



SCHOOL STAFF WELLBEING PROJECT

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE

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Introduction

The **School Staff Wellbeing Project** team is made up of ten Educational Psychologists and six Assistant Educational Psychologists.

Our main aim with this project is to provide knowledge and support to staff in schools and nurseries, to help them in creating a more positive and nurturing school culture that emphasises the importance of emotional wellbeing for all members of staff.

With this project we are offering to provide schools and nurseries with **evidence-based training** through a series of webinars that focus on staff wellbeing, as well as support with developing a **Staff Wellbeing Policy** that can be included in your school development plan, and opportunities for you to be part of a wellbeing focused **Cluster Group** with other schools in Northern Ireland. All the support will be provided from staff within the **Educational Psychology Service**.

As part of this project, each school will be asked to nominate a member of staff to take on the role of **Health & Wellbeing Lead**. Ideally the wellbeing lead should be a member of the **Senior Leadership Team**, however if this is not possible, then it is imperative that whoever takes on the wellbeing lead role has the full backing and support of the school's leadership team. The wellbeing lead will be an ambassador role for the schools **Health and Wellbeing Policy** and evidence-based support and training will be provided to anyone who takes on this task. The person who takes on the Health and Wellbeing Lead should be eager and willing to **promote a positive culture and support all their colleagues** at work.

“Our teachers and school leaders deserve to be paid at a level which recognises the outstanding job they do” – Education Minister, Paul Givan, 2024

Background

In 2023, the **Mental Health Foundation** published a report highlighting the prevalence of mental health issues in Northern Ireland. According to the report, around one in five adults (21%) were estimated to be facing mental health challenges, this was based on the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) data. The prevalence was higher among women (25%) than men (16%). Additionally, individuals living in the most economically deprived areas showed a mental health prevalence about 1.5 times higher than those in the least deprived regions (30% compared to 20%).

A report by the **Northern Ireland Audit Office in 2023** revealed that Mental Health funding in Northern Ireland was lower compared to other regions in the United Kingdom and Ireland. This shortage of funding corresponded with a rise in the number of individuals on mental health waiting lists, awaiting their initial appointment, due to the growing demand for mental health services.

The 2023 report from **Education Support** in partnership with **YouGov**, which presents findings from the annual **Teacher Wellbeing Index**, reveals alarming statistics regarding the well-being of education professionals. According to the report, 78% of education staff are experiencing stress, with 81% reporting stress-related symptoms stemming from their work. Notably, 39% of education staff disclosed facing mental health issues in the previous academic year, marking a 3% rise from the 2022 data. Moreover, there has been a significant increase in teachers and senior leaders reporting that the culture of their organisation negatively impacts their wellbeing. The report also revealed that 46% of staff feel that individuals facing mental health and wellbeing issues lack sufficient support. The report highlights a significant decline in teacher wellbeing over the past year, with a 6% increase in teachers reporting exhaustion and a 9% increase in teachers indicating signs of burnout. Record numbers of educators and education staff in the UK have contemplated exiting the profession over the previous academic year due to mental health and wellbeing concerns. A notable 59% of staff members have actively pursued changing career or leaving their current positions, with workload emerging as the primary factor.

Why should you take part?

According to the **Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework (February 2021)**, staff wellbeing has been prioritised. It outlines the following areas when considering school staff wellbeing:

- *Ethos and environment of the school* places a high value and significance on staff wellbeing.
- An understanding that *if staff are not effectively supported*, they cannot be expected to properly support the children and young people in their care.
- *A culture of trust where all staff feel valued* and know how to access support if needed, for example using staff debriefing/supervision.
- *Supporting and providing* comprehensive and on-going training as deemed necessary.
- *Support given to the emotional health & wellbeing* of educational setting leaders by the employing authority.

A literature review on the topic of teacher wellbeing (McCallum, Price, Graham, & Morrison, 2017), found several reports highlighting the **link between employee wellbeing and effectiveness in the workplace**, and in particular, how promoting positive wellbeing in the workforce could lead to improved productivity and performance (Teacher Support Cymru). There is also evidence to suggest that teacher wellbeing can have a direct impact on student achievement and school performance, with Briner and Dewberry (2007) claiming that 8% of the variation of Standard Assessment Test (SAT) scores in the UK were accounted for by teacher wellbeing (Briner & Dewberry, 2007).

'Newly-qualified teachers quit UK for schools abroad due to abject pay and conditions' - [The Guardian, 2023](#)

Project Overview

The School Staff Wellbeing project consists of five training webinars, with each session focusing on a different topic related to staff health and wellbeing. The topics being covered in each session include:

Webinar 1

- *School Culture Overview*
- *Overview from the EA Health and Wellbeing Team*

Webinar 2

- *Teacher Stress within the School Environment*
- *Individual Self-Care Strategies*

Webinar 3

- *The Health and Wellbeing Lead*
- *School Development Plan (SDP)*
- *Wellbeing Policies*

Webinar 4

- *Peer Supervision and Support Strategies*

Webinar 5

- *Health and Wellbeing Strategies*
- *Evaluation and Cluster Groups*

Following the webinar training, there will be an opportunity for wellbeing leads from each school to take part in **cluster groups**, which will be supported by Educational Psychology. As part of these groups, the wellbeing leads will be encouraged to share experiences of how their schools have promoted staff wellbeing, what strategies they found to be effective, and the overall impact that promoting health and wellbeing has had at their school.

