

Education Workforce Council

Guide to good conduct and practice

Mental Health and Wellbeing

January 2023



Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

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Introduction

As a member of the education workforce, the work you do can be hugely fulfilling. It can have a significant impact on you and your colleagues, as well as the lives of children and young people, and their parents/guardians. It is therefore crucial that you take care of your mental health and wellbeing.

This isn't something you should just do if you are struggling, or feeling low. It's something you should think about all the time and really invest in, just like with your physical health. Good self-care is a reflection of good professional practice.

Some of the factors that impact on your mental health and wellbeing may be out of your control. Employers, and the leadership in an organisation, is key to role-modelling and supporting good emotional and mental wellbeing. It is important to create an environment where mental and emotional health becomes a cultural priority. However, the choices you make as an individual can be critical for your own wellbeing, and there are many ways in which you can take positive steps to support yourself.

You should always familiarise yourself with any relevant policies in effect at your workplace. These might include policies relating to health and safety, mental health and wellbeing, and domestic abuse. This guide is designed to complement such policies. It discusses some of the core building blocks to supporting your own mental health and wellbeing, as well as that of your colleagues. It is intended to encourage you to consider the steps you could take, in relation to how you work and your lifestyle, that could have a positive impact on your wellbeing.

It also provides links to a range of useful tools, resources, and sources of information, as well as contact details for organisations that can provide you with specialised help and advice.

We have produced this guide in partnership with our colleagues at [Education Support](#), the only UK charity dedicated to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of teachers and education staff¹.

The Code

The [Code of Professional Conduct and Practice](#) (the Code), sets out the key principles of good conduct and practice for registrants. As part of that, it recognises the importance of registrant mental health and wellbeing, and outlines that registrants should be mindful of "the health, safety and wellbeing of colleagues, and themselves".

This guide is designed to complement the Code and offers practical advice that will assist you in fulfilling your professional responsibilities.

¹ Education Support's remit includes working with education practitioners

Building blocks of good mental health and wellbeing

Evidence suggests that there are a wide range of practical steps you can take to help improve your mental health and wellbeing. We have tried to identify some of the core 'building blocks' that can help you to feel happier and healthier. These are based around the [five ways of wellbeing](#):

- a healthy lifestyle: eating well, sleeping well, and getting regular exercise
- communication: talking (and listening) to others
- taking notice: being mindful of the present moment and your own feelings and thoughts
- keep learning: learning boosts our self-esteem, keeps us engaged, and helps us adapt to change
- taking time to help others: making sure that colleagues feel listened to and appreciated

This document is not intended to provide all of the answers, but it will hopefully help you to think about your mental health and wellbeing, and reflect on the positive choices that you might be able to make.

A healthy lifestyle

A healthy lifestyle is essential to mental wellbeing. Some of the key ingredients of a healthy lifestyle are: exercise, eating well, and getting a good night's sleep.

Exercise

Exercise is great for your physical health and evidence has shown that it can also improve mental wellbeing, decrease stress, boost self-esteem, improve concentration, and help you to sleep better. Exercise can also provide ways of connecting with friends, colleagues, and the world around you.

You do not necessarily have to head to the gym every day, or run a marathon in order to gain these benefits. Focus instead on joyful movement – what feels good to you. This might mean just getting out for a walk once a day, or getting back into an activity that you used to enjoy but haven't done recently, such as swimming or cycling.



If you enjoy competition, then you could use an app to record your step count, distance, or repetitions – competing against yourself and perhaps challenging others.

Participating in team sports can also be great for mental health, helping you to feel that you're not isolated, whilst also generating mood-boosting endorphins. You don't need to be great, you just need to turn up and support your team mates.

If you have a disability or long-term health condition, find out about [getting active with a disability](#).



Eating well

Eating a well-balanced diet can be a challenge – particularly after a long day at work when you may lack the energy and motivation to cook yourself a healthy meal. But, like exercise, your diet also has a significant impact on physical and mental wellbeing.

Eating a nutritious and balanced diet can improve energy levels, boost concentration, and help you sleep better. A good, well-balanced diet can also help to prevent and ease symptoms of mental illness, as well as help you to maintain a healthy weight, improving your physical health and reducing risk levels in relation to a range of diseases and conditions such as diabetes, cancer, and heart disease.

Tips for eating well

1. Plan your meals

Set aside time in your week for meal planning and try to ensure that you have ingredients available that will allow you to make healthy meals.

2. Stay hydrated

Make sure that you drink regularly throughout the day. The NHS recommends drinking [6–8 glasses](#) or cups of liquid every day (including water, lower-fat milk, sugar-free drinks, tea, and coffee).

