



Looking after each other & ourselves

A guide to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of staff at schools and colleges during periods of disruption



Anna Freud
National Centre for
Children and Families

Good wellbeing

When we think about wellbeing, we are thinking about our physical, mental and emotional health. Good wellbeing is usually indicative of good balance in life. At this time of change and uncertainty, focussing on our wellbeing becomes even more important.

We understand that the school and college setting has significantly changed in the past weeks and may continue to evolve over the coming months. During this time it is important to think of ways to support your own and your colleagues' mental health and wellbeing, whether they are working remotely or still working in school.

In school we often come together as a staff body to share and celebrate as a way of supporting staff wellbeing and boosting morale. With this no longer an option, we need to think of different ways to connect and prioritise our wellbeing. There are many ways you can do this. We've listed some things to help you:

1. Identify your goals

Identify what "self-care" means for you and build in more activities that you enjoy or help to keep you calm and relaxed. What has a positive impact on your wellbeing? Once you are clear about what works for you, you can start to identify some simple personal goals. For example, it could be going out for a daily walk, meditating, exercising or something else. Setting aside 15 minutes a day to do this may seem small but starting off with something measurable and achievable will help you identify strategies to prioritise self-care.

2. Plan your wellbeing

Plan the activities that you enjoy. Set aside some time at particular times of the day for your activities. These may be activities you have enjoyed before such as reading, yoga or connecting with friends and family, or you may want to take this time as an opportunity to identify new activities such as cooking, running or meditation.

3. Use media positively

Engage with the media mindfully. Media and social media can be a great way to connect with others and find out information. However, the things that we watch, see and hear can impact upon how we feel, think and behave. Find ways to use the media to energise yourself and to improve your social support networks.

4. Take time to breathe

Deep breathing can be calming. Taking a minute (or less!) to stop and breathe can help you to manage feelings of stress or tension as well as reflect on what needs to happen next. There are many useful apps which you can download for guided breathing exercises, for example [The Breathing App](#) and [Headspace](#).

Links to more info:

Schools in Mind

www.annafreud.org/schoolsinmind

Child in Mind podcasts

www.annafreud.org/childinmind

On My Mind

www.onmymind.info

5. Buddy up

Create a buddy system. Knowing that there is support around you can feel containing and comforting. You may wish to choose a "buddy" within your staff team and/or outside of your work life. This person can be someone that you can talk to or check in with on a regular basis to help check on your wellbeing levels.

Remember that everyone has different needs. Making connections with friends, family and colleagues is key to our wellbeing but not everyone wants to take part in collective chats or activities. It is important to respect each individual's strategies for managing their own wellbeing, while making sure that all staff have someone looking out for them in a supportive and non-obtrusive way.

6. Go back to basics

Focus on your basic needs. During times of change, focussing on maintaining a healthy routine including sleeping, exercising and eating well can be helpful in creating consistency and balance in our lives. This can help us to feel contained and that life is more manageable as there is some consistency.

7. Express yourself

Finding a way to express how you feel can be powerful in helping to process strong feelings. This can include talking to someone about how you feel or expressing yourself more creatively through methods such as writing, art, sports or music.

8. Be kind to yourself

Be patient with yourself. Like any other change that we may make, embedding more positive self-care strategies into your daily routine can take time. Be as consistent as you can whilst you make these changes and remember that some self-care is better for your wellbeing than none at all!

Sharing good practice

We're at our best when we learn from each other's experiences. We've been speaking to colleagues in Hong Kong who have been experiencing school closures for many weeks now have kindly shared some successful strategies that they have been using to support staff who are working and teaching remotely.

- Staff have prioritised time to connect one-to-one via [Zoom](#), [WhatsApp groups](#) and other forms of social media
- Keeping staff wellbeing as positive as possible has been key: promoting enjoyable activities such as [Skype](#) cheese and wine events or a book club, as well as ensuring regular check-ins with those who may be working or living alone.
- Maintaining professional development courses online to support staff wellbeing

We cannot overestimate the importance of looking after each other and supporting your wellbeing and the wellbeing of others at this time. Change can be disruptive and people respond in different ways, but there will be challenges to all of us during this period. Being mindful of the need to take care of your own wellbeing it the best place to start.

Additional guidance and support

For additional guidance and support, you may find the following resources helpful:

[Supporting Staff Wellbeing booklet](#)

This booklet offers practical guidance about what school staff and senior leaders can do to support their colleagues.

[Ten Steps Towards Staff Wellbeing report](#)

This is a practical resource to help schools promote staff wellbeing.

[Staff wellbeing in schools video](#)

Claire Ely speaks about the importance of school staff looking after their own wellbeing, and how senior leaders can support this.

[Supporting schools and colleges booklet](#)

A guide to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of pupils and students during periods of disruption.

[Education Support partnership](#)

UK charity dedicated to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of education staff in schools, colleges and universities. Includes 24/7 telephone support and counselling.

[Self-care resources](#)

Over 90 self-care strategies to help if you are feeling low or anxious - originally written by young people but suitable also for adults and families.



Finding support:

Samaritans: 116 123 / www.samaritans.org
Childline: 0800 1111 / www.childline.org.uk
Youth Wellbeing Directory: www.youthwellbeing.co.uk

Details on how to find urgent help are available here (annafreud.org/urgenthel).

About the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families:

The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families has developed and delivered pioneering mental health care for over 60 years.

Our aim is to transform current mental health provision in the UK by improving the quality, accessibility and effectiveness of treatment.

We believe that every child and their family should be at the heart of the care they receive, working in partnership with professionals.

Our Patron: **Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cambridge**
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Anna Freud Centre

Kantor Centre of Excellence, 4-8 Rodney Street,
London. N1 9JH

T: +44 (0)20 7794 2313
E: info@annafreud.org