an important source of friends, social networks and adult role models, all of which can have a significant influence on young people's mental health and wellbeing.[4] School staff are able to reach young people regardless of their personal characteristics, family background or wider circumstances.

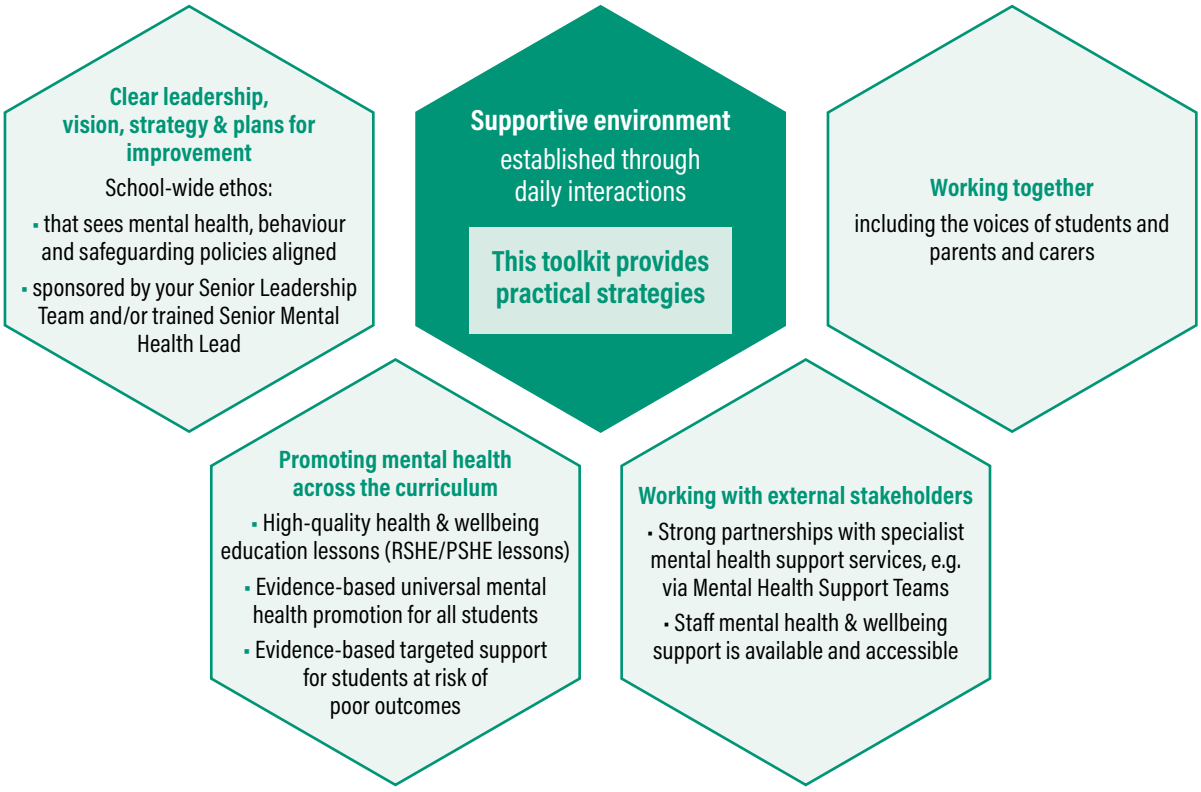
Schools can best nurture young people's mental health by implementing a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing.



THE NEED FOR A WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH

A whole-school approach enables mental health to be prioritised across the whole school community. It requires coordinated action across the school to provide universal and targeted mental health and wellbeing support for students. This support is delivered through curriculum teaching and learning, the development of a supportive environment and culture and work carried out in partnership with wider support structures outside of school.

WHAT DOES A WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH LOOK LIKE?



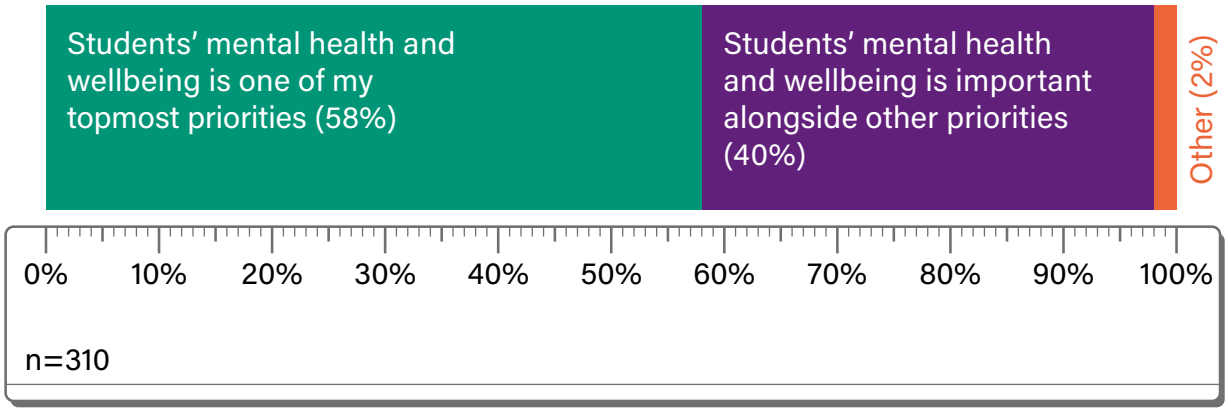
As part of a whole-school approach, all staff members see student mental health and wellbeing as their responsibility. This toolkit is designed to equip staff with the confidence and skills to support students' mental health and wellbeing through their everyday interactions. The strategies provided in this toolkit complement the work of the school's mental health lead and mental health support team (if one is in place) and the work delivered through the RHSE curriculum, pastoral staff and special educational needs staff.

The Department for Education and its health partners have committed to increasing support for schools in developing their whole-school approach, through training for senior mental health leads in schools, and improved links with external services (mental health support teams).

TEACHERS CARE ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE'S WELLBEING BUT NEED THE RIGHT TOOLS

To inform the development of this toolkit, we conducted a survey to understand to what extent teachers and other staff members feel it is part of their role to support wellbeing and mental health, and to what extent they feel able to do so. An overwhelming majority of participants agreed that supporting students' wellbeing and mental health is an important part of their role.

MENTAL HEALTH IS A PRIORITY FOR MOST TEACHERS



The survey also asked respondents what they needed most to better support students' mental health and wellbeing. Responses suggested that there is demand for practical tools or strategies that are tangible and easily accessible and which can be applied in daily interactions. Participants called for everyday activities to encourage positive mental health and help with building friendships, fitting in and developing resilience. Other responses suggested demand for practical strategies to support young people to manage stress and anxiety, including exam stress.

The tools in this toolkit have been shaped to meet these needs. It contains practical strategies that are based on strong evidence and relatively easy for teachers to implement.

HANDY LINKS

- Find out more about a whole-school approach to mental health: 5 Steps to Mental Health and Wellbeing at AnnaFreud.org
- Find out if you are eligible for Senior Mental Health Lead Training: Senior mental health lead training at AnnaFreud.org

HOW IS THE TOOLKIT STRUCTURED?

This toolkit is structured around questions proposed by young people, teachers and other staff. These focused on:

- building supportive relationships with students, encouraging positive peer relationships and creating a classroom environment where all students feel they belong
- supporting students to understand and manage their emotions
- helping students to flourish, be mentally healthy and make responsible decisions
- helping students to manage everyday stress, low mood, and anxieties
- adapting daily interactions to support young people with identified mental health difficulties
- preventing bullying and sexual harassment in the classroom.

This toolkit provides evidence-informed, practical strategies which respond to each of these points. How you use it will depend on your needs as a member of staff and the needs of your students.

You don't need to read this toolkit from front to back, but can jump to the question you're most interested in. If you're reading online, you can use the quick links in the top right corner to navigate to the other modules.

You can also use the directory at the end to quickly identify strategies that are most relevant to you.

Every interaction is an intervention



All notes and references are provided in a dedicated document, available at

www.annafreud.org/resources/schools-and-colleges/classroom-wellbeing-toolkit/



1

Building supportive relationships

This module contains practical strategies you can use in everyday lessons and interactions to build supportive relationships with and between students.



How can I build supportive relationships with students?

WHY THIS?

Building strong, positive relationships between staff and students is fundamental to protecting mental health and wellbeing. Strategies focused on building relationships were highlighted as essential by both the students and teachers who worked with us to develop this toolkit. Positive teacher–student relationships have been shown to contribute to students' attendance, academic grades, psychological engagement and reduced disruptive behaviours. Supportive teacher–student relationships can also help in overcoming family education disadvantage.[5] On the other hand, negative teacher–student relationships are associated with poor peer integration and depressive symptoms.[6]

Research suggests that demonstrating empathy is the main component of supportive interactions. Levels of teacher empathy for their students are linked to reduced school suspension rates and closer relationships with students with challenging behaviours.[7] Teacher empathy also predicts improved student self-esteem, motivation to behave well in class,[8] and improved academic achievement and motivation.[9]

"Being able to treat your students as individuals is probably, in my opinion, the key to education."

Student



Strategies to develop positive relationships

Strategies identified via a review of the common elements of evidence-based programmes, practice experience, and echoed by the wider research evidence, all highlight the importance of being human, empathic and authentic. Key strategies based on these principles include:

- **Greet students at the door:** Research with 11–14-year-olds suggests that greeting students personally and positively at the classroom door improves student behaviour. Where teachers also used the greetings to remind students of expected behaviours, praise those who have kept to them, and provide guidance and encouragement to students who struggled with behaviour the previous day, the greeting increased academic engagement by 20 percentage points, and decreased disruptive behaviour by nine percentage points, equivalent to adding as much as an extra hour of learning over the course of a five-hour teaching day.[10]
- **Make time, if you can, for a brief chat with individual students:** Ask them how their football team is doing, for example, or how their weekend went.
- **A little empathy will go a long way:** Try to show you understand a student's perspective and feelings, using active listening techniques. 2



TRY THIS: THE '2 x 10' STRATEGY

Focus on students whose behaviour suggests they may have underlying mental health needs. For two minutes each day, 10 days in a row, have a conversation with the student about an interest they have.

- **Notice things** and be aware of changes, for example in a student's mood.
- **Share some information about yourself**, such as your own interests, goals, or likes and dislikes.

2 For more go to p.57

- **When you say you're going to do something, follow through**, so students know that you're reliable and consistent.
- **Ask students at the start of the year** to write down the name of the family member they would like you to call to share good news about how they are doing in your subject. Try to find 10 minutes at the end of each week to make a few positive phone calls home.
- **Write a personal note** to a student from time to time, to acknowledge a contribution they have made in class or a success they have had.
- **Don't be afraid to show that you care:** *'I really want you to do well'*, *'There are a lot of people here who care about you, including me'*.

"The best teacher ever? He was respectful and professional, but at the same time he was friendly and you felt like you could go up to him and say something. He would share little bits about himself."

Student

"If they're 11 or 16, we all as humans want to feel appreciated and respected no matter what we do in our field. Showing that you care or, you know, noticing those things, 'You've had a fresh haircut' or, 'Those are new trainers' or whatever it may be – taking an interest is that love aspect, isn't it?"

Teacher

TRY THIS: PERSONAL PROFILES

Make sure students feel 'seen' as individuals. For example, ask your new Year 7 class to complete personal profiles at the start of the year.

This is me: Jordan Jones Year 7 	What I'm interested in: Singing, TikTok, country music, animals
What I'm good at: Looking after my dog, Lola	What I find hard: Maths
What I like about ... subject (e.g. maths, history): I like reading stories about people in history. What I don't like or am worried about in ... subject (e.g. maths, history): I don't like doing loads of writing.	What teachers need to know so they can help me learn: Please use lots of pictures and videos in lessons to help explain things.

Download this template

"'You are an individual person within that class. I know your name. I know little bits about you.' And that's making the person feel valued when they're sitting in front of you. I think that's part of it as well."