3. Eat a balanced diet

A diet that embraces a variety of food groups will boost your nutrition. The [UK Government's Eatwell Guide](#) shows how much of what we eat overall should come from each food group to achieve a healthy, balanced diet.

4. Eat regularly

Skipping meals can disturb your blood sugar levels, leaving you susceptible to mood swings and cravings. Eating small meals or snacks regularly helps keep energy steady. It is also helpful if you can't face cooking or eating big meals.

5. Enjoy eating with others

Use meal times as an opportunity to connect with friends, colleagues, and loved ones. It doesn't have to be every day, but sitting down with friends or family, even once a week, can help boost your mood.

6. Seek help if you think you might have a problem with food

If you think you are using food, or the control and restriction of foods, as a coping mechanism, and that this is impacting your life negatively, you may be experiencing an [eating disorder](#). If you are concerned that this may be the case, speak to your GP for advice and support.

Getting a good night's sleep

Sleep is essential to our emotional and mental wellbeing. The NHS recommends that adults need between [7 and 9 hours' sleep](#) every night. Sleeping well will help to rejuvenate your body (allowing it to grow muscle and repair tissue). It will also help your mental health and wellbeing as a lack of sleep can increase stress levels and trigger episodes of depression.

Our colleagues at Education Support have put together a [helpful guide that explains why sleep is so important](#), outlining nine practical steps to improve our sleeping patterns.

Take a break

Taking a break can have a significant positive impact on your frame of mind and mental health. It can also help to improve your memory, boost creativity, and reduce stress levels. This might mean taking a proper break at lunchtime that allows you to re-energise.

Communication

It is essential to talk about your feelings and experiences with people that you trust. Speaking about what's on your mind with friends and family, or colleagues, can play a key role in supporting your mental health.

Some of us can feel uncomfortable talking about our feelings, particularly when we are upset or troubled. But sharing how we feel is not a sign of weakness and can help you to cope with problems.

Find time in your week to be with your family and friends, such as meeting for dinner, going for a walk together on the weekend, or trying a new lunch spot with a colleague.



It is also important to try to be there for your colleagues. Try to have an 'open door' policy and encourage colleagues who may want to share their issues and concerns with you to talk. Remember too that opening up about your own concerns and vulnerabilities will help others to gain the confidence to do so.

Never be afraid to ask for help

We all need help sometimes. Perhaps you're just feeling tired, or maybe you're beginning to feel overwhelmed by work? If so, it's always best to seek help as early as possible to ensure that you address problems before they have a negative impact upon your mental health and wellbeing. Your colleagues, family, and friends are often the best people to speak to first.

However, depending on the nature of the problems you are experiencing, you may also need more specialised help and advice. [The final pages of this guide](#) provide a wealth of links to useful resources. They also provide contact details for organisations that can help you if you are experiencing significant problems, such as stress, anxiety, depression, alcoholism, or suicidal thoughts.

Work-life balance

Working with learners and young people is demanding, can involve long hours, and requires a degree of flexibility. It is therefore important to set some boundaries as overburdening yourself might lead to burnout. It can be difficult to say no, but it is essential to ensure that you leave adequate time for relaxation, hobbies and interests, and friends and family, as well as work.

Lack of work-life balance can have significant effects on your health, leading to problems such as exhaustion, anxiety, and a higher risk of physical illness. It will also impact negatively on your wellbeing, leaving you with insufficient time to exercise and socialise, and contribute to insufficient sleep and a lower quality of life. Ultimately, a lack of work-life balance will not help either you, or your employer, as it can lead to periods of sickness and absence from work. In addition, it may impact negatively on your relationships and personal life.

Achieving work-life balance can be difficult. It can be challenging to say no, particularly if you aren't used to doing so. Learning to say no in the right way is a vital part of being an effective practitioner and maintaining your own wellbeing. Setting boundaries in this way will help you to protect your mental health and wellbeing and to conserve energy, helping to ensure that you can be effective when you are most needed. Without boundaries, being open and available can quickly lead to you becoming overwhelmed and overworked.

It is also important to make time for your friends and family, letting them know when you're free to spend time with them and when you will be needing time for yourself. Our colleagues at Education Support have produced a helpful guide that sets out the importance of [setting boundaries](#) and how to communicate this to colleagues.

Education Support have also produced an excellent [guide on work-life balance](#).

Take notice

'Take notice' is about paying attention (on purpose) to what is going on around you and how you feel. Taking time to reflect on the 'here and now' within a busy lifestyle can help you to enjoy life and appreciate what really matters to you.