Participants will also be given an overview of the Staff Wellbeing Questionnaire results which will help to inform their school planning.

Session 1: School Culture

What is 'School Culture'?

Culture has been described as “*one of the most powerful and stable forces operating in organisations*” (Schein, 1996, p. 231). **School Culture** is a powerful and influential force within an educational setting. It refers to the way teachers and other staff members work together, and the set of values, beliefs, and assumptions they share.

Why is School Culture important?

The culture that develops within an educational setting will have an important and influential part to play in how the school operates, and there is a strong and significant correlation between a school's culture and its performance.

As the culture of a school consists of the underlying influences and attitudes that exist within the school, it will have an overall impact on the attitudes of students and teachers, as well as the entire learning experience. The culture that develops will be unique to each school and will have either a positive or negative influence on the school's culture and performance.

“Culture eats strategy for breakfast”- Peter Drucker

Who makes the school's culture?

The culture that develops within a school is created by everyone who works there, from the senior leadership team, to teachers, and non-teaching staff, as well as the pupils and their parents. All these people play a part in the school and influence the culture with their behaviours and attitudes. As a result, the culture in a school will be largely dependent on the interactions between the people within the organisation. *The culture that develops will be unique to each school.*

Negative Culture

A negative school culture can affect both staff and students by contributing to feelings of stress and anxiety, low morale and lack of fulfilment, low academic standards, distrust and interpersonal tensions, arguments among staff, and problems that are rarely addressed or even resolved. **Toxic schools** are places where negativity dominates conversations, interactions, and planning. These toxic environments are places where staff grow increasingly disgruntled and oppositional, new ideas are attacked, and trusting relationships break down.

Positive Culture

Positive school culture is noted to contribute to greater school success, higher levels of teacher self-efficacy, staff recognising the importance and impact of their contribution, and a reduction in stress and burnout. It is also conducive to higher levels of staff satisfaction and benefits student learning and wellbeing (Bennett, 2017). Characteristics of a positive school culture include the development of open and trusting relationships, an environment where staff feel able to take risks and make mistakes, it emphasises collaboration among staff. Feedback is constructive and well intentioned, and leadership decisions are made collaboratively.

Collective Efficacy

Collective efficacy refers to a group shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given results (Bandura, 1997). Collective efficacy is an example of a shared belief, or culture, within an organisation. The influence of the collective on the individual is likely to be higher in schools in which teachers share a common vision about school directions (Strahan, Gibbs, & Reid, 2019). Increasing collective efficacy can result in higher levels of organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and student achievement, as well as having an impact on the **school culture** (Ware & Kitsantas, 2007); (Donohoo, 2018); (Yurt, 2022).

Understanding of the concept of teachers' collective efficacy and what enables it to develop may provide school leaders with greater insights into how a school functions and its capacity for change.

Increasing Collective Efficacy

According to psychological literature there are several ways you can go about increasing or improving teacher and collective efficacy (Strahan nee Brown, Gibbs Reid, 2019), which include:

- **Good Communication**- senior management feedback, sharing information, expectations being communicated to staff, staff being encouraged to be active during staff meetings, involve staff in planning and policy making.
- **Opportunities for Learning**- learning from each other, observations, sharing good practice.
- **Supporting Roles**- senior management are available, peers are supportive, praise, mentors.
- **Stress Management** – guidance is provided on how to manage stress.
- **Decision Making**- Staff should be able to participate in decision making that affects their work.

Without collective efficacy, depersonalisation can come about through a lack of knowledge and opportunity to become a valued member of the organisation both within and outside the classroom. **Depersonalisation** can be a contributing factor to teacher burnout.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a collaborative, strengths-based approach to change in organisations that was developed by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva in the 1980s. Cooperrider explains, *‘It is a collaborative effort to search for the best in people, their organisations, and their world. It involves the discovery of what gives ‘life’ to a living system when it is most effective’* (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stravos, 2003).

AI challenges traditional problem-solving approaches by emphasizing what is already working well rather than looking only to fix problems. Instead of asking “What’s wrong?” it encourages asking positive questions to uncover existing strengths and possibilities within a team, community, or organisation.

AI shifts the focus from deficits to strengths and recognises that organisations can thrive when they build upon positive attributes and *meaningful change can occur through discovering, valuing, and developing strengths of individuals in organisations* (Onyett, 2009).