Teacher

TRY THIS: USE POSITIVE LANGUAGE WHEN MANAGING BEHAVIOUR

When students' behaviour is causing problems for themselves or others:

- **Restate the general rule instead of naming students:** e.g. *'Remember everyone, the rule is hands up'*, *'I'm hearing lots of really good answers but don't see hands up'*.
- **Convey high expectations:** e.g. *'That's not the sort of behaviour I'd expect from a considerate person like you'*. In relation to negative comments always talk about the behaviour rather than the person: e.g. *'That was unkind behaviour and not how we talk to each other in this class'*, rather than *'You're unkind and unhelpful'*. *'It was thoughtless to…'* rather than *'You're thoughtless'*.
- **Increase the amount of praise for positive behaviour**, giving the praise privately for older students.
- **Keep reminders simple:** e.g. instead of *'Eli you've walked out of the door again without your bag. You're so busy chatting you're not thinking about what you're supposed to be doing…'*, just *'Eli – your bag'*.
- **Acknowledge how you think the student might be feeling**, and accept the feeling but not the behaviour: e.g. *'It's okay to feel angry. It's not okay to hit someone.'*
- **Do your best to find time for a short restorative conversation**, in which you explore the incident together before you next see the student in class. Discuss who has been affected, consider the impact of the incident, and agree what to do next.
- **Use 'I messages':** e.g. *'I feel frustrated when you don't get down to your work quickly, because you won't have the chance to produce the work you're capable of'*.
- **Allow for fresh starts:** When you next greet a student at the door after a lesson when things went wrong say, e.g. *'Okay, I know yesterday was a bad day for both of us – let's just start again and do better today'*.

How can I encourage positive peer relationships?

WHY THIS?

Students' relationships with their peers are fundamental to their mental health and wellbeing.[11] The review of common elements of evidence-based programmes that informed this toolkit showed that relationship skills are frequently targeted in programmes that improved adolescents' wellbeing and behaviour.[12] Supportive peer relationships are associated with enhanced mental wellbeing, self-esteem, optimism and academic performance. On the other hand, a lack of supportive peer relationships is associated with adverse outcomes including risk-taking behaviours and long-term mental health consequences.[13] Research also shows that peer support is actively protective against depression and stress.[14]

There are many skills involved in building positive peer relationships, including the ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, empathise, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.[15]



Strategies to help students develop positive peer relationships

Strategies identified via a review of the common elements of evidence-based programmes, practice experience, and echoed by the wider research evidence, include:

1. Actively promote classroom cohesion

- **Take care around transitional periods**, such as starting secondary school or a new school year, or joining a new class mid-year, which can disrupt established peer relationships and trigger anxious feelings in students. Take some time in September for brief 'getting to know you' activities relevant to your subject area.
- **Create opportunities for students to work with others** outside their normal friendship groups, throughout the year, using random pairs.
- **Encourage peer support:** e.g. *'Can anyone think of a way to help Mo here?'*
- **Give specific praise** when students are helpful to each other.
- **Scaffold peer assessment** with prompts like 'greatest strength', 'tiny tweaks', 'even better if'.

2. Teach and rehearse the skills of working cooperatively in groups

Well-managed group or pair work can be an effective strategy to build positive peer relationships.[16]

- **Provide lots of opportunities for students to work together in pairs and groups**, scaffolding their interactions with sentence starters: e.g. *'Building on what x said…', 'I agree because…', 'I disagree because….'*
- **Develop ground rules for productive group work:** Ask students to imagine and describe the behaviours they would see in 'the worst group in the world', then turn these into their opposites to generate ground rules. Rules could include, e.g., 'Focus on the subject', 'Listen to each other', 'Give everyone a turn', 'Disagree with the point not the person.'

- **Self-assess group work:** Have students routinely evaluate how well they worked together in a group, each time focusing on a specific ground rule, e.g. listening, taking turns, bringing others in.
- **Use role cards to assign students roles in groups:** e.g. note-taker, timekeeper, chair, reporter.

3. Support the development of empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand the perspective of others and what they might be feeling.[17] It plays an important part in enabling students to support each other and resolve conflict. It is central to reducing bullying and the hurt that can be caused by thoughtless comments that students may try to pass off as 'banter.'

- **Encourage discussions that enable students to appreciate different perspectives**, e.g. in relation to current affairs or historical events.
- **Encourage students to step into others' shoes:** *'If that had been you, how would you have felt?'*
- **Create opportunities for students to listen to each other's perspectives and feelings in a conflict.**
- **Use behaviour management systems** that encourage a process of exploring how people felt and what was in their minds at the time, discussion, listening to another point of view, resolution, and moving forward together.



All notes and references are provided in a dedicated document, available at www.annafreud.org/resources/schools-and-colleges/classroom-wellbeing-toolkit/



2

Creating a classroom where all students feel they belong

This module contains practical strategies you can use to create an environment that welcomes diversity and promotes a sense of belonging.

How can I create an inclusive environment?

WHY THIS?

Belonging refers to students' sense of being accepted, valued, included and encouraged by others (teacher and peers) in the classroom setting, and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class.

Research has demonstrated that a sense of belonging is positively associated with motivation and academic success.[18] Students who have a sense of belonging are also more likely to experience positive emotions and feelings of self-worth.[19] Studies have shown that belonging helps to prevent depression and suicidal ideation among LGBTQ+ youth, who have a higher likelihood of facing challenges related to mental health,[20] and international research has found that school belonging is associated with lower depressive symptoms and increased self-worth, scholastic competence and social acceptance among minority ethnic students.[21]

Feeling seen and heard is an important part of feeling valued and developing a sense of belonging. Students from underrepresented groups – such as LGBTQ+ students, minority ethnic students or foreign-born students – may question their belonging more frequently than others, which forces them to split their attention between the learning task and assessing whether they are being respected, which can have an impact on their achievement.[22]

CONTINUED FROM THE PREVIOUS PAGE

In addition, young people with minoritised identities may be subjected to discrimination in and out of school, experiences which are associated with poorer academic and mental health outcomes.[23] A study conducted in England found that racism in schools is a major driver of young people's mental health problems, particularly among children from mixed ethnic backgrounds and Black/Black British backgrounds.[24] The strong link is borne out by a 2022 survey carried out by the Anna Freud Centre, in which 88% of young people reported that racism negatively affects their mental health 'a great deal' or 'a lot', while only a quarter felt that teachers understand the impact that racism has on mental health.[25]



Strategies to develop an inclusive classroom environment

Strategies identified via a review of the common elements of evidence-based programmes, practice experience, and echoed by the wider research evidence include:

1. Role-model inclusive and respectful behaviour

- **Model respect** for all students by fostering open communication, acknowledging different lived experiences and ensuring the voices of all students are heard, valued and respected.
- **Use microaffirmations:** Small gestures of inclusion, caring or kindness – such as listening, providing comfort and support, being an ally, and explicitly valuing the contributions and presence of an individual – can increase a young person's sense of empowerment, positive emotions and connection with others.
- **Use the language your students use for themselves:** Take care to pronounce names correctly and to use an individual's chosen pronouns.
- **Respect individual differences** and acknowledge that membership of a particular group doesn't mean everyone from that group has the same values, beliefs, rituals and needs.



"It's unhelpful when teachers direct questions at certain people."

Student

2. Expand students' awareness and appreciation of diversity

Research suggests that discussing and celebrating cultural difference is more effective than de-emphasising those differences in fostering positive student attitudes toward diversity.[26]

- **Identify areas where you can actively choose to reflect diverse backgrounds**, e.g., in your lessons or in the posters and books you put on display, which can increase students' sense of belonging.[27]

- **Provide opportunities for students to listen** to people from a range of backgrounds and their perspectives,[28] and think about representation during career days and field trips.
- **Teach young people about multicultural role models:** Research suggests that students prefer less well-known or early-career role models over very famous professionals, and role models do not need to share students' ethnic origin or gender to be rated highly.[29]

The Anna Freud Centre has produced 10 practical resources [4] to improve education staff's understanding of racism and its impact on mental health. Read more about issues like representation in the curriculum [5] or teaching curriculum topics linked to racism and handling racist world events.[30] [6]

3. Pay attention to microaggressions

> *"I think EDI [equality, diversity and inclusion] can cause mental health issues quite severely. Just because it's a whole fitting-in thing: a sense of belonging, and questioning. It causes a lot of issues."*
>
> **Student**

Microaggressions are comments or actions that unconsciously or unintentionally express or reveal a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalised group, such as a minority ethnic group. These small, common occurrences include insults and slights, or stereotyping, undermining, devaluing, overlooking or excluding someone. Over time, microaggressions can isolate and alienate those on the receiving end, and affect their cognitive, behavioural and emotional wellbeing. Several studies have found that being subjected to microaggressions is associated with higher prevalence of depression,[31] and increased stress levels, anxiety and suicidal thoughts.[32]

Teachers can sometimes inadvertently engage in microaggressions themselves, for example, by mispronouncing students' names even after being put right, scheduling assessments on major holidays for religions other than Christianity, or asking a student to speak for or represent their entire ethnic group.

4 See at: https://bit.ly/cwt-anna-freud-centre-01

5 See at: https://bit.ly/cwt-anna-freud-centre-02

6 See at: https://bit.ly/cwt-anna-freud-centre-03

To tackle microaggression in the context of your own classroom, you might:

- **Consider ways in which microaggressions might manifest** and the impact they can have on individuals involved.
- **Engage in an open discussion with students about classroom norms**, including why they are important and to ensure that the impact of microaggressions is understood.
- **Pick up on microaggressions when they happen**, even if they seem minor or students try to pass them off as banter. If a student says they have experienced a microaggression, listen to and validate their feelings about it, rather than e.g. *'I'm sure they didn't mean anything by it'*. Return to class or school norms, and support students to reflect critically on the situation. Ensure that those who have been targeted are supported. Follow up on the situation as needed.

"I think just being aware can definitely encourage a safe environment within the classroom, promoting good mental health."

Student

"It's unhelpful when teachers pretend that they don't hear rude or not inclusive comments."

Student

All notes and references are provided in a dedicated document, available at www.annafreud.org/resources/schools-and-colleges/classroom-wellbeing-toolkit/



3

Promoting good mental health

This module is about helping to prevent avoidable mental health difficulties.

How can I support my students to understand and manage their emotions?

WHY THIS?

Two key skills – the ability to understand emotions and the ability to manage emotions – were frequently targeted in the effective school-based mental health promotion programmes that we reviewed as part of the common elements work to inform this toolkit. The EIF evidence review [7] also found that social and emotional learning programmes, which typically target self-awareness and self-management, had a consistently positive impact on students' mental health. Research shows that these skills are fundamental to both attainment and wellbeing, in adolescence and throughout life.[33]

The ability to understand and regulate emotions is associated with reduced depressive and anxiety symptoms in young people.[34] Emotional regulation strategies such as cognitive reappraisal[35] and problem-solving have been shown to be associated with elevated levels of positive affect and wellbeing.[36]

Individuals with anxiety or depression have greater difficulty managing their emotions because they tend to rely on ineffective self-regulation skills (such as rumination or avoidance) more often than effective skills (such as problem-solving or acceptance).[37]

Research has demonstrated that self-regulation skills continue to grow throughout adolescence and that they can be strengthened with instruction.[38] Schools can thus play a key role in helping students learn how to be aware of how they are feeling, describe how they are feeling to others, and deal with their feelings effectively.

