



Supporting Mental Wellbeing in Primary Schools

A teacher's guide to developing a child's emotional, social
and physical wellbeing everyday.



Content

Chapter 1 - Emotional Wellbeing

Chapter 2 - Social Wellbeing

Chapter 3 - Physical Wellbeing

Your helping hand for a happy class

As a team, we are extremely proud to have collectively worked within the education sector for over 10 years and to have partnered with over 600 schools supporting amazing and inspirational teachers just like you.

As guardians of our children's education, we know that the pressures you face to not only nurture the academic performance of those in your care, but to help them build emotional resilience, social skills, and self-belief, are immense. And that was before a global pandemic!

In the UK, Barnardo's reports that 81% of the children their frontline personnel are working with are experiencing increasing mental health issues. A study by Young Minds shows that 74% of other teachers and staff feel that schools being closed for a prolonged period has had a negative impact on their young people's mental health.

Together we must continue to focus on children's holistic health – on their physical, emotional, and social wellbeing. To support them in dealing with all of their feelings – from anxiety, anger, and sadness to frustration, confusion, and disconnect.

Which is why we've created this dedicated guide just for you.

It's a step-by-step guide to help you support children's mental health and wellbeing in your primary school.

We've broken it down into 3 bite size chunks, and have included some simple tools for you to use in your classroom to support your children's wellbeing:

- **Chapter 1 – Emotional Wellness**
- **Chapter 2 – Social Wellness**
- **Chapter 3 – Physical Wellness**

This handy guide can be accessed anytime, anywhere, by you and your colleagues. It's just a little something to give you the extra support you may need to get you through this crazy, crazy journey.

Imogen Buxton-Pickles | Founder and Director of imoves



Chapter 1 - Emotional Wellness

Emotional wellness is that feeling you get when you are happy and motivated despite the stresses and strains of everyday life.

This does not mean that you're happy all the time, far from it.

But it does mean that you are motivated to tackle the challenges that life may throw at you.

If you are not feeling emotionally well, you may feel symptoms such as anxiety, depression and a lack of focus or motivation. This can affect any of us at any time, but our childhood is an excellent time to be able to learn and understand how we can be emotionally well and how to respond if we're feeling emotionally unwell for any reason.

Being able to support our children's emotional wellbeing and provide the tools and strategies to cope will prove valuable, not only now, but for the rest of their lives.

Mental Strength and Resilience

Coping with the anxieties of school life and then real life requires mental strength. Giving children tools to cope with their feelings can positively affect a child's perception of a problem or a stressful situation.

Here's a couple of great activities to try with your children.

The Grumpy Jar

What you may need: *Transparent container / Tube of glitter / A little imagination*

This is a great way for children to visually understand their feelings, and an effective method to show them useful techniques that they can use (at any age) to manage their emotions in a positive way.

Do this together as a class, or you can incorporate it into a lesson and ask each child to create their own personal 'Grumpy Jar'.

Here's how:

- ✓ Fill a transparent container with water and glitter and pop the lid back on.
- ✓ Shake the jar and ask the children to watch the glitter swirling around.
- ✓ The swirling glitter represents the brain when it's full of worry or stress - *chaotic and out of control!*

When children feel like this, it's important to give them a tool to calm them down, like shape breathing.

Now explain to your children that the glitter represents their feelings of anxiety which can be managed using their breathing if they feel stressed or overwhelmed.



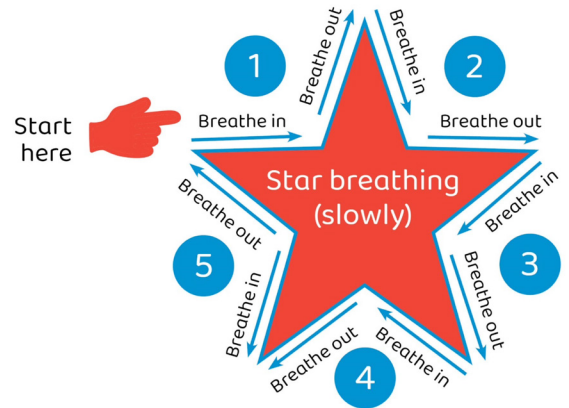
Use the star breathing technique (below) until the glitter has settled in the water.

Shape Breathing Technique

Teach your children how to calm themselves using this simple star breathing technique.

- ✔ Start by holding up one hand with your fingers stretched out like a star
- ✔ As you breathe in and out follow each finger with the index finger of your opposite hand

This technique can be used to manage emotions in a simple and effective way.