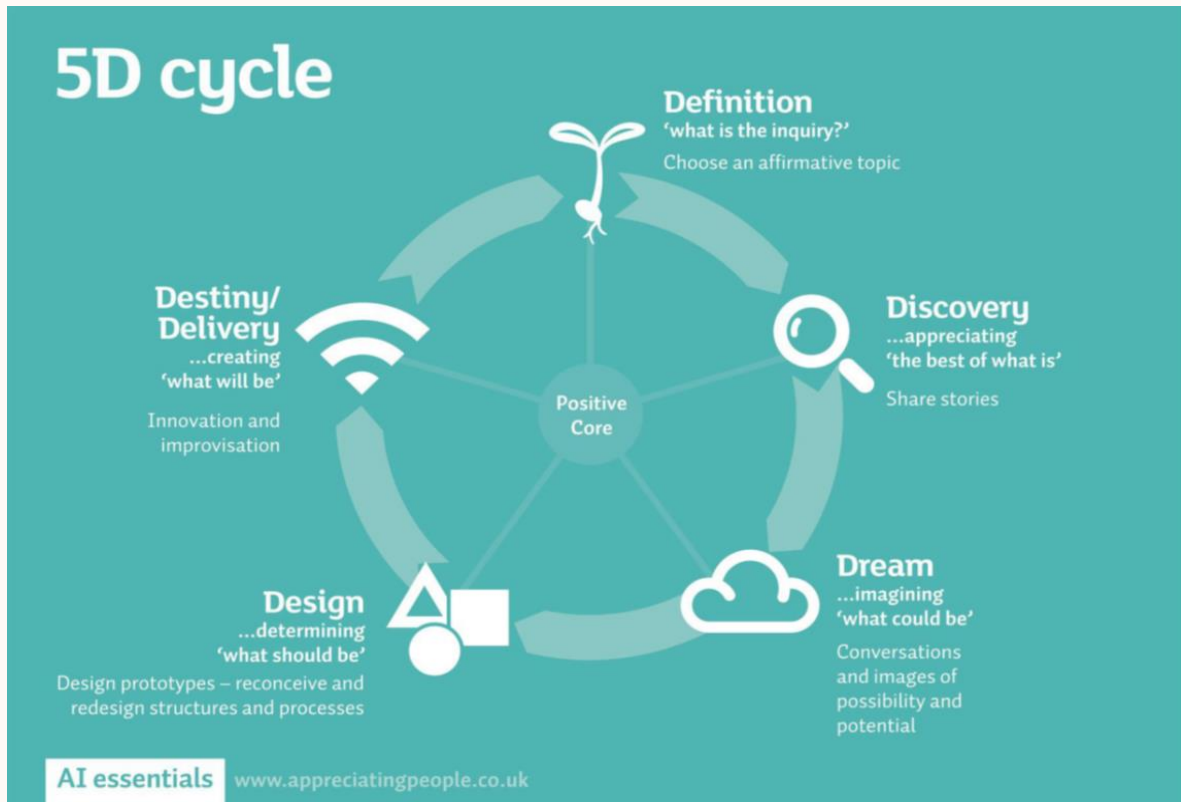
In the context of schools, AI advocates shifting focus away from existing problems that lead to staff demotivation and disengagement. AI suggests that change can be achieved by exploring topics related to what is already working well, such as success stories, peak experiences, and moments of excellence. Rather than dwelling on challenges, AI encourages a positive approach, and schools should ask more constructive questions that facilitate collective learning, engage in positive dialogue, share good experiences, and collaborate on solutions.

“We are more likely to be able to move forward if we can take some of the past with us”.

When looking to the right questions, instead of asking: “What is causing our low motivation?” or “How can we fix our lack of motivation?”, AI suggests asking: “What motivates us and brings us joy?” or “When have we felt most engaged and productive?”. These sorts of positive questions lead to insights and solutions that build on existing strengths. Further examples of positive AI questions include:

- What is good about working in.....?
- What one small thing and one big thing would you change to make a difference?
- What can you do to support?.....
- What is happening in the school when we are at our best?
- What do we need to do differently?
- Could there be a different way of doing things?
- What are the vision and intentions for the organisation?
- What specific things do we want to achieve and how will we know we got there?

A useful AI activity for school staff is looking at the 5D cycle. This encourages staff to focus on what is working well in their school, and with this knowledge they can build on these successes to make plans for the future. When successes are openly acknowledged to staff it can have a positive impact on staff wellbeing.



To obtain a better understanding of Appreciative Inquiry the following online resources may be of use:

- **Appreciating People**
- **5D Cycle of Appreciative Inquiry**
- **Appreciative Inquiry Introduction**

Health and Wellbeing services for EA Staff

The EA provides the following services that can be accessed by all staff working in schools:



The **EA HealthWell Hub** is an online one stop shop for all things Health and Wellbeing and can be accessed by computer or smartphone at this link:

- [EA Healthwell Hub](#)



Inspire are an independent counselling service that provides an Employee Assistance Programme to EA staff. This programme is free for all EA staff and is 100% confidential. It is available 24 hours a day for 365 days a year, and can be contacted by phone:

- **0808 800 0002**
- [Inspire](#)

The EA's [Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) provides an overview of what the EA are aiming to achieve in the realm of staff Health and Wellbeing. You can contact the Health and Wellbeing Team on:

- healthandwellbeing@eani.org.uk
- 028 90418023

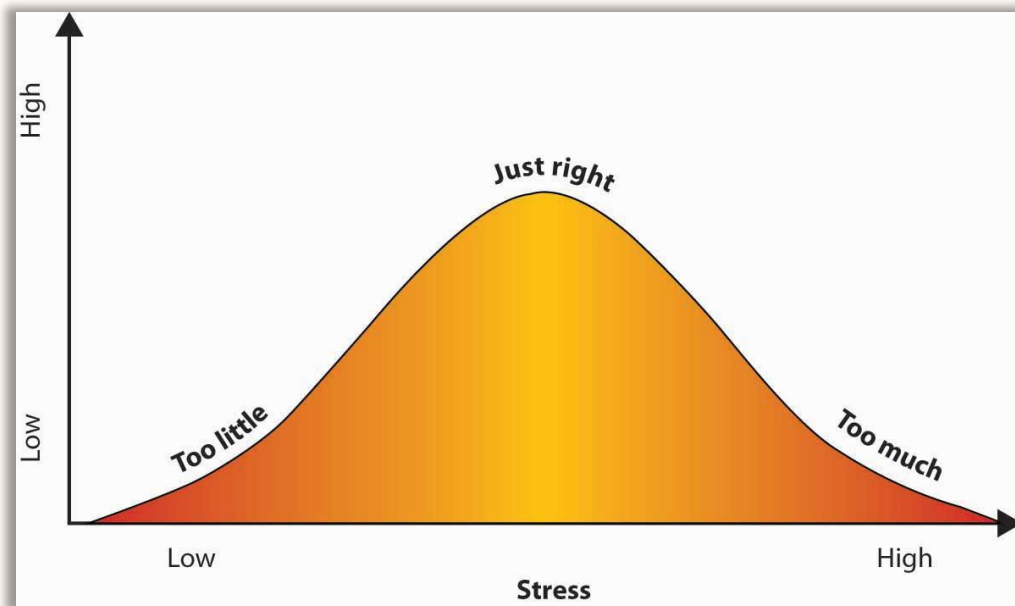
Guidance from NICE states that “promoting a culture that improves the health and wellbeing of employees is good management and leads to healthy and productive workplaces” - (NICE, 2015)

Session 2: Teacher Wellbeing within the School Environment

Teacher Stress & Staff Burnout

Several studies have found that school staff experience higher levels of work-related stress than employees in other occupations, which places them at increased risk of developing common mental health disorders such as, anxiety or depression (Stansfeld S. A., Rasul, Head, & Singleton, 2011) (Kidger, et al., 2016) (Reilly, Dhingra, & Boduszek, 2014).

A degree of stress is common in most jobs at various times; however, high levels of stress over prolonged periods of time are detrimental to a person’s wellbeing.



Commonly identified stressors that can affect school staff include:

- heavy workloads,
- competing demands requiring attention,
- parental and colleague expectations,
- managing student discipline / behavioural issues,
- pressure to meet school targets and administrative duties.

(Gu & Day, 2013) (Naghieh, Montgomery, Bonell, Thompson, & Aber, 2013)
 (Viac & Fraser, 2020)

What is Burnout?

Unlike everyday stress, burnout is a complex phenomenon, which involves individual, organisational, and institutional aspects. According to Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001), burnout is ‘a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job.’ It occurs whenever an individual feels overwhelmed, emotionally drained and unable to meet constant demands.

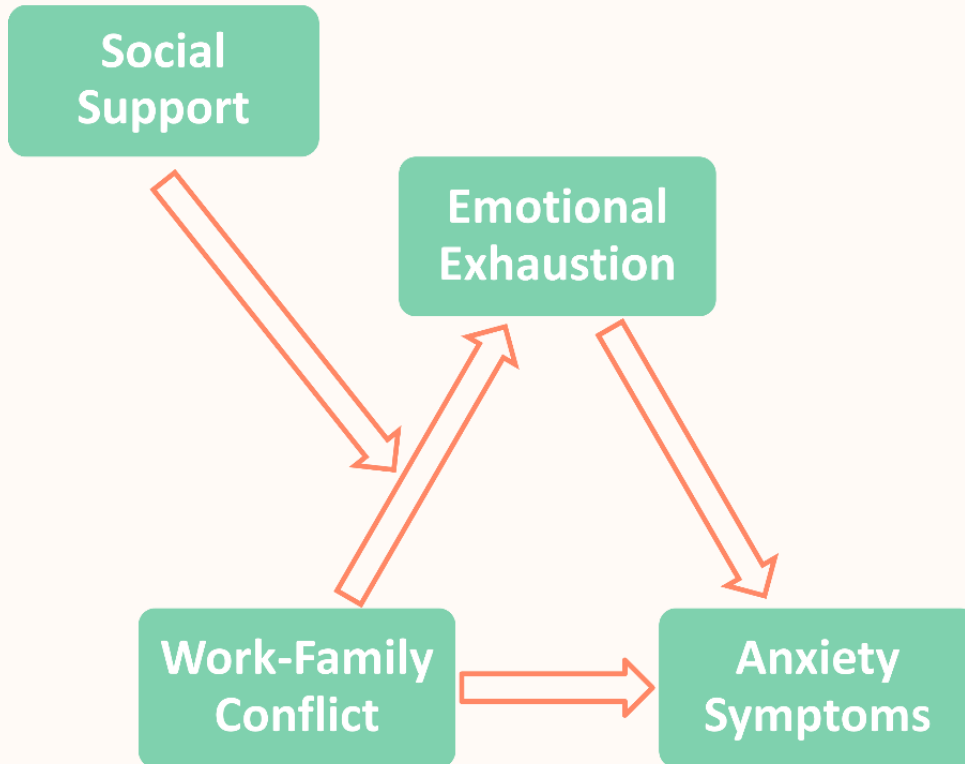


Promoting Staff Wellbeing in Schools & Teacher Burnout- [Highspeed Training, 2023](#)

From a psychosocial perspective, burnout consists of three components:

1. **Emotional exhaustion**, which is defined as a chronic state of physical and emotional depletion that results in excessive job or personal demands, and/or continuous stress. It describes a feeling of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one’s work.
2. **A feeling of cynicism** regarding work includes holding a secluded and indifferent attitude to one’s work and the predisposition to assess one’s own performance at work in negative terms. Studies have found that some form of work-related cynicism might act as a coping strategy for employees.
3. **A sense of personal and professional inefficiency** (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001) describes reduced productivity or capability, low morale, and an inability to cope.