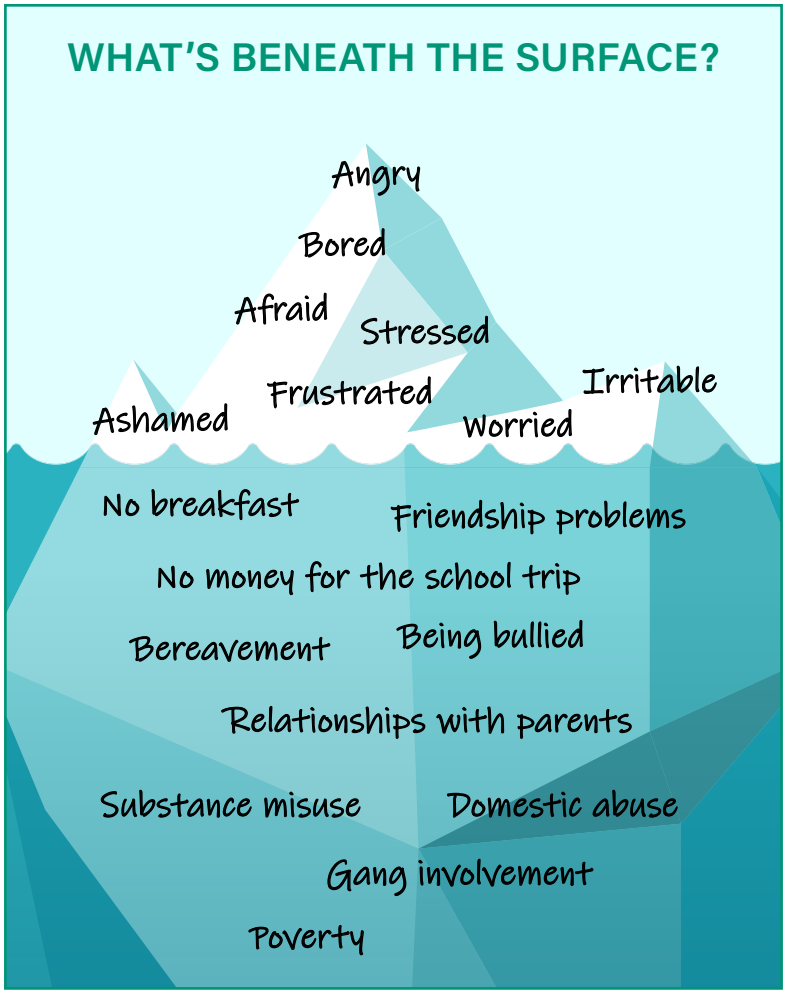
7 See at: https://bit.ly/early-intervention-foundation-01

Strategies to develop students' ability to understand and regulate their emotions

Strategies identified via a review of the common elements of evidence-based programmes, practice experience, and echoed by the wider research evidence include:

1. Help students be aware of and talk about their feelings

- **Provide a model** by being prepared, on occasion, to talk about your own feelings: *'Just to let you know, I'm on a bit of a short fuse today for various personal reasons. Sorry about that. I'd appreciate your help in keeping the noise down.'* Describing scenarios where you felt hurt, ashamed or angry, for example, helps young people see that everyone experiences difficult emotions and that these emotions are not only unavoidable but important, in that they provide signals which tell us something about the situation we are in.[39]
- **Make clear it is okay for students to talk about their own emotions:** Ask *'How are you feeling?'* instead of *'How are you doing?'*, or encourage students to talk briefly about how they are feeling when they are frustrated by a piece of work or when someone annoys them (the principle of 'Name it to tame it').



- **Encourage students to think about 'What makes you feel that way?'** rather than 'Why do you feel that way?'. This helps them see the feeling as valid and think about an appropriate response.[40]
- **Make it clear that all emotions are okay:** *'It's okay to feel angry about X, but what we do with our emotions might not always be okay, so we need to learn how to control our response to strong feelings.'*
- **Use modelling to help students develop a wider range of vocabulary for emotions:**[41] *'It's usual to feel a bit discouraged at this point'*, *'Does it feel like the amount of revision is overwhelming?'*, *'Great to see you all so enthusiastic about the trip'*.
- **Use brief emotional check-ins** at the start of some lessons: Ask students to put their thumbs up if they are feeling good, down if they are not feeling okay, and sideways if they're feeling somewhere in-between. You might also have them talk to a partner for a few minutes about why they each chose the option they did.
- **Assist students to reflect:** If a student has behaved inappropriately, try to spend a little time later to help them chart how they felt and how others felt during the period leading up to the problem behaviour, how that affected their actions, and what different choices could have been made.



2. Help students use self-regulation strategies

- **Model strategies for managing emotions:**[42] *'My laptop's crashed again, and we need it for the lesson. This is so frustrating – I'm really annoyed. I need to use some self-control here – I need to press my own reset button.'*

THINGS WE MODEL, WHETHER WE REALISE IT OR NOT



- **Encourage students to use a 'chill' strategy** that works for them (such as mindfulness breaks, counting to 10, five deep breaths, or physical activity) when they get stressed or angry.[43]
- **Encourage students to talk to a trusted friend or adult** when dealing with difficult emotions.[44] Ask students to identify trusted people in their support system. 8

8 For more go to p.53

- **Help students use cognitive reappraisal**[45] to be aware of their thought patterns and change negative patterns, such as catastrophising (taking something negative and blowing it out of proportion) or all-or-nothing thinking (seeing things as only good or bad). You may be able to support students in spotting these distortions in their own thinking (spotting 'thought traps') and challenge them to replace them with more factual thoughts that are more likely to be true. For example, if they tell you they are finding something impossible, you could say *'That sounds very challenging. Is there any other way to look at this situation?'* You might also occasionally notice your own distortions and call them out in a light-hearted way.

TRY THIS: REFRAMING NEGATIVE THOUGHT PATTERNS

When you hear...	Try reframing it as...
I'm not good at this. This is horrible!	Are you feeling frustrated with this? Take a moment to pause. What do you understand and what is it that you are missing?
This is too hard.	This may feel overwhelming – it is a challenging task that can help you develop new skills. It may take some time and effort. Let's think about the best place to start.
I give up!	This can feel very daunting. But you've come so far already. Remember why you started? How will you feel once you have accomplished it? Which routes you have tried? What else could you try?

"I had a teacher in Year 9 – she would just give us five minutes' meditation time, and she would put on like a piano piece. And honestly it helped me get through quite a few days."

Student

How can I help my students flourish and be mentally healthy?

WHY THIS?

Mental health is about more than the absence of mental health difficulties. It involves having a sense of wellbeing and feelings of happiness, a capacity to cope with life stressors, a sense of self-esteem, and a sense of control.[46]

Self-esteem is frequently targeted in the effective secondary school-based mental health interventions that we identified in our evidence review.[9] Several studies have found that better self-esteem is associated with reduced symptoms of depression, with a bidirectional relationship (where poor self-esteem is both influenced by a history of elevated depression symptoms and increases the future risk of depression).[47]

Healthy self-esteem in early adolescence protects young people from experiencing depressive symptoms during later adolescence.[48] It is also associated with more physical activity and less sedentary behaviour,[49] as well as better physical health in adolescence and during early adulthood.[50] Poor self-esteem on the other hand is associated with eating disorders. This connection is especially strong among girls.[51]

Self-esteem has been identified as an important factor in enabling young people to navigate social media successfully.[52] The relationship between social media and self-esteem is complex. Social media use can be associated with higher self-esteem in some people, and with lower self-esteem in others.[53] However, young people with better self-esteem are less likely to be addicted to social media and less likely to experience emotional problems.[54]

9 See at: https://bit.ly/early-intervention-foundation-01

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Being mentally healthy also involves self-compassion and self-care. Self-compassion entails being kind and understanding towards oneself, instead of being overly self-critical. It includes accepting that self-doubts and negative self-evaluations are human, and that all people experience disappointment.[55] Self-care refers to the ability to promote and maintain your own health and cope with challenges. It means taking the time to do things that help you live well and improve both your physical and mental health.[56]

Self-compassion and self-care during adolescence are strongly associated with enhanced emotional wellbeing.[57] Self-compassion has been shown to prevent panic symptoms, depressive and suicidality symptoms, and post-traumatic stress in young people.[58]

Teaching self-compassion also helps reduce perfectionism,[59] in which a person bases their self-worth on consistently (and at times unrealistically) meeting their own and others' high standards and expectations. Although perfectionism is associated with a range of positive beliefs about achievement and productivity, it is also strongly linked to depression, anxiety and eating disorders.[60]



Strategies to help students to flourish

Strategies identified via a review of the common elements of evidence-based programmes, practice experience, and echoed by the wider research evidence, include:

1. Help build students' self-esteem

- **Offer specific praise that is authentic and relevant:**[61] E.g. *'Great job applying the strategy we learned to the homework'*, *'Well done for sticking with the project – it wasn't easy but you stayed focused'*, *'The way you communicated with each other really helped you to work together well'*, *'It was great to see you helping your friend with…'*. Avoid generic or inflated praise, which can actually lower students' motivation and self-esteem if they struggle or fail.[62]
- **Notice small successes and strengths**, using students' names: *'Sedef, I've noticed you have a real talent for…'*, *'I hear that you did really well at X, Jason'*.[63]
- **Send home good news about a student's successes**, however small, perhaps using technology, 'praise postcards', or taking 10 minutes at the end of each week to make a few positive phone calls home.



"I try wherever possible to catch them being good. So I can praise them … just not over the top so it's embarrassing."

Teacher

"It was helpful when teachers rewarded us or said 'well done' for the little things we did right."

Student

- **Help students identify their character strengths:** Research has shown that interventions focused on strengths like those in the box below can have a positive impact on young people's happiness, symptoms of depression and life satisfaction.[64] You may well already be noticing and providing feedback on strengths like these through your school's values, vision and mission statement.

Wisdom and Knowledge E.g. creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, perspective	**Justice** E.g. teamwork, fairness, leadership	**Courage** E.g. bravery, perseverance, integrity, enthusiasm
Temperance E.g. forgiveness, humility, prudence, self-control	**Humanity** E.g. love, kindness, social intelligence	**Transcendence** E.g. appreciation of beauty and excellence, purpose or spirituality, gratitude, optimism/ hope, humour

- **Reinforce strengths:** When students identify character strengths, follow up by asking when they last used this quality, and when they could use it next.
- **Moderate self-assessment:** Encourage students to invite feedback from you or other supportive individuals, rather than relying on self-assessment only, as introspection may be overly negative in some young people.[65]



TRY THIS: GIVING FEEDBACK IN WAYS THAT PROMOTE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- Comment on positives and provide feedback on elements that the student did get right.

  'That was a skilful use of a rhetorical device.'

  'I can see you used that new formula we learned yesterday.'

- Find specific examples to help demonstrate growth.

  'This part shows me that you have improved with X skill because compared to last time…'

- Value mistakes as opportunities to learn.
- Invite students to identify their own successful learning strategies.

  'Outstanding contribution. How did you learn that?'

  'It looked like everyone was really listening to your presentation. What do you think you did that got their attention?'

- Give authentic feedback when students persevere.
  'That was hard, but you never gave up. You kept on going.'

2. Help students develop self-compassion and self-care

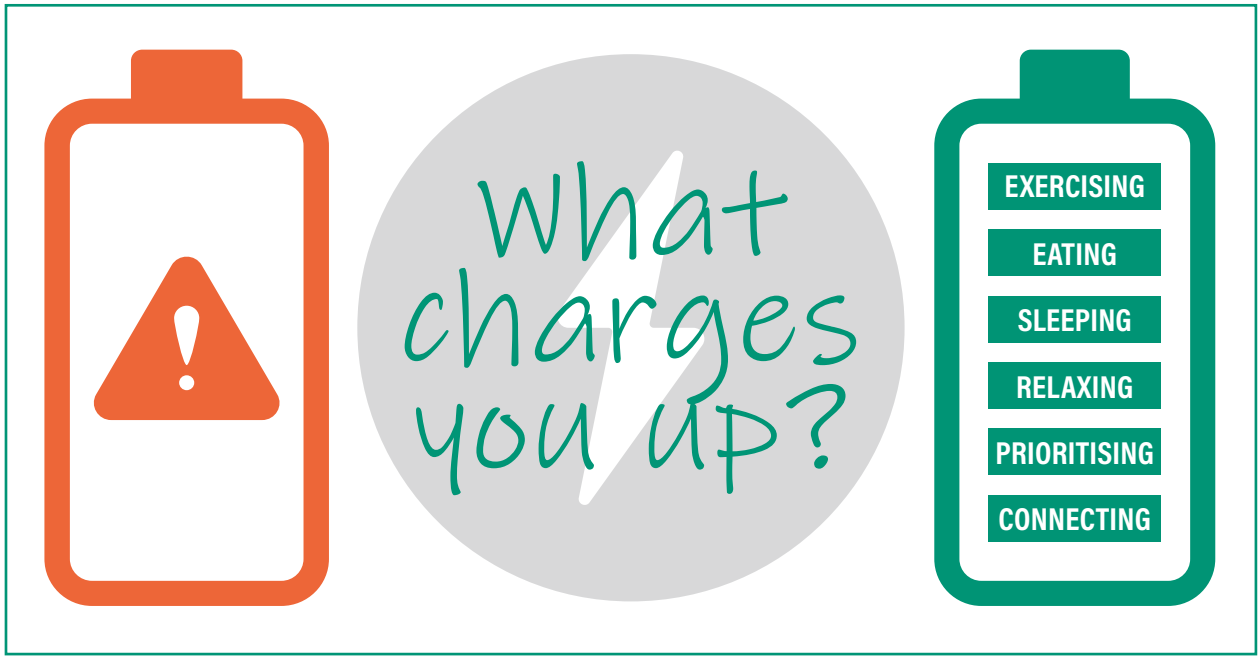
Young people can be very hard on themselves, academically, socially and emotionally. Teachers and other adults in school can play a key role in helping them deal with setbacks and be less self-critical.