Worry Monster

The worry monster is a popular activity that's often used by teachers to monitor worries, concerns and anxieties that children may be experiencing.

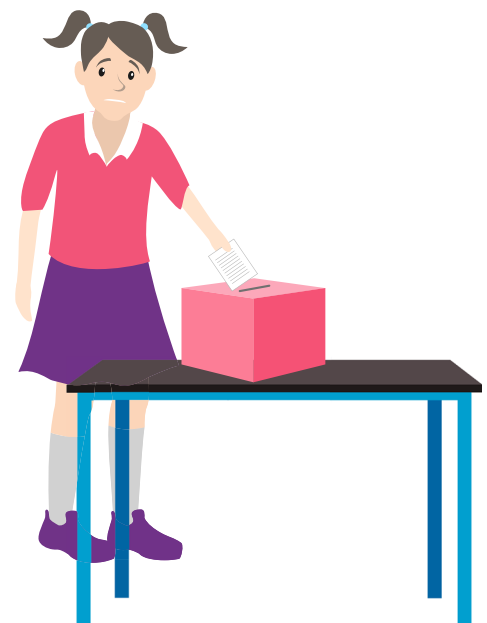
Here's how it works:

- ✔ Get an empty box and cut a 1 to 2-inch-wide slot in the lid
- ✔ Decorate your box however you want!
- ✔ Anytime your children have a worry, they write it down on a piece of paper and pop into the worry monster box.

You can then discuss the general matter as a group if it's a recurring concern, like exams.

Some children may need additional support if they have raised issues like bullying, friendships, home life or school work.

You'll find even more mood management activities like these on the imoves platform, including lots more breathing and calming techniques for children aged 4 to 11 years old.



Developing Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the ability to be fully present and aware of where we are and what we are doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by the world around us.

Mindfulness doesn't remove difficulties or challenges from children's lives, but it helps them to deal with these situations and the negative emotions that come with them – whether that be anger, fear or disappointment.

For children of all ages, being mindful helps them to acknowledge that they're OK, that they're safe and that they're surrounded by people who care about them.

Here's a couple of great activities to try with your children.



Chair Based Pilates

What you may need: *Chair / A Quiet Place*

Pilates is perfect for not only helping children to breathe healthily (from the diaphragm), maintain good posture and improve core strength, but it also helps children become more mindful and more relaxed – supporting their learning capabilities.

This simple exercise can be done with all your children no matter what age or activity level

Ask your children to sit comfortably – back stretched, shoulders down and hands on their knees. Then, guide them through this simple exercise...



- ⦿ Step 1 | Take slow breaths in and out (counting to five each time). Raise both of your arms as you breathe in, and lower them as you breathe out. Repeat four times
- ⦿ Step 2 | Curl your spine forwards until your chest is on your knees, then slowly curl back up to a sitting position. Repeat three times
- ⦿ Step 3 | Roll your shoulders backwards three times and then stretch up as tall as you can go, with your arms above your head. Again, repeat three times
- ⦿ Step 4 | Twist your body from the waist up right to left three times
- ⦿ Step 5 | Clench your fists into a ball and hold for five seconds, then stretch your fingers out as wide as they'll go. Repeat three times

Guided Meditation

What you may need: *Meditation Scripts / A Quiet Place*

Meditation is designed to encourage a heightened state of awareness and concentration, and can be an amazing way for children to learn to be present in the moment, fully engaged, calm and restful. Just a few minutes of meditation can have powerful results.

Script for younger children:

Floating on a Cloud

Imagine a big fluffy cloud floating above you. See it come down gently beside you.

Imagine what your cloud looks like. What colour is it? Does it have a shape?

This is your own special cloud. You are completely safe and happy when you're on your cloud. Climb up onto your cloud and it will take you anywhere you want to go. What things do you see as you float on your cloud? Where will it take you?

Let your cloud fly you to a special place where you can rest quietly and feel peaceful.



Script for older children:

Rainbows

Imagine a big, beautiful rainbow in front of you. See all of its colours. Feel the colours.

Imagine the colour red is glowing brighter than the rest, and there is red all around you. Breathe in the colour red. Think to yourself: I am safe. Say to yourself: "I feel safe."

Now, imagine the colour orange is glowing brighter, and orange is all around you. Breathe in orange. Think to yourself: I feel my feelings stirring in my body. Say to yourself: "I feel peaceful."

Next, imagine the colour yellow is glowing all around you. Breathe in yellow. Think to yourself: I am powerful. Say to yourself: "I am confident."