Burnout can impact on **personal and work outcomes**, as it may encompass reduced personal or professional accomplishments as expressed in negative emotions and cognitions about one’s own achievements and capacities to succeed at work or in life in general (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Van Rhenen, 2009).

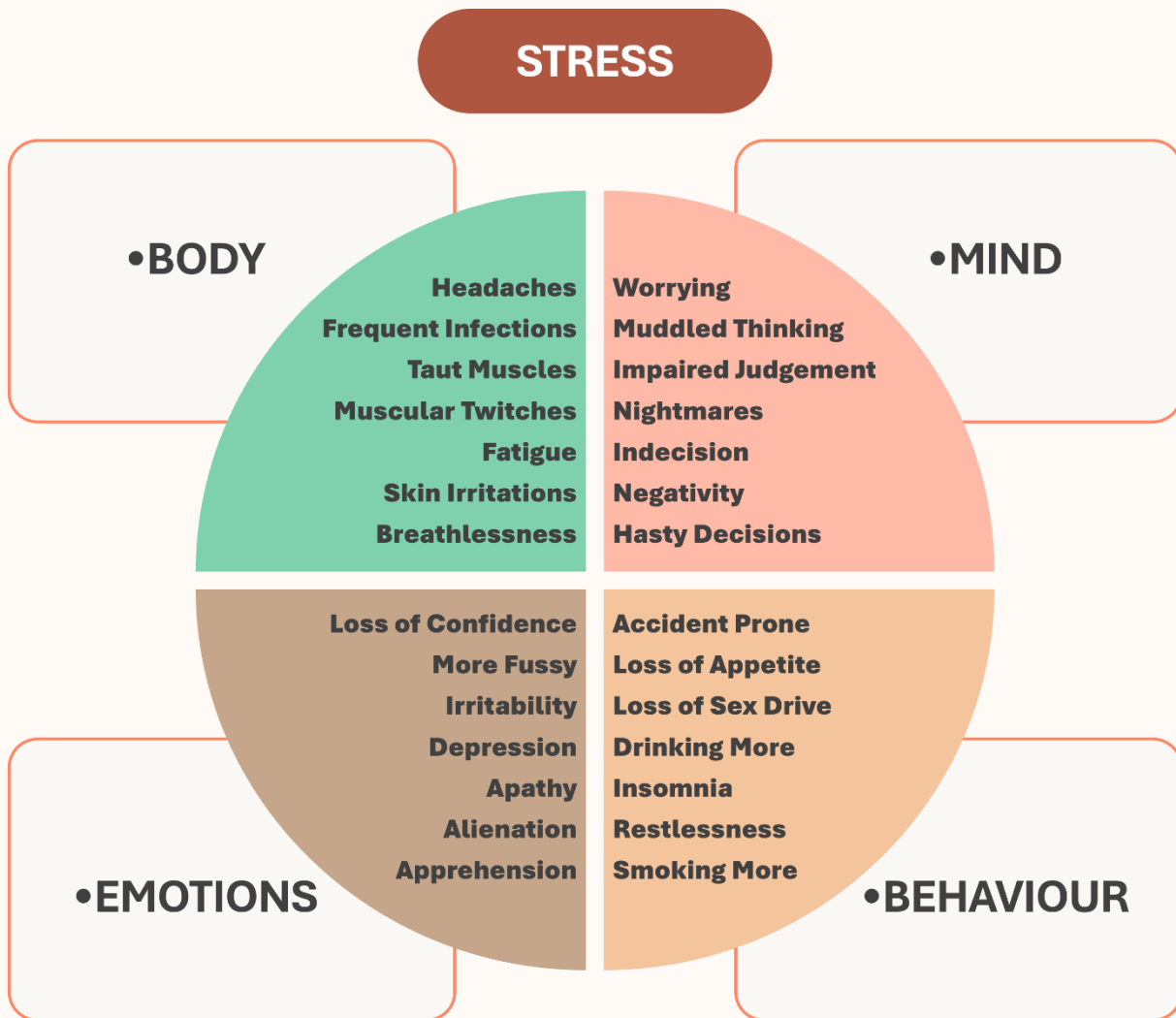


Negative emotions, such as irritability or loss of confidence, and negative thoughts like worrying or indecision, can also impact on a person’s physical wellbeing e.g. becoming more prone to having headaches and fatigue, and on behaviour e.g. drinking more and insomnia.

Staff Burnout

Schaufel and Enzmann’s research in 1998 found that *teachers had the highest levels of emotional exhaustion compared to other professions*. The chronic nature of burnout can negatively impact the quality of teachers’ performance and impact their interaction with students, which subsequently results in negative outcomes for students’ performance (Gerber, Whitebook, & Weinstein, 2007) (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008) (Merida-Lopez & Extremera, 2017)

With this knowledge, it is important that **preventative measures** are taken to reduce the likelihood of burnout occurring in staff as a means of promoting both staff wellbeing and student outcomes.