- **Acknowledge your errors** to demonstrate that it is okay to make mistakes. Share personal stories, e.g. a time you were able to learn from mistakes, bounced back from a major disappointment, or overcame an academic obstacle.

"It's important that students can see that my teacher is able to make a mistake, they're able to own it, they're not super robots, you know – they do have these moments."

Teacher

- **Model a hopeful, optimistic outlook.**[66]
- **Demonstrate self-care:** Share with your students what you do to take care of yourself, explain we all need to take time to look after ourselves, and encourage them to make self-care plans involving:[67]
  - physical exercise
  - eating healthy and staying hydrated
  - prioritising good sleep
  - taking time to relax
  - setting goals and prioritising; saying no to some things
  - staying connected with friends and family.



- **Share affordable ideas:** If your role permits it, brainstorm with students what kinds of activities they find relaxing or enjoyable that are available at low or no cost.[68]

TRY THIS: WHAT IF YOU WERE YOUR OWN BEST FRIEND?

Have students spend five minutes writing down how they would respond to a close friend in distress (*"How would you react? What would you say to your friend?"*), and contrast this with what they tend to say to themselves when they are struggling.[69] They can then reflect on how things might change if they responded to themselves in the same way they typically respond to a friend.

3. Use positive psychology practices

Positive psychology interventions are becoming more popular as they have consistent evidence of improving wellbeing, as our evidence review [10] found. Two key concepts of positive psychology are practising gratitude and savouring positive emotions.[70]

Gratitude is a feeling of appreciation for someone or something, small or large. Acknowledging positive things, events and interactions is a way of practising gratitude.[71]

Gratitude is positively associated with wellbeing.[72] Research has shown that practising gratitude helps reduce antisocial behaviour, protects from stress, promotes physical and mental health, supports resilience, and improves social functioning and interpersonal relationships throughout life.[73] Practising gratitude has also been associated with improved academic attainment[74] and social integration[75] among secondary school students. Several studies confirm that gratitude interventions, such as 'counting blessings' (e.g. by journalling about the things one is grateful for), increase life satisfaction and decrease negative affect.[76]

[10] See at: https://bit.ly/early-intervention-foundation-01

'Savouring' positive emotions means paying attention to positive emotions, expressing positive emotions, or sharing positive events with others. The opposite of this is called 'dampening.'[77]

Savouring is associated with increased happiness and life satisfaction and reduced depression.[78] On the other hand, dampening is associated with increased depressive symptoms and reduced life satisfaction and happiness.[79] A 2021 study found that savouring/dampening affected adolescents' mental health over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic.[80]

To promote gratitude and savour positive emotions you might:[81]

- **Explain what gratitude is and what practising gratitude looks like:** Share with students how grateful you are about the little things and encourage them to take notice of the positives around them, actively look for them, and appreciate them.
- **Encourage students to think about good things that happened each day**, small or big. Try to get them to reflect on why those good things happened to them – the intentions of those involved – and on the actual benefits the student has experienced. Get them to elaborate: *'What was the best thing about X? What did you like about it, how did it make you feel?'*

TRY THIS: FIVE MINUTES OF GRATITUDE

Ask students to take five minutes at the beginning or end of your class to write down three things they are grateful for, no matter how big or small. If they struggle to come up with ideas ask about the weather, fun activities, friends they saw, books they read, movies they watched, etc. Aim to do this over five consecutive days, if possible.

TRY THIS: DOING AND REFLECTING

Set students two tasks: one, to do something they enjoy; two, to do something positive for another person. Ask them to reflect after both activities on how they felt, and as they remember associated positive feelings, help them to savour the experience.

How can I help students set goals and work towards them in the face of challenges?

WHY THIS?

The positive psychological resources of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (HERO) are strongly associated with increased wellbeing and reduced depression and anxiety symptoms in young people. Young people can develop these psychological resources through applying cognitive and metacognitive techniques, such as goal-setting.[82]

There are various effective goal-setting strategies, one of which is the WOOP method[83] that you can easily teach. Research has found that the WOOP method has a significant positive effect on goal attainment,[84] self-discipline in studying for exams,[85] and students' grades, attendance and conduct.[86] Studies also suggest the method works particularly well for young people at risk of ADHD.[87]

"I had very poor planning skills. But then one of my teachers, when exam season was coming up, he was very proactive, and like kind of telling everyone 'make a schedule' or 'come to me and tell me what your plan is to revise for the exam'. And like, you'd meet him and he'd come talk to everyone in the class one by one. And that was very useful in helping me kind of develop planning skills."

Student



Strategies for setting and working towards goals

1. Teach students about the WOOP method[88]

W — WISH

Ask students to specify the goal the time period in which they will achieve it.

O — OUTCOME

Ask students to picture several positive aspects associated with completing their goal. This could be one especially large benefit, or a few smaller ones. Encourage students to think about how they will feel when they reach their goal, who else will know when they have met their goal, and how those people will feel. Encourage them to write down how they will celebrate or treat themselves when the goal is achieved.

O — OBSTACLE

Ask students to identify one or more obstacles that might make it difficult to reach their goal.

P — PLAN

Ask students to set out a plan to accomplish their goal and to overcome the obstacles they identified.

2. Ask students to work with a partner on a goal

The goal here could be an academic task or a goal that interests both students. It should be achievable within a short period of time, using the WOOP method:[89]

- The partners should ask each other: How will they feel when they reach their goal? Who else will know when they have met their goal, and how will those people feel?
- Partners should help each other consider the obstacles to success, what they can do to overcome them, and how they will celebrate success.
- The partners should also help each other to develop their plan, perhaps breaking down the goal into small steps along the way and writing them down e.g. as a racetrack, ladder or stepping stones.
- When the set time is over, ask students to self-evaluate and reflect on:
  - whether they met their goal, and what helped or hindered them
  - what their partner did that helped them
  - whether they needed to change the plan as they went along
  - how their plan might be improved and what they could do next.

3. Help students generalise their goal-setting strategies

- **Provide merits, praise, notes home or certificates** for working towards goals with determination and showing resilience.
- **Create planned goal-setting opportunities:** e.g.
  - have students take on extended pieces of work and plan how to break tasks down into manageable steps
  - provide opportunities for students to set goals, time targets and success criteria for their work
  - develop class goals for behaviour, attendance and punctuality
  - use curriculum challenges, such as preparing a presentation.

- **Reflect together:** Give the class the opportunity to discuss the feelings, such as frustration or boredom, that they experience when working towards a challenging goal, and help them come up with strategies to deal with these feelings. Strategies for dealing with frustration might include relaxation, distraction, taking a break, or doing something completely different for a short time. Strategies for boredom could include setting a shorter-term target or giving themselves a reward, like a break or a drink.

  Students could work in threes, and take turns in the roles of a learner who is trying to complete a long and difficult piece of work, the 'gremlin' who throws in the thoughts, feelings and distractions that stop the learner from getting on, and the 'angel' who challenges the gremlin's disruptions.

- **Reframe failures as opportunities for learning:** Introduce the 'FAIL' acronym and ask students to think about alternative approaches they could apply in the future.[90]



How can I teach responsible decision-making?

WHY THIS?

The ability to make responsible decisions about personal behaviour, social interactions and academic goals is an important aspect of young people's mental health. It is one of the core social and emotional competencies taught and developed in the effective interventions for adolescent mental health that we identified in our evidence review.[11] Responsible decision-making requires critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Critical thinking is associated with academic achievement,[91] stress management,[92] happiness and social adjustment.[93] Critical thinking skills are also key to navigating the digital space safely and being able to identify 'fake news.'[94]

As individuals, critical thinking generally impacts the quality of evidence we use to make decisions about our physical health, mental health, relationships, and many other aspects of our lives.[95] Indeed, the ability to think critically has been shown to be a better predictor of life decisions than intelligence.[96]

Critical thinking is needed for effective problem-solving skills,[97] which are an important ingredient in reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety.[98]

[11] See at: https://bit.ly/early-intervention-foundation-01



Strategies to help students learn responsible decision-making

Strategies identified via a review of the common elements of evidence-based programmes, practice experience, and echoed by the wider research evidence, include:

1. Create opportunities for students to apply their critical thinking skills

The ability to think independently, rationally and in an open-minded way is something that all teachers strive to develop in their students. You can use curriculum content to enhance critical thinking skills, e.g. through structured classroom debates[99] and synthesis essays.[100]

- **Scaffold constructive debate** with sentence starters such as 'I agree / disagree because…', 'I think the flaw in that argument is…', 'Building on what X just said…'
- It is important to **be mindful of topics or arguments that may make students feel uncomfortable** and moderate discussions carefully.
- Encourage students to:
  - **Ask the questions that matter:** Support pupils to identify the important information by asking questions and using the responses to dig deeper.
  - **Evaluate what they have heard:** Support pupils to sort through the information they have been provided with, to decipher between facts, opinions and ideas.



"My school had a discussion on whether gay people should be married, you know, a discussion where people were allowed to say 'no', that they didn't think gay people should be married – with gay people in the classroom!"

Student

— **Actively question their own thinking processes,** ensuring they present facts and can identify and avoid fallacies.[101]

12 FALLACIES TO WATCH OUT FOR

- **Ad hominem:** attacking another person or their traits rather than discussing what they said.
- **Anecdotal:** using an isolated experience to suggest a general rule.
- **Appeal to authority:** assuming something is true because an authority said it.
- **Appeal to nature:** suggesting that something is 'natural' and therefore ideal.
- **Bandwagon:** basing an argument on popularity or how many people think it's true.
- **Black-or-white:** asserting there are only two options where there are more.
- **Genetic:** seeing something as either good or bad based on where or whom it came from.
- **Loaded question:** asking a question that bakes in your own argument and forces the other person to respond on your terms.
- **Slippery slope:** claiming that A will eventually lead to Z when they aren't causally linked.
- **Strawman:** misrepresenting someone's argument to make it easier to attack.
- **The gambler's fallacy:** assuming a connection between unconnected events.
- **Tu quoque:** responding with criticism (justified or not) rather than engaging with the criticism received.