Now, imagine the colour green is glowing brighter, and there is green all around you. Breathe in the colour green. Think to yourself: My friends and family love me. Say to yourself: "I feel loved."

Imagine the colour light blue is getting brighter, and light blue is all around you. Breathe in the glowing light blue. Think to yourself: People listen when I talk, and I am a good listener. Say to yourself: "I feel heard."

Now imagine the colour indigo is getting brighter, and indigo is all around you. Breathe in indigo. Think to yourself: I have a great imagination. Say to yourself: "I see great things happening for me."

Now imagine the colour purple is getting brighter, and the colour purple is all around you. Breathe in purple. Think to yourself: I am wise. Say to yourself: "I am smart."

Take one last look at your big, bright, beautiful rainbow, and notice if you see anything, feel anything or hear anything. Now take a deep breath and wiggle your toes. Take another deep breath and wiggle your fingers.

Take one last deep breath, and open your eyes when you're ready.

As you and your children become more familiar with guided meditation, you may want to write your own scripts, or have each child create their own.

Growth Mindset

Learning how to cope in stressful situations and then being mentally strong enough to find a way to solve a problem is a process that should be addressed as soon as a child can understand the concept "I can't do it yet, but if I practice, I CAN".

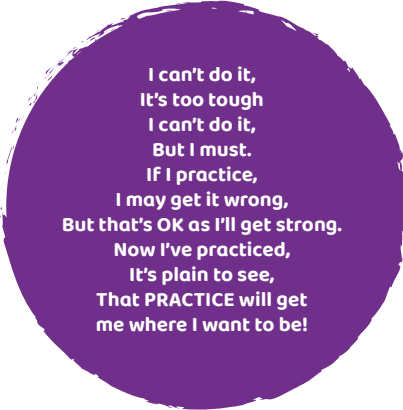
Here's a couple of great activities to try with your children.

Create a Poem

What you may need: *Paper / Pen / A touch of bravery*

Create a simple poem around a growth mindset theme such as The POWER of PRACTICE.

Below is a short verse to inspire you:



I can't do it,
It's too tough
I can't do it,
But I must.
If I practice,
I may get it wrong,
But that's OK as I'll get strong.
Now I've practiced,
It's plain to see,
That PRACTICE will get
me where I want to be!

- ⤵ In small groups, children can use body percussion or a backbeat to bring the poem to life.
- ⤵ You may want to adapt this for older children by asking them to write their own poem or rap, and then bring it to life with music and actions.
- ⤵ Another lovely idea is to collectively agree on a phrase that children can say to themselves or others, that reminds them to PERSEVERE even if a task appears too difficult.

You might also want to use positive messages to help inspire your children to create poems that will motivate themselves and each other.

Growth Mindset Posters

Growth Mindset posters can be created and stuck on the walls of your classroom - children can design their own and you'll find loads of free ones online to inspire them. Here's a few that feature in the imoves mental health and wellbeing programme



Chapter 2 - Social Wellness

In this chapter we look at social wellness and how we can help your pupils build and maintain healthy relationships with friends and be respectful of the environment we all share.

Healthy relationships and friendships

The restrictions during the pandemic have limited the opportunity to socialise with friends for an extended period and may naturally create feelings of nervousness and apprehension now children are starting to rebuild those relationships again.

Now that our children are back within the school environment there are a whole host of ways in which we can facilitate and encourage that re-connection.

Trust Balance

This is a brilliant and fun way to re-establish trust, connection and communication between children and their classmates - it also encourages a little healthy competition between friends!

In small groups (of say three or four) or in pairs, task your children with coming up with three individual counterbalance positions – where each child supports the other to balance.

For example, each child could stand on one leg with an arm raised above their heads and reach out with the other arm to hold hands with their partners.

Or, two children could stand facing each other with their feet touching. They hold hands and lean backwards – using each other to stop themselves from falling backwards.

Depending on the year group you are teaching, you could encourage lots of creativity with the positions.



Friendship Rap

Use a short poem about friendship, and create a group discussion to uncover the meaning behind the words.

Split your class into small groups and ask them to create a short performance to express what the poem means to them, this could be a rap, a dance or a theatre style performance – anything goes!

This approach helps individuals to discuss and explore what friendship means to them.



Thankfulness Paperchain

A great way to strengthen children's connections with others and help them to identify everything they're thankful for is by using the thankfulness paperchain.