Mental Health at Work: Toolkit for Supporting Staff Wellbeing- [Mental Health at Work, 2021](#)

Protective factors

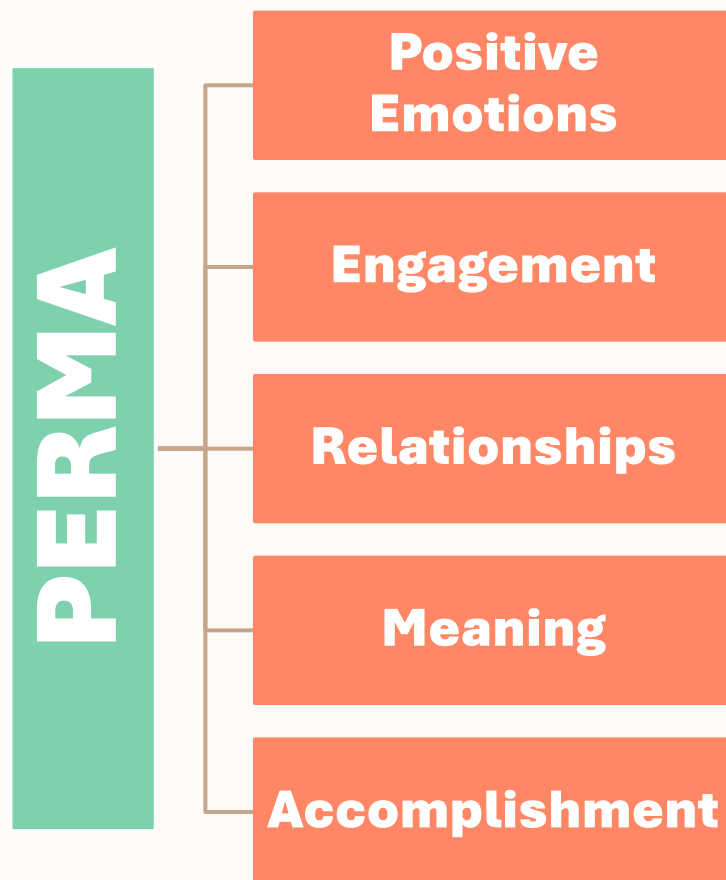
Protective factors play an important role in helping to manage and reduce stress in our lives. These protective factors can be defined as conditions or attributes (skills, strengths, resources, supports or coping strategies) in individuals, families, communities, or the larger society that helps people

deal more effectively with stressful events and mitigate or eliminate risk in families and communities. Examples of protective factors include:

- Personal attributes e.g. problem-solving skills, positive mindset, coping skills.
- Supportive relationships- family, friends, colleagues.
- Social connectedness e.g. participating in group activities outside of work.
- Religious or spiritual practices.
- Physical exercise, diet, self-care.

Teacher Wellbeing and the School Environment

The environment in which we work can have a significant impact on our individual ability to manage stress and burnout, which helps explain why a positive school environment is so important for helping to manage our wellbeing. The PERMA model of wellbeing introduces the idea that we need five building blocks to enable us to flourish personally in work.



The PERMA model is a framework developed by Martin Seligman in the field of positive psychology, which aims to understand and enhance wellbeing and happiness. The five components of the model are:

1. **Positive Emotion (P):** This refers to experiencing positive feelings such as joy, gratitude, love, and contentment. Cultivating positive emotions contributes to overall wellbeing.
2. **Engagement (E):** Engagement involves being fully absorbed and immersed in activities or tasks. When you're engaged, you lose track of time because you're so focused and fulfilled by what you're doing.
3. **Positive Relationships (R):** Meaningful connections with others are essential for wellbeing. Building and maintaining healthy relationships contribute to happiness and life satisfaction.
4. **Meaning (M):** Finding purpose and meaning in life is crucial. It's about understanding why you do what you do and feeling a sense of fulfilment from contributing to something greater than yourself.
5. **Accomplishments (A):** Achieving goals, both big and small, provides a sense of accomplishment. Celebrating achievements boosts self-esteem and contributes to overall wellbeing.

PERMA the Wellbeing Model of Positive Psychology- [YouTube](#)