2. Teach students problem-solving skills

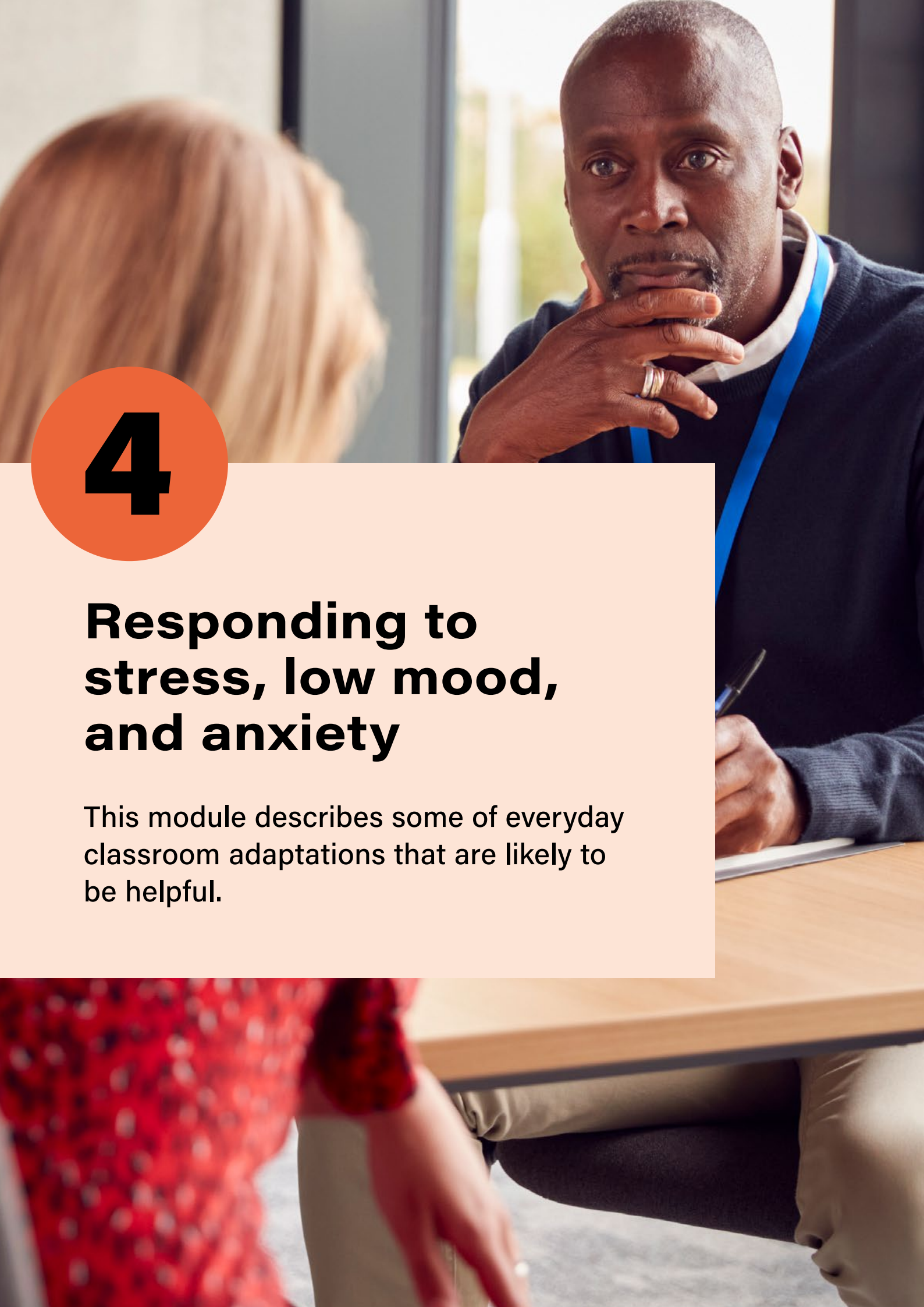
- **Create opportunities to develop problem-solving skills across the curriculum.** For example, in English lessons ask students to identify a problem a character faces, the options open to them, and the likely effects of different choices.
- **Teach a formula for approaching problems:** Teach the formula for solving problems, and then encourage students to apply it to interpersonal problems and wider decisions in their lives.

A FORMULA FOR PROBLEM-SOLVING

1. Stop
2. Focus, calm down
3. Identify the problem
4. Consider the alternatives
5. Make a choice
6. Try it out
7. Re-evaluate

- **Scaffold problem-solving:** *'Let's think about what your options might be… Now you've thought about it, what would the best option be?'*
- **Help students resolve problems with their peers** by identifying the issue, suggesting solutions, considering how a proposed solution would affect them and others, and picking a solution that works for everyone.

All notes and references are provided in a dedicated document, available at www.AnnaFreud.org/classroom-wellbeing-toolkit



4

Responding to stress, low mood, and anxiety

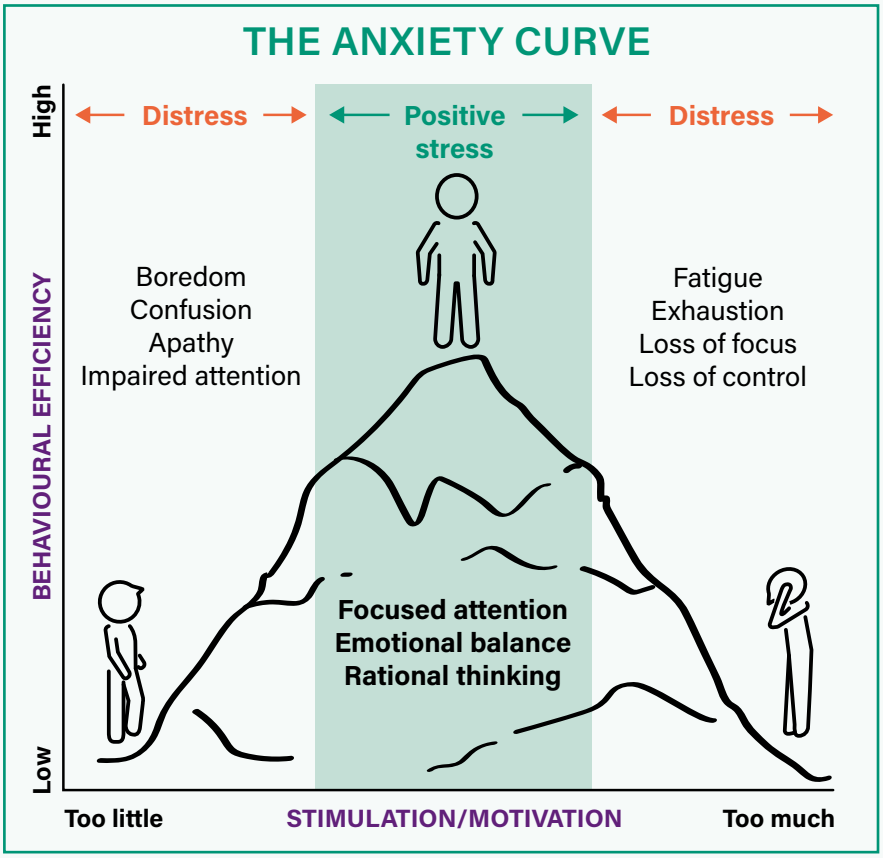
This module describes some of everyday classroom adaptations that are likely to be helpful.

How can I help my students to manage everyday stress, low mood, and anxieties?

WHY THIS?

Everyone feels stressed, low or worried at times. These emotions are a normal part of the human experience, providing important signals that we may need to take action or withdraw into ourselves for a while.[102]

During school years, they are common feelings at times of transition[103] and in response to significant events like exams.[104] In everyday learning, students may feel stressed or anxious when asked questions, completing challenging tasks, or working towards a deadline.[105]



Stress is our body's reaction to a perceived threat. When confronted with a stressful event, the nervous system triggers a hormonal response that increases the heart rate and blood pressure and heightens the senses. The right amount of stress can improve students' performance with a task.[106] On the other hand, too little stress can result in boredom or apathy, and too much stress can lead to fatigue, exhaustion, panic, anxiety, anger or burnout.[107] This relationship between stress and performance is known as the Yerkes-Dodson law.[108]

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Anxiety, stress and depression can manifest in physical sensations (e.g. being easily fatigued), thoughts (e.g. difficulty controlling worries) and feelings (e.g. restlessness or irritability).[109] They may also be expressed through challenging behaviour.[110]

Understanding the science of how stress works can help students manage it effectively, and if they develop a better understanding of what anxiety or other emotional difficulties look like then they are more likely to be able to take steps towards receiving help if they need it.[111]

"We've now got children who self-label, because they don't fully understand what they're feeling. They use words sometimes that are too strong. They kind of mislabel themselves and say 'I suffer from anxieties'. Do you? Or are you just a little bit stressed today?"

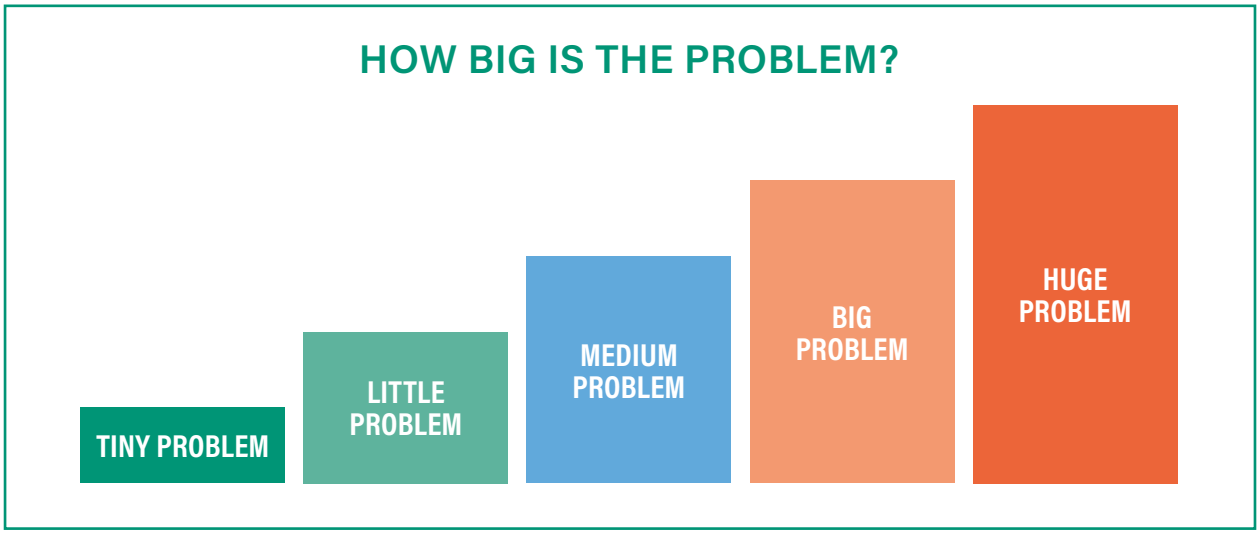
Teacher

Strategies to help students manage everyday stress, low mood, and anxieties

Strategies identified via a review of the common elements of evidence-based programmes, practice experience and echoed in the wider research literature include:

1. Reassure students that occasional stress, anxiety and low mood are normal and manageable

- **Share appropriate examples** of situations where you may have felt a little anxious, low or stressed, and how these feelings eventually passed. In the case of stress or anxiety, highlight how these feelings might have helped and how your body was ready to deal with the challenge you were facing. For low mood, explain that your feelings were normal and came to an end.
- **Help students avoid over-reacting to situations** by asking them to rate the size of problems they are experiencing on a scale from tiny through small, medium, and large, according to how dangerous the problematic event is, how long it will last, the number of people involved, and how difficult it is to solve. Have students use numbers to categorise and represent the intensity levels of any stress and anxiety they are feeling, so that they see smaller problems as manageable. For example, anxiety can fall on a scale from 1 to 10 with 10 being the most intense.