This group activity can be integrated into an art or PSHE lesson, and sees children create a colourful paper chain that can be displayed in the classroom as a reminder of all the positive things that your children collectively have in their lives.



Here how it works:

1. Ask your children to cut out strips of paper.
2. Think of something they are thankful for
3. Write, draw or stick pictures on their strip of paper to show this
4. Ask the children to share with their classmates
5. Loop the strips of paper together and hang in a prominent place in the classroom

You could repeat this exercise throughout the school term to focus on other areas such as what makes them happiest, or what they are most grateful for. You can then hang your paper chains around your classroom, school corridors or hall.

Healthy environment

When children feel proud of their learning space and environment it will improve their mood, behaviour and even reduce stress. Declutter your classroom where possible and give children the responsibility for their own space and communal space.

Here's a couple of great activities to try with your children.

Recycling

What you may need: *Paper | Coloured Pens | Initiative*

Create your own recycling worksheet (using some or all of the recycling types on our illustration below). Set your children off on a hunt around their classroom and school grounds, looking for anything they can find that could be recycled.

They should write each item next to the correct recycling bin on their worksheet. As a group, they can discuss their findings and agree on ways to keep their environment clean, tidy, and sustainable.



Chapter 3 - Physical Wellness

You'll have seen numerous times in your classroom the impact that being physically active has on a child.

Not only does it have the obvious benefits from a physical health perspective (strengthens muscles and bones, prevents excessive weight gain and helps reduce the risk of conditions such as cancer and diabetes), but the mental effects of physical movement are huge.

With exercise comes increased confidence, better concentration and generally happier children.

A study within primary schools by the BBC and Premier League initiative, Super Movers, found exercise to increase brain speed, the ability to process information, and to apply it to tasks by almost 20%. The study also found that all the children who undertook some form of exercise showed a significantly improved mood straight afterwards.



Using activity to improve focus

So, what can you introduce into your day if your children need a little more focus?

There are lots of activities you can do together to get your children moving and motivated, and which can be incorporated into every lesson – no matter what the subject.

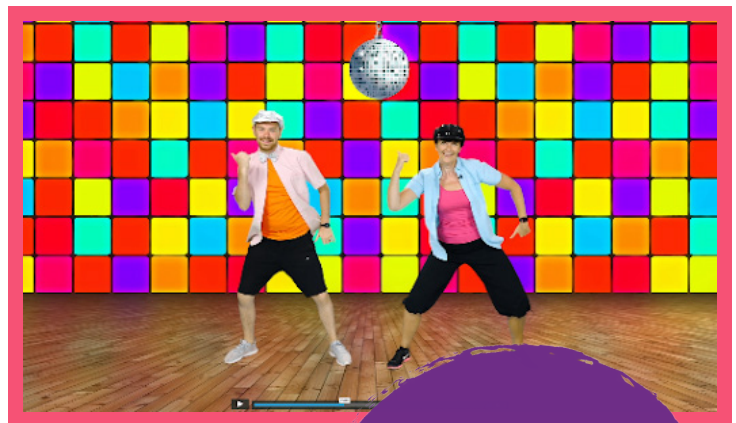
Here are a couple of activities to try with your children.

Active Blasts

A short blast (even just two minutes) of physical exertion at any time of the day can do wonders for a child's energy levels, focus and motivation. Why not start the day with a quick workout to get everyone in the mood for a morning of learning?

Ask your children to choose their favourite piece of music (make sure it's high energy!), and get them doing a couple of minutes of simple exercises they can do in front of their desks – star jumps, hops, or burpees.

Do the same before your afternoon lessons to get everyone invigorated and ready to go after the post-lunch slump!



There are 100's of fun and interactive active blasts on the imoves platform.

Log in or create your free account at imoves.com



The 'Choose Between' Game

The next step is to start adding movement into sedentary lessons - an easy concept to start with is "choose between" which can be introduced in ANY lesson.

It involves your children giving an answer to a question through movement rather than speech.

Firstly, think of two physical actions - for example 'A Dab' and 'A Star Jump' (*these actions can be changed every time you play the game - perhaps ask each of your children to nominate their own favourite action and compile a collaborative list*).

Then, ask the class a question that has two possible answers (such as higher or lower, true or false, hotter or colder) - and they have to answer by either 'dabbing' or 'star jumping'.

For older children, you can increase the number of potential responses to a question and add in more movements.