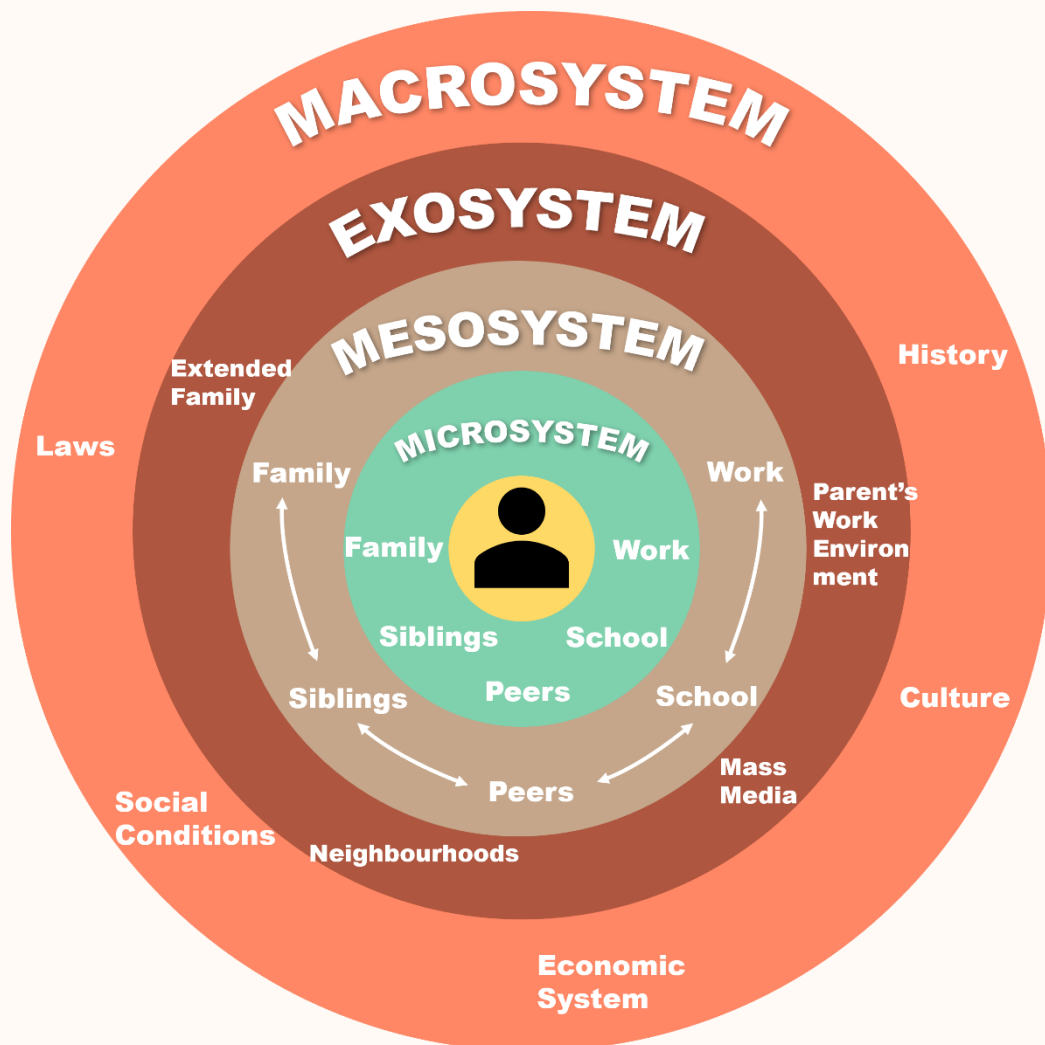
It is worth taking time to consider how balanced your personal building blocks of wellbeing are. It is important to identify any areas that are weaker and attempt to build them up to ensure that your overall wellbeing is more balanced.

According to Viac & Fraser (2020) in the OECD 'Education Working paper on Teacher's Wellbeing', teacher occupational wellbeing is defined as "teachers' responses to the cognitive, emotional, health and social conditions pertaining to their work and their profession". This quote highlights that teacher wellbeing is influenced by how they respond to these various aspects of their work and profession, and that we can only feel well whenever we feel our work has meaning and we are able to do it well.

Bioecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1994)

The Bioecological Model is a theoretical framework that helps us to understand how various environmental factors influence human development. It was first introduced in 1979 by Urie Bronfenbrenner and was later revised to include individual biological elements and developmental processes experienced over time.

Bronfenbrenner believed that an individual’s development is influenced by a complex interplay of multiple systems at various layers of the environment around them, with the most influential areas being closest to the individual at the centre.



The five systems are interrelated and the influence of one system on an individual depends on its relationship with the others (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

Microsystem

This is the immediate environment to the individual and includes direct interactions with family, peers, school, and community. For staff working in schools this could involve:

- Children and young people
- Other teachers and classroom assistants
- Parents
- Other professionals

It is also possible for the children within a school to have a direct impact on your ability to manage your stress and emotions. If they are having a bad day, that can directly influence your mood and stress levels.

Mesosystem

The Mesosystem refers to the interactions between different microsystems. For example, poor relationships in the staff room can impact negatively on a teacher's mood and influence their teaching in the classroom. For school staff, these interactions will include:

- You and your pupil
- You and other school staff
- You and other professionals
- You and your family

Exosystem

This system involves indirect influences on an individual and can be either formal or informal social structures. For example, decisions made by managers or outside agencies can impact on the school and indirectly affect teachers. For school staff this could involve:

- School management structures
- The local environment around the school
- EA
- CAMHS
- Social Services
- EPS
- Other external agencies

Macrosystem

This system involves cultural elements of the society that the individual is living in. For example, cultural norms, values, and ideologies. With school staff this can include:

- Government policy and legislation
- Political climate
- Education legislation
- Societal attitude to wellbeing
- School funding decisions

Chronosystem

This layer refers to time and how changes over time can impact development. These include life events and transitions such as divorce, moving house, changing jobs, and technological advancements.

Teacher Stress and the Bioecological Model

According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, an individual does not operate in isolation, and instead is part of a complex web of inter-relating systems. The individual influences and is influenced by their surrounding environments, and therefore an important factor in staff wellbeing is the relational quality present throughout the school.

In line with Bronfenbrenner's theory, it is necessary to consider **whole-school factors** on the individual, which means that any examination of teacher wellbeing must also look at organisational variables, the quality of social relationship, and the various forms of social capital that teachers can potentially draw on (Day & Gu, 2010).