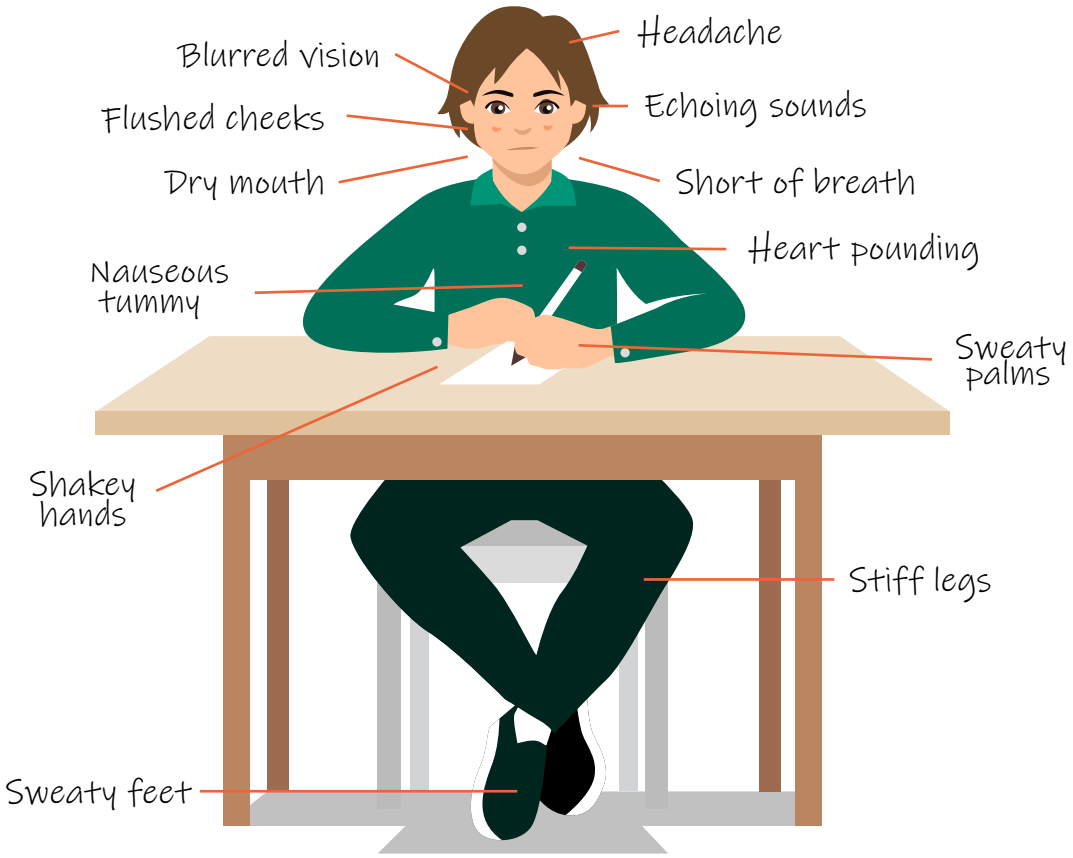
- **Be empathetic:** If students tell you that they are feeling a little low, be empathetic and say that you understand their feelings and take them seriously. Explain that feeling sad is a normal reaction: everyone feels low or down at times. Ask students what makes them feel low, and encourage them to think about small actions that might help them feel better. Immediate actions that studies have shown to be helpful, which they could try, include getting more sleep tonight, eating a healthy meal, exercising, talking it out, or engaging in a fun activity with people they love.
- **Listen:** If students tell you that they feel stressed, listen to what they have to say and validate their feelings. Encourage them to harness their body's alertness. Remind them that not all stress is distress: helpful stress (eustress) is different from distress in that it:[112]
  - only lasts in the short term
  - energises and motivates
  - is perceived as something within our coping ability
  - feels exciting
  - increases focus and performance.
- **Ask students about the intensity of their feelings, and how long they have been feeling this way**. Emphasise that mental health issues develop over time and involve persistent symptoms. For example, when low mood lasts for more than two weeks, it is considered a sign of depression.[113] Reassure them that you are taking their issue seriously and are there to help.

"There should be a focus on how to help yourself too – ways to manage or prevent panic attacks or habits to decrease the impact of low mood."

Student

- **Help students understand that symptoms of anxiety, stress and depression may look different in different people.** You could discuss with them the way some people may experience physical symptoms (e.g. sweaty palms and lowered energy levels), while others have less tangible symptoms (e.g. feeling tense and negative thoughts). Many symptoms will not be outwardly visible to you or other students.

HELP YOUR STUDENTS TO SPOT THE SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY



- **Recognise that there is a fine line between 'normalising' students' experience of anxiety or low mood and missing actual mental health difficulties**. If you are at all unsure, follow your school policies and procedures and discuss your concerns with your designated safeguarding officer or senior mental health lead.

2. Help students manage stress, low mood, and anxieties

- **Coach students to use self-regulation strategies** to reduce the intensity of negative emotions they are experiencing, e.g. a 'five-minute chill', where they undertake an activity of their choice , such as listening to a mood-flipping playlist of music (using earphones).
- **Use zones of regulation (if applicable):** Your school may be teaching students about the concept of 'zones of regulation' (perhaps in a withdrawal unit or through PSHE). If so, encourage students to identify whether they are in the 'blue' zone (low mood, bored, sad), the 'green' zone (happy, ready to learn), the 'amber' zone (irritated, tense, excited, frustrated) or the 'red zone' (panicking or furious). If they are in the blue zone, you can suggest they use strategies to 'up-regulate', e.g. doing star jumps or listening to up-beat music. If in the amber or red zones they need to 'down-regulate', e.g. by using slow breathing or other relaxation strategies they have been taught.

ZONES OF REGULATION

BLUE ZONE	GREEN ZONE	AMBER ZONE	RED ZONE
RUNNING SLOW	GOOD TO GO	CAUTION	STOP
☐ Sad	☐ Happy	☐ Frustrated	☐ Angry
☐ Tired	☐ Calm	☐ Irritated	☐ Furious
☐ Bored	☐ Feeling okay	☐ Anxious	☐ Out of control
☐ Moving slowly	☐ Focused	☐ Worried	☐ Panicky
	☐ Ready to learn	☐ Restless	☐ Overwhelmed
		☐ Unfocused	
		☐ Loss of some control	

- **Encourage students to use positive self-talk:** Negative thoughts have been found to be associated with negative emotions such as nervousness, sadness, anger and guilt. These negative thoughts are generally expressed in negative self-statements that people describe as 'popping into their heads.'[114]

  Positive self-talk is when we talk to ourselves in a reassuring, kind and more optimistic way. Many studies have shown that negative self-talk increases anxiety in young people,[115] while engaging in more positive self-talk can, over time, help reduce stress, improve self-esteem, increase motivation, inspire productivity, and improve overall mental and physical health.[116]

  To help students challenge negative thoughts you can:

  - Model positive self-talk: E.g. *'Today is going to be a great day'*, *'I'm really looking forward to…'*.
  - Build up a positivity bank: Work with the class to create a list of positive self-talk statements or affirmations that students can keep adding to and use at any time.
  - Practise changing negative self-talk into positive self-talk: If a student has a success, for example in a test, encourage them to change *'I was just lucky'* to *'I worked hard and I'm proud of myself'*. If they say *'I'm really struggling'*, suggest they try saying to themselves *'When there is a bump in the road, I keep going – I have successfully overcome other challenges in the past'*.

- **Encourage students to talk to someone they trust.**

  Encouraging students to share worries and fears can help them access support to overcome them.[117]

  You can ask students who they would feel most comfortable to talk to about how they are feeling: it might be a close friend, a family member, you or another member of staff.

  If your school uses student passports, My Plan, or any other system where trusted adults are recorded, consult these resources to find out who your student could talk to outside of school. Hang a poster in your classroom that explains how they can access support in school.

It can also be helpful for students to be part of deciding what strategies they would like to implement at school to help with their stress, anxieties, and low mood. Young people may feel empowered when allowed to participate in decisions that can help support their own mental health.[118] Having a list of go-to options that students are familiar with [12] will be useful in helping them make such choices.

3. Help students cope with exam stress

If anxiety about exams is well managed, it will be a short-term experience that should not impact on students' long-term mental health. If they do not have the tools to manage their anxiety, however, it can lead to mental health difficulties.[119]

Anxiety immediately before an exam is common and entirely normal. It can actually be exciting and positive: it may fuel personal motivation and help improve academic performance.[120] It is only if anxiety tips over into panic that it stops the higher functions of the brain (decision-making, logical thinking, recall, planning, etc.) working well during the exam. Students need to understand this.

- **Share the anxiety curve** [13] with students and help them reframe the feelings they have as potentially making them more productive: '*That pounding heart is preparing you for action. If you are breathing a bit faster, it's no problem, it's getting more oxygen to your brain.*'
- **Teach a simple self-regulation strategy**, e.g. the 'five finger breathing' [14] technique, to use if the anxiety gets too much.

"It was unhelpful when teachers didn't understand that tests are stressful and hard for us."

Student

[12] For more go to p.61

[13] For more go to p.47

[14] See at: https://bit.ly/cwt-lpft-nhs-01

TRY THIS: 10-MINUTE EXAM PREP

In a study published in 2019, students spent 10 minutes before their exams doing one of the following:

- expressive writing: writing as openly as possible about their thoughts and feelings about the exam they were about to take
- reappraisal: reading a short passage from an academic article about how the body responds to stress and how it can be used to one's advantage, and then answering two short questions about the text
- a combination of both, with less time for the expressive writing.

These students performed better on the exam and were more likely to pass the course than students in the control group, who were asked to ignore symptoms of their stress and nervousness. The complete article extracts and writing prompts are freely available in the appendix to the study.[121] 15

TRY THIS: FAST FORWARD TO THE FUTURE

Ask students to press fast forward and imagine how they will feel in a few years if they fail an exam now. Researchers have found that being asked to view a negative experience from a future time perspective reduces negative feelings about the stressor. The study also showed that greater habitual use of this kind of technique (called 'temporal distancing') predicts greater mental health overall.[122]

15 See at: https://bit.ly/cwt-pnas-01

How can I adapt my daily interactions to support young people with mental health difficulties?

All students can benefit from the strategies described in previous sections. This section is to help you become more confident in providing personalised support to individual students who experience persistent mental health difficulties.

WHY THIS?

Research evidence illustrates the positive impact daily interactions have in improving students' mental health. For instance, interventions consisting of strategies that foster supportive interactions in schools and communities have been found to decrease disruptive behaviours and mental health difficulties, as well as improving social skills and personal wellbeing.[123]

These strategies are particularly important for success with schoolwork, because certain mental health difficulties, such as anxiety, have been found to predict lower academic motivation.

Studies show that showing empathy is the main component of supportive interactions. Teachers' empathy towards a withdrawn student has been associated with improvements in how positively the student thinks about themselves.[124] Similarly, teachers who adopt an empathetic mindset have been shown to reduce school suspension rates, sustain students' motivation to behave well in class[125] and develop closer relationships with students with challenging behaviours.[126] Teachers' empathy is also associated with maintaining or improving students' academic motivation and achievement.[127]



Strategies for supportive daily interactions

Strategies identified via a review of the common elements of evidence-based programmes, practice experience and echoed in the wider research literature include:

1. Clearly communicate your availability for a conversation and willingness to support

- **Be there:** Students highlight that teachers' 'just being there' matters for their wellbeing.[128] Unsurprisingly, research has found that open-door policies work in fostering students' sense of belonging and developing school connectedness.[129]
- **Be clear:** If a student approaches you at an inconvenient time, explain that their matter is important to you, and that you want to make sure they get support. You can explain to the student that you will ask the pastoral team to reach out to them. If you think you will be able to give them more time later in the day, invite them to talk to you then.

2. Demonstrate empathy through active listening

Empathetic teacher behaviours include a set of communication techniques that are sometimes called 'active listening'.[130] If a student tells you about an issue or problem in class:

- **Be mindful of your body language** and try not to look at your watch, even though you may be pushed for time. Assume an open and relaxed posture, leaning forward slightly, making eye contact, nodding.
- **Listen without giving advice or opinions:** Use open questions, e.g. *'Could you tell me more?'* instead of *'You might need to…'* or *'In your place I would…'*.
- **Consider how the speaker might be feeling** and check this with the student: *'I'm guessing you must be feeling overwhelmed… have I got that right?'*

- **Acknowledge that their feelings are valid:** If you ask about their weekend and they say *'It was rubbish'*, try *'That sounds tough, I'm sorry'* rather than *'I'm sure the next one will be better'*. Show that you understand how they feel: *'I can see you're really upset'*.
- **Paraphrase and reflect back what the other person has said:** *'So you're finding the work tough at the moment. Could you tell me a bit more about that?'*
- **Summarise what the other person has said and ask them if you understood correctly:** *'So what you're saying is that the amount of work is too much now, you're feeling overwhelmed, and you'd like some help in deciding on priorities. Is there anything I've missed?'*
- **Where appropriate, help the other person to think of their own solutions to problems:** *'What are some of the options, do you think?'*, *'If a friend had this problem, what would you say to them?'*
- **Establish the next steps:** *'What do you need right now?'*, *'Would it help to talk to…'*
- **Plan to follow up:** *'Let's talk more about this next week. I want to know how things are going'*.

"Our job is to provide that safe supportive space so that the young person wants to talk to us."

Teacher

"A lot of time you don't really need an answer, you just need someone to listen."