The role of food to improve wellness

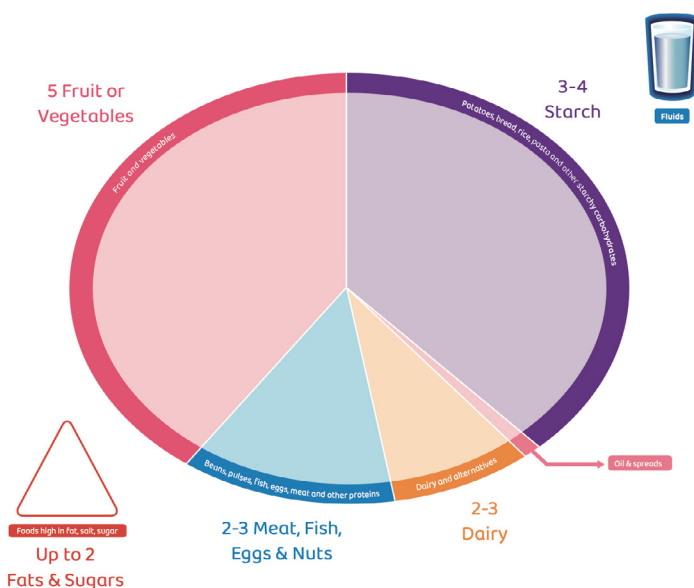
Good fuel is essential for growth, energy, and development; so inspiring good food choices as early as possible in a child's life can only be a good thing.

Food group games

What you may need: *Flashcards / sticky tape / Fun!*

Create some 'food flashcards' featuring different types of food like apples, milk and fish. Download an 'eat well plate' template for each child.

Eat Well Plate



For younger children (aged 5 - 7 years) you could use 'food flashcards' with hints and clues about the food group they belong to.

Stick your 'food flashcards' all over the classroom using various heights and hard to reach places. They should not be hidden, but instead make sure the children do plenty of bending, stretching and crawling to find them.

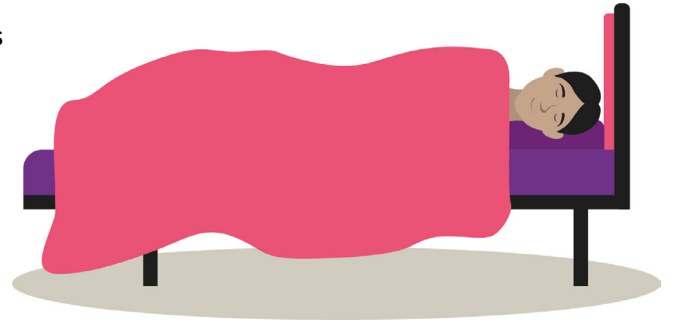
Make sure the 'food flashcards' are placed randomly. Children should work together in small groups searching for pictures of the different foods and pop them in the correct section of your **Eat Well Plate**.

The role of sleep to improve wellness

A good sleep routine is key to having a happy, productive and fun day at school.

Deeper sleep improves the ability to cope with stress, plus quality sleep can help to boost the immune system too.

- ✔ Being more active throughout the day means that children are physically more tired enabling better-quality sleep.
- ✔ Being more active also reduces stress enabling better quality sleep.
- ✔ Encourage the same routine each night, omitting caffeine and technology devices at least 2 hours before they intend to sleep.
- ✔ Embolden children to make better choices by setting up a sleep experiment for one week. Encourage children to make tweaks to their bedtime routine, recording the impact these changes have made in relation to their focus at school, energy levels and mood.



Use our group sleep experiment to help children understand their sleep pattern and how a few small changes could help them get better quality sleep. This type of activity helps children to understand the benefits of better sleep first-hand, which in theory should help them to make better choices before bedtime.

A final thought from Imogen...

I hope you are now thinking "I can do this!"

You may feel less worried about how to tackle the mental health and wellbeing of your children in a world where we are all having to adapt after Covid-19.

There's lots of high-quality support out there including the resources from imoves which includes a full mental health and wellbeing programme to support your curriculum.

I know you'll pull out all the stops to create a brighter, happier, healthier classroom to help your children overcome anxiety, manage their mood and negative feelings and achieve their amazing potential.

YOUR mental health is just as important, so make sure you take some time to think about YOU! And join your children on their healthy journey by getting stuck into some of the activities in the classroom.

Let me know if this report was useful, or if there are any other activities of your own that you would like me to share with my network of like-minded teachers – it's always great to inspire each other!

You can find me at imogen@imoves.com.

Best wishes,
Imogen

PS. You'll find loads more resources, CPD support and teaching guides on the imoves platform. Log in or create your free account at [imoves.com](https://www.imoves.com)