Examples of taking notice may include:

- spending time outside, to take notice of new things, such as the changing seasons, plants, and wildlife
- listening to your favourite piece of music, thinking about how it makes you feel and what memories it may bring back
- taking time each day to write down three things in your life you feel grateful for



Take notice through mindfulness

Mediation and mindfulness activities can also play a role in helping you to take notice. Mentally switching off and focussing on the present can be a huge challenge when you're focused on your work. It can also be difficult to find dedicated time for activities such as meditation. Consider starting small by meditating for just a couple of minutes a day at first and see whether you feel the benefits. Education Support have put together a [guide on meditation](#) that outlines a range of different activities and techniques, including mindfulness, visualisation, and movement mediation. Try experimenting with these and see which ones you find most helpful.

Keep learning

Learning boosts our self-esteem, keeps us engaged, and helps us adapt to change. It has also been shown to help prevent depression in later years.

Learning doesn't have to happen in a classroom, it can be informal and can happen in a variety of ways. It is about exploring new ideas and embracing new experiences.

Get creative

There is evidence that participating in creative activities such as art, craft, or playing an instrument can help to improve your mental health and wellbeing. Allow yourself more time to undertake a hobby, or work on a creative project. Perhaps try to continue to challenge yourself by taking up a new hobby. You may find that others share your passion and that there are groups that you could join, made up of people trying to achieve a similar goal, be that a gardening club, a band, orchestra or choir, a running club, or a knitting circle.

Take time to help others

Caring for others is integral to what you do as an education practitioner. However, it is important to take time to help colleagues, as well as the learners and young people that you work with. Be open and honest with your colleagues and (above all) be ready to listen to their problems and concerns.



Everyone wants to feel appreciated, but sometimes the pace at which we live our lives means that some people can feel overlooked. Simple acts of kindness can play a significant role in helping colleagues, who may be experiencing problems to feel seen, appreciated, and cared for. An act of kindness doesn't have to be a big gesture – anything from complementing a friend or making someone a cup of tea can provide real benefits to both their, and your own, wellbeing. Taking such actions has been known to provide individuals with feelings of euphoria and has been recorded as increasing serotonin levels for both the giver, and receiver.

If you think that a colleague might be struggling, let them know that help is available. Ask them what they need and whether you can assist, encourage them to take a break, and show empathy and kindness. If you think that they may need additional support, encourage them to make use of the [services and resources](#) that are highlighted within this guide and on [Education Support's website](#).

Useful links and resources

Many of the links and resources below include examples of good practice. Always familiarise yourself with any relevant workplace policies. Your trade union (both nationally and through local representatives) may also be a useful source of help and advice on matters relating to mental health and wellbeing.

Education Support

Education Support's mission is to improve the mental health and wellbeing of education staff. They believe that better mental health leads to better education.

The [charity's website](#) hosts a wealth of information and helpful advice to support your mental health and wellbeing. They also provide practical resources covering a range of topics, including:

- [anxiety](#)
- [stress](#)
- [burnout](#)
- [working life](#)
- [depression](#)
- [grief or bereavement](#)
- [personal life](#)
- [self-care](#)
- [finances](#)

Education Support have also produced some great resources for leaders, including this guide to [bringing wellbeing into the everyday](#) and a tool for undertaking a [staff wellbeing audit](#).

Health and Safety Executive

[Talking Toolkit. Preventing work-related stress](#)

Mental Health Foundation

[Information on mental health issues in Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities](#)

Mentally Healthy Schools

[Resources for understanding and promoting pupils' mental health and wellbeing](#)

Mind

[LGBTIQ+ mental health information](#)

Welsh Government

[Framework on embedding a whole school approach emotional and mental wellbeing](#)

If you need to talk

Alcoholics anonymous

Website: www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

National helpline: 0800 917 7650

Anxiety UK

Website: www.anxietyuk.org.uk

Telephone: 03444 775 774

Bipolar UK

Website: www.bipolaruk.org

Telephone: 0333 323 3880

Education Support

Website: www.educationsupport.org.uk

Helpline: 08000 562 661

Men's Health Forum

Website: www.menshealthforum.org.uk

Telephone: 0330 097 0654

Mind Cymru

Website: www.mind.org.uk

Telephone: 0300 123 3393

No panic

Website: www.nopanic.org.uk

Telephone: 0300 772 9844

OCD UK

Website: www.ocduk.org

Telephone: 03332 588112

Rethink Mental Illness

Website: www.rethink.org

Telephone: 0808 801 0525

Samaritans

Website: www.samaritans.org

Telephone: 116 123

Sane

Website: www.sane.org.uk

Telephone: 07984 967 708

The Menopause Charity

Website: www.themenopausecharity.org

For other suggested sources of support and advice, visit the [NHS website](#).