Student

3. Help students to develop coping strategies

Our review of the common elements of evidence-based programmes found that developing and practising coping strategies was at the core of many school-based interventions that were effective in preventing mental health difficulties and promoting good mental health among students. Additionally, our evidence review [16] found that the majority of programmes that were effective in preventing depression or anxiety were based on cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). As a teacher you won't need to deliver CBT, but you can use some of the underlying principles to support your students.

Strategies that help students learn to cope typically focus on three areas:

- **Prompt the student to consider and recognise what affects their mental health at school**, including:
  - signs that they may be experiencing elevated levels of anxiety, anger, stress or sadness, e.g. psychosomatic symptoms such as difficulty breathing, fast heart rate or exhaustion[131]
  - factors exacerbating their low mood or worries, e.g. not seeing friends for a long time, forgetting to take breaks from schoolwork, lack of physical exercise, sleeping poorly[132]
  - problems they are encountering due to mental health difficulties, e.g. trouble concentrating or not being able to think straight because they feel anxious.[133]



"Our job isn't to fix that trauma as such, we're not gonna be able to magically fix it, but it is to build resiliency within that."

Teacher

[16] See at: https://bit.ly/early-intervention-foundation-01

- **Support the student to develop effective strategies**, for example:
  - Create a response plan: prompt the student to recall strategies (e.g. deep breathing, taking a walk, asking for help or accommodations, doing a short meditation, having a comfort object, saying a positive affirmation) that have worked for them previously or in other settings (e.g. at home or in therapy) and to plan how they might implement some of these strategies in class during or prior to experiencing distress.[134]
  - Help the student to set realistic goals for managing their difficulties: e.g. *'When I am feeling very anxious, I will practise deep breathing'*.[135]
  - Help them to identify negative self-talk and replace it with more positive coping statements.[136] 17
- **Prompt the student to reflect on how effective the implemented strategy or strategies were.**
  - Reassure them that it is normal to struggle with implementing strategies and that some strategies will be more effective than others in different situations.

"Everything is individual, so they should have a conversation with you about your needs. They should not make assumptions. They should be patient."

Student

"Teachers should be supportive and understanding of our needs and not penalise students for actions that stem from mental health differences."

Student

17 For more go to p.53

4. Reduce everyday stressors

Teachers should make appropriate and reasonable classroom adjustments to give a student who experiences mental health difficulties an equal opportunity to succeed in school. This is because students with certain mental health difficulties, such as trauma, may encounter triggers within the classroom,[137] and because essential skills needed for learning, such as working memory or attention, can be affected by conditions like depression.[138]

Some of these reasonable adjustments may be suggested by your SENCO/SENDCo if the student has persisting mental health difficulties that affect their ability to carry out everyday tasks.

But, in all cases, you can also discuss with the student which adjustments they feel they would benefit from, such as:

- **Providing special seating:** e.g. near the door if they might need to leave to take a break, or near the front if they struggle with attention.
- **Assigning a classroom buddy** to help them keep track of missed notes or homework instructions, or work with them on group assignments.
- **Breaking down a task** into smaller, easier to manage tasks, so the work feels less overwhelming.
- **Adapting the amount of homework** or the time given to complete homework.



"When I struggled, my maths teacher throughout was such an amazing teacher. And he knew that if I turned around and looked at him, I would just walk out and I could go to like my safe space. So we had agreements that didn't necessarily mean having a long conversation."

Student

- **Allowing the student to keep a soothing object or photograph** near them in class.
- **Letting the student discreetly take a break:** e.g. walking down the hallway, getting a drink, listening to music during school work, or leaving the classroom when they are experiencing symptoms.
- **Building additional breaks into the classroom routine** for students with frequent anxiety attacks or outbursts.
- **Providing copies of notes** in the event that the student misses a lesson or lessons.
- **Providing alternative forms of assessment:** e.g. a student with anxiety might benefit from doing a written assignment in lieu of an oral presentation, or from doing their oral presentation in private.
- **Making use of the special arrangements permitted by exam boards** such as extended time for examination completion or allowing exams to take place in an alternative environment.

"Put trigger warnings on your lessons. You can't talk about certain stuff without saying you're going to talk about it."

Student



5. Check in regularly to review students' progress

It is important that you check in with students with mental health difficulties to see whether the agreed adaptations are helpful.

A US-based study found that check-ins positively impacted students by giving them the opportunity to detail their learning successes or failures, as well as other factors that might be impacting their learning, such as mental health problems.[139] Similarly, when implemented as a part of school-based interventions, intentional and routine check-ins by teachers can improve students' challenging or disruptive behaviours.[140]

Check-ins might include taking a few minutes after class to check that adjustments and strategies are still working, and whether the student is able to regularly employ those strategies, and to generate new strategies to tackle new challenges if needed.

If you are concerned about a student, always share this with your school's pastoral staff, designated safeguarding lead or senior mental health lead.

"I think it's very important for teachers to follow up with a student, just kind of asking them on a weekly basis, just 'How is this going? Asking the student 'You need any more support? And is this all solved now? How was that like? Is it all fixed?'"

Student

All notes and references are provided in a dedicated document, available at www.annafreud.org/resources/schools-and-colleges/classroom-wellbeing-toolkit/



5

Preventing bullying, cyberbullying and sexual harassment

This module contains practical strategies you can use to help prevent bullying behaviour and sexual harassment.

How can I prevent bullying and cyberbullying in my classroom?

WHY THIS?

Bullying, sometimes called peer-on-peer-abuse, can be understood as a form of violence towards a victim involving repeated aggressive behaviour from an individual or a group of young people.

Bullying takes many forms including:

- physical: hitting, kicking, punching, destruction of property
- verbal: name-calling, threatening, teasing
- social: exclusion, spreading rumours, encouraging others to bully
- virtual: sending threats or posting upsetting comments online.

Research has shown that being bullied is associated with negative mental health outcomes including depression, anxiety, self-harm[141] and poorer school performance both in the short and long term.[142] Bullying perpetration has also been associated with increased aggression, substance use and a higher risk of dropping out of school.[143] Suicidal ideation, depression and anxiety are all most common in bully-victims (those who both bully and are bullied), followed by victims, bullies, and those uninvolved in bullying.[144]

CONTINUED FROM THE PREVIOUS PAGE

The strong links between bullying and mental health difficulties mean that it is particularly important that every teacher does what they can to prevent bullying, including noticing any signs that it may be happening. Many of the strategies suggested in other sections of this toolkit play an important role in helping to prevent bullying, including those focused on creating a positive classroom climate where all students feel safe and respected, and enhancing students' relationship skills and empathy.

Each school will have its own protocol in place to address bullying situations, as well as safeguarding policies and procedures. It is important that you follow these, along with national guidance. [18]

[18] See at: https://bit.ly/cwt-govuk-01



Strategies to prevent bullying behaviour

Strategies identified via a review of the common elements of evidence-based programmes, practice experience, and echoed by the wider research evidence include:

1. Create a supportive classroom environment

- **Foster relationships:** Build strong, supportive relationships between staff and students, and between students themselves, using the strategies suggested in section 1 of this toolkit. Such relationships have been shown to reduce the frequency of bullying incidents[145] and make students more likely to report bullying, which buffers against the risk of bullying problems,[146] as well as making students more likely to intervene in bullying.[147]
- **Establish norms:** Actively engage students in the design of class norms that promote respect, inclusion and dignity for everyone. Research suggests that the use of classroom norms or rules can lead to reductions in instances of bullying.[148] It is important that they are:
  - clear and understood by students
  - written in a positive way
  - consistently and regularly reinforced.
- **Talk about bullying**, what it is and how people are affected by bullying.
- **Discuss the role social media can play** and highlight that it can have both negative and positive effects on mental health. Find out more about encouraging students to use the internet in a safe, responsible and positive way. [19]
- **Empower the bystanders:** Encourage students to stand up against bullying or to report it to an adult.
- **Be an ally:** Ensure students know that there are teachers who can support them in relation to being bullied or witnessing bullying incidents, who they are, and how and when to find or contact them.

[19] See at: https://bit.ly/cwt-mentally-healthy-schools-01

2. Know the signs and symptoms of bullying

While there are some obvious indications of bullying, most signs of bullying are more subtle. A student who is being bullied may:

- have unexplained physical injuries, e.g. bruises, cuts or scratches
- refuse to go to school
- become anxious or withdrawn
- refuse to talk about what is wrong
- start to fall behind academically
- be less likely or less willing to speak up in class
- become aggressive and unreasonable
- lose interest in regular social activities
- be alone or excluded from friendship groups
- lose or have damaged belongings.

Additional signs to look out for in relation to cyberbullying include:

- a noticeable, rapid increase or decrease in device use
- a student's emotional response to what is happening on their device
- if a student tries to hide their screen or avoid discussions about what is happening on their device.

"Notice when someone is being bullied and help them out of the situation."

Student

"Every classroom is dependent on the environment that the teacher creates."

Student

How can I prevent sexual harassment in my classroom?

WHY THIS?

Sexual harassment can be defined as 'unwanted behaviour which is of a sexual nature and which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment' (Equality Act 2010). Sexual harassment can include verbal comments, non-verbal communication or physical contact.

When sexual harassment occurs, the target may feel threatened, embarrassed, fearful or self-conscious. Power and intimidation are intrinsic in sexual harassment.[149] Sexual harassment victimisation in schools is associated with negative student wellbeing[150] and health outcomes,[151] as well as poor school engagement and academic achievement.[152]

Sexual harassment does not only affect girls. Research from the US found that boys experienced sexual harassment as frequently as girls (although this study is 10 years old and pre-dates recent developments that have encouraged girls to report harassment). This study also found that students who identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual or questioning their sexual orientation were more likely to experience sexual harassment than their heterosexual peers. Students who experienced sexual harassment had lower self-esteem, poorer mental and physical health, and more trauma symptoms than those who did not have these experiences.[153]

CONTINUED FROM THE PREVIOUS PAGE

As with bullying, the strong links with students' mental health difficulties mean this is an important issue for all teachers. Many of the strategies suggested in other sections of this toolkit play an important role in helping to prevent sexual harassment, including those focused on creating an inclusive environment, enhancing students' relationship skills, and strengthening their emotional regulation skills.

Each school will have its own protocol in place to address sexual harassment, as well as safeguarding policies and procedures. It is important that you follow these, along with national guidance. [20]

[20] See at: https://bit.ly/cwt-department-for-education



Strategies to prevent sexual harassment behaviour

Strategies identified via a review of the common elements of evidence-based programmes, practice experience, and echoed by the wider research evidence include:

1. Know the signs and symptoms

Evidence shows that some teachers struggle to see the difference between sexual harassment and bullying, so knowing the signs and symptoms that are specific to sexual harassment may be helpful. Peer-to-peer sexual harassment happens across a continuum. While this is not an exhaustive list, the DfE has set out what may constitute sexual harassment as including:[154]

- sexual comments: e.g. making sexual remarks or calling someone sexualised names, making sexual remarks about clothes or appearance
- sexual 'jokes' or taunting, including what students may try to pass off as banter
- physical behaviour: e.g. deliberately brushing up against someone or interfering with someone's clothes, displaying pictures or photos of a sexual nature
- online sexual harassment: e.g. sharing sexual images or videos, sexualised online bullying, unwanted sexual comments and messages, including on social media, sexual exploitation, coercion or threats.

DfE guidance [21] also stresses that 'Sexual harassment is likely to: violate a child's dignity, and/or make them feel intimidated, degraded or humiliated and/or create a hostile, offensive or sexualised environment.'

[21] See at: https://bit.ly/cwt-department-for-education

2. Reinforce whole-school norms

- **Define and explain clear expectations for behaviour:** A number of studies suggest that a safe school and classroom environment that expects appropriate behaviour and promotes tolerance, sensitivity to others' views and cooperative interactions among students helps protect students from harassment and its impact.[155]
- **Challenge *all* behaviour, language and incidents related to sexual harassment**, even when it is presented as a 'joke', including any sexual name-calling or comments. The DfE recommends a zero-tolerance approach, making it clear that this behaviour is never acceptable and should not be passed off as 'banter' or 'just having a laugh'. Downplaying behaviours risks creating a culture of unacceptable behaviour and an environment where this behaviour is normalised.[156]
- **Model how to challenge or take a stand against unwanted comments or actions** in a non-aggressive way, making it clear that this behaviour is unacceptable.
- **Maintain open communication:** Students want adults to engage in thoughtful conversations about sexual harassment, objectification in the media, sexting and relationships in general. It is important that students engage in active learning, which includes discussions and challenges around the factors underpinning young people's beliefs about whether behaviours are acceptable or not. Discussing what is understood by healthy relationships and building on this as the foundation is key.

"I think the most important thing for teachers is if there's something that you can see is making someone uncomfortable, move it away from them."

Student

All notes and references are provided in a dedicated document, available at www.annafreud.org/resources/schools-and-colleges/classroom-wellbeing-toolkit/

Where can I learn more

about identifying and supporting young people who need extra mental health support?

1. IDENTIFYING THE SIGNS THAT A STUDENT NEEDS EXTRA MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

As a secondary school teacher or member of staff you will never need to diagnose a mental health issue, and it is not your responsibility to do so. However, your regular contact with students means you are in a good position to notice any changes in behaviour that might be signs that they need additional help.

Knowing when a student is struggling with their mental health and requires additional support can be challenging. These resources can be useful when understanding what behavioural changes to look out for, but signs may not be immediately obvious, and children may attempt to mask or hide their difficulties.

If you are concerned about a child or young person, follow your school policies and procedures, and involve your designated safeguarding lead as a matter of priority. They will be able to contact parents/carers and refer on or contact other services as necessary.

If the child or young person is at immediate risk, ensure that they are taken urgently to their GP or A&E – either by their parents/carers or, where parental contact is not possible, by the designated safeguarding lead.

2. LEARNING MORE ABOUT SPECIFIC MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

Although it is not your responsibility to identify or diagnose mental health issues, you may want to find out more about different conditions.

If one of your students has been diagnosed with a particular mental health condition, you can best support them emotionally and academically if you understand their condition better.

The Mentally Healthy Schools website has a section dedicated to explaining different mental health needs that may present in students. Each page introduces the condition, shares information on what schools can do to support students, and links to related resources.

These pages include:

- Anxiety [22]
- Bereavement and grief [23]
- Challenging behaviours [24]
- Eating disorders [25]
- Low mood and depression [26]
- Suicidal thoughts and feelings [27]
- Self-harm [28]
- Trauma [29]

You can explore more information about mental health in secondary school students, including risk and protective factors, on the Mentally Healthy Schools secondary section. You can find helpful resources to use in school settings in the resource library [30] from the Anna Freud Centre.

If you are teaching a young person with ADHD, you can learn more about ways to support them on the website of the ADHD Foundation. [31]

If you are teaching an autistic young person, you can learn more via the National Autistic Society. [32] The Autism Education Trust also published a four-page guide for teachers.[33]

Supporting a student who has been bullied

Children who have been bullied may require specific mental health support, and this support may be dependent on the nature of the bullying they have experienced (e.g., relating to sexual orientation or physical differences). The DfE has produced a comprehensive list of resources [34] for all school staff on tackling issues related to bullying, and different types of bullying.

Supporting a student who has become a victim of sexual harassment

The NSPCC operates a helpline (0800 136 663) to support victims of sexual harassment and abuse in education settings. Anyone can use this, including young people who experienced or witnessed sexual harassment or abuse as well as parents, volunteers or school staff who are concerned about a young person. You or the young person dealing with an incident of sexual harassment can also email them at help@nspcc.org.uk.

3. FURTHER SUPPORT

If a student needs further support, you may consider signposting them to some helplines **with the full involvement of your safeguarding lead**:

- **Childline:** 0800 1111, www.Childline.org.uk
- **Samaritans:** 116 123, www.Samaritans.org
- **AFC Crisis Messenger:** text AFC to 85258

If you signpost to these sources, be sure to follow up with students and make appropriate referrals through your mental health team at a later stage, if these are needed.

To find mental health services specific to your local area, your safeguarding lead can use the Youth Wellbeing Directory. [35]

SOURCES LINKED IN THIS SECTION

22 Anxiety, Anna Freud Centre: https://mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/mental-health-needs/anxiety/

23 Bereavement and grief, Anna Freud Centre: https://mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/mental-health-needs/bereavement-and-grief/

24 Challenging behaviours, Anna Freud Centre: https://mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/mental-health-needs/challenging-behaviours/

25 Eating disorders, Anna Freud Centre: https://mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/mental-health-needs/eating-disorders/

26 Low mood or depression, Anna Freud Centre: https://mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/mental-health-needs/low-mood-or-depression/low-mood-or-depression/

27 Suicidal thoughts and feelings, Anna Freud Centre: https://mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/mental-health-needs/low-mood-or-depression/suicidal-feelings-and-thoughts/

28 Self harm, Anna Freud Centre: https://mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/mental-health-needs/self-harm/

29 Trauma, Anna Freud Centre: https://mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/mental-health-needs/trauma/trauma/

30 Resource library, Anna Freud Centre: https://www.annafreud.org/schools-and-colleges/resources/

31 ADHD Foundation website: https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/

32 Advice and guidance on education and autistic young people, National Autistic Society: https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/education

33 Do you have a child with autism in your class? A guide for teachers, Autism Education Trust: https://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/media/11945/asd-teachers-guide.pdf

34 Preventing and tackling bullying: Advice for headteachers, staff and governing bodies, Department for Education: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/623895/Preventing_and_tackling_bullying_advice.pdf

35 Youth wellbeing directory, Anna Freud Centre: https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/youth-wellbeing/

Where can I learn more

about looking after my own mental health?

We know that being a teacher is rewarding but it can also be challenging and stressful. In A 2024 report by the UK government's Health and Safety Executive [36] found that teaching staff and education professionals had the highest rates of work-related stress, depression and anxiety in Britain. This risk is alarming, given that better teacher wellbeing is associated with better student wellbeing and lower student psychological distress.[157] Additionally, sickness absence linked to mental health difficulties may affect teachers' ability to build consistent relationships with students.

Teachers' self-reported psychological wellbeing was found to predict their readiness to help pupils with mental health problems.[158] When we feel we have positive wellbeing, we are able to form good connections with others, we feel that our life is in balance, we do not feel distressed or burnt out, and we set a positive example for the children, young people and families that we work with. Therefore, thinking about wellbeing is an essential part of the professional identities of teachers. To support young people's mental health and wellbeing, teachers must prioritise their own mental health, too. The Anna Freud Centre has produced various resources on teachers' mental health [37] as well as a booklet on supporting staff wellbeing in schools [38] for school staff or senior school leadership. This sits alongside guidance which outlines 10 ways to support staff wellbeing [39] in a school setting.

Key strategies to improve your own mental health include:

- **Knowing your 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.
- **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.
- **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

the premises, as this can then help you to process how you are feeling, ask for support, and separate your work and home life.

- **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 to cope better overall.

- **Practising 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 thoughts, you can begin to introduce more positive thoughts and 'turn the volume down' on the critical voices.

A range of other materials are available, including:

- **Education Support**, a charity specifically dedicated to improving the wellbeing of school staff, has curated a host of materials [40] for educators. Resources include guides, videos and articles, and are tailored to specific mental health topics or difficulties, such as practising self-care, avoiding burnout and navigating depression.

- The **Bupa Foundation** has produced a guide [41] on wellbeing for educators during the pandemic. It details looking after the three building blocks of wellbeing – physiology, mindset and choices – and is one of many resources included in the Bupa Foundation's Wellbeing Toolkit for Educators. [42]

All notes and references are provided in a dedicated document, available at www.annafreud.org/resources/schools-and-colleges/classroom-wellbeing-toolkit/

SOURCES LINKED IN THIS SECTION

36 Work-related stress, anxiety or depression statistics in Great Britain, 2021, UK Government Health and Safety Executive: https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/stress.pdf

37 Supporting staff wellbeing, Anna Freud Centre: https://mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/whole-school-approach/supporting-staff-wellbeing/?searchTerm=staff+wellbeing

38 Supporting staff wellbeing in school [booklet], Anna Freud Centre: https://www.annafreud.org/schools-and-colleges/resources/supporting-staff-wellbeing-in-schools/

39 Ten ways to support school staff wellbeing, Anna Freud Centre: https://www.annafreud.org/schools-and-colleges/resources/ten-ways-to-support-school-staff-wellbeing/

40 Resources for individuals, Education Support: https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/resources/for-individuals/

41 Wellbeing for educators, BUPA: https://cdn.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/03155157/Bupa_Foundation_Wellbeing_For_Educators_Coping_during_covid.pdf

42 Educator's wellbeing toolkit, BUPA: https://www.bupafoundation.org/wellbeing-toolkit/



Appendix: Why and how this toolkit was created

WHY IS THIS TOOLKIT NEEDED?

NHS data shows that the rate of mental health disorders among adolescents has risen steadily from 1999 to 2017.[159] The latest data from 2020[160] and 2021[161] suggest that young people's mental health has further deteriorated over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic. More than one in seven young people (15.3%) aged 11–19 in England had at least one mental health disorder in 2017. Follow-up surveys carried out during the Covid-19 lockdown and in the year after indicate that one in six young people aged 11–16 years had a probable mental health disorder (17.6% in 2020; 17.7% in 2021). This figure is similar for 17–19-year-olds (17.7% in 2020; 17.4% in 2021).

There is growing evidence that young people's mental health is linked to educational success. Emotional problems can undermine academic progress by eroding cognitive functions, such as working memory, and by reducing engagement, persistence and participation during learning activities. Behavioural problems arising from mental health needs can also limit opportunities for learning to occur in the classroom.[162] Longitudinal research in the UK has found that low levels of social-emotional development among 11–14-year-olds are associated with a lower likelihood of gaining five A*–C GCSEs including maths and English at age 16.[163]

As well as having an immediate negative impact, persistent emotional and behavioural problems during adolescence (including those below clinical levels) put young people at greater risk of negative outcomes throughout their adult life. They have an increased risk of depression and anxiety during adulthood,[164] poorer employment outcomes,[165] and poorer general health.[166] Emotional problems during adolescence are also associated with risky behaviour in young adulthood, such as being arrested or committing a crime, engaging in risky sexual behaviour and being an excessive drinker.[167] Adolescents with strong emotional and behavioural symptoms have also been shown to be at high risk of getting into serious financial difficulties.[168]

Schools are well-placed to provide effective support, in conjunction with other more specialist services, because of their dual role in promoting academic attainment and helping their students lead a fulfilling life, and because of their unique position

of being able to reach young people regardless of their personal circumstances or family background.

Schools can best prevent mental health difficulties by implementing a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing. A supportive environment is a key part of a whole-school approach. This toolkit contains practical strategies that are based on strong evidence and are relatively easy for teachers to implement. These tools help teachers build supportive relationships, create a nurturing classroom environment, and support the development of students social and emotional skills.

HOW WAS THE TOOLKIT DEVELOPED?

This toolkit was developed by the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) and the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families. The toolkit was informed by multiple sources of evidence including:

- A systematic review [43] on the effectiveness of secondary school-based interventions to enhance mental health, prevent mental health difficulties and prevent behavioural difficulties. The evidence review included 34 systematic reviews and 97 primary studies (with control groups). It found consistent evidence that secondary school-based social and emotional learning programmes improve students' mental health. Positive psychology programmes also have promising results, and several mindfulness-based programmes have been found to be effective.
- A review of common components of evidence-based mental health interventions delivered in secondary schools.
- A review of school-based practices with evidence of improving mental health outcomes.
- Input from an advisory board of practitioners, academics and policymakers on evidence-based practices.
- An expert panel of teachers, who devised the questions the toolkit should address, provided expert views on what works to support young people's mental health, and reviewed drafts of the toolkit.

[43] See at: https://bit.ly/early-intervention-foundation-01

- An expert panel of young people, who shaped toolkit questions, and provided expert views on what works for young people, what doesn't work, and what teachers should do in practice.
- One teacher/staff survey and one survey for young people to enable a wider group to input on the scope and content of the toolkit.

The flowchart below provides an overview of the research methodology.



All notes and references are provided in a dedicated document, available at www.annafreud.org/resources/schools-and-colleges/classroom-wellbeing-toolkit/

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