Liu, Song and Miao (2018) further suggest that teacher wellbeing can be both an individual and institutional concept. They explain that individual wellbeing can be interpersonal relationships and self-analysis, while institutional wellbeing can be positive staff relationships, institutional support, and professional development. Liu, Song and Miao (2018) describe how a **balance needs to be found** between individuals supporting their

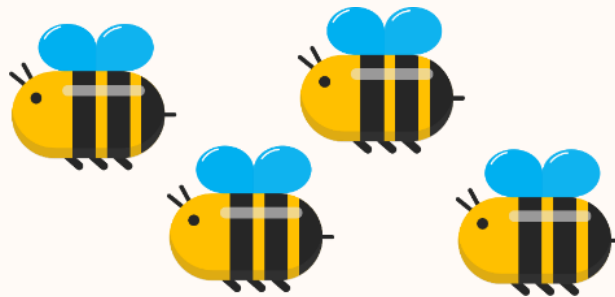
institution's wellbeing, and their institution supporting individual wellbeing (Liu, Song, & Miao, 2018).

Supporting Staff Wellbeing- [Mentally Healthy Schools](#)

Social Support

Kinman, Wray and Strange (2011) proposed that workplace social support plays a role in three ways:

1. Good interpersonal relationships at work may make the emotional work less onerous.
2. Less emotional labour may be needed as more 'appropriate' emotions arise naturally.
3. The ability to disclose emotions in a supportive environment could improve coping mechanisms.

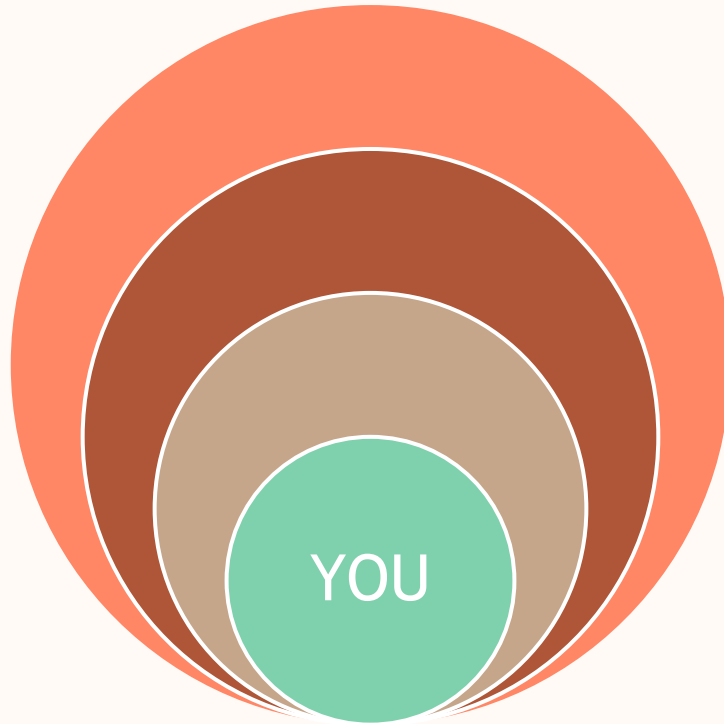


Social support in schools is very important for helping to reduce feelings of stress and burnout among staff (Kinman, Wray, & Strange, 2011). Being able to display authentic emotions and have a respite from pretending to be okay has a positive effect on an individual's wellbeing. Whenever school staff perceive a supportive staff community where they can seek advice and support, they will be more resilient when they are supporting children and young people in school.

Having the opportunity to share difficulties with other people can help us feel better, and whenever everyone feels supported to share their problems, we become much better able to manage our emotions and stresses, as we now feel that we have others to help and support us. For this reason, peer support is very important within schools.

Your Personal Community

It is worth taking some time to think about your own personal community and the community you work in. Consider who you spend your time with, who is taking up most of your energy and attention, and who you would like to be spending more time with or giving your attention to.



Some tips to help with this:

- Try to **limit your time at work**- you will never get that time back again to use with friends and family.
- **Stay in touch with friends**- Make time to connect and meet, and do not let being busy affect your relationships with others.
- **Maintain perspective**- know what is important to you and focus on that.

YouTube: The power of Peer Support- [TEDx](#)

Factors Influencing Teacher Stress

In relation to Bronfenbrenner's model, here are some examples of the protective and negative factors that can influence teacher stress at different levels:

- **Microsystem:** Individual mental health, temperament, personal experiences, capacity to reflect.
- **Mesosystem:** relationships between staff, pupils, parents, external staff.
- **Exosystem:** School leadership and culture, supportive structures around the school, attitude to wellbeing from external agencies.
- **Macrosystem:** Education policies and cultural value of wellbeing.

These factors can impact on how the individual manages stress and how the environment supports them. **Leadership behaviours** have been found to be connected to teacher burnout and job satisfaction (Nguni, Slegers, & Denessen, 2006), as has the **workplace culture** of a school (Malinen & Savolainen, 2016). Supportive leadership and culture tend to lead to enhanced belonging and connectedness, and support for wellbeing.

Think about what protective factors are present within your workplace to help with staff wellbeing and consider any additional factors you would like to see implemented.

Managing Stress and Anxiety

We have looked at recognising the signs of stress and burnout in staff working within schools and will now look at the ways in which staff can take care of themselves. Here are some basic self-care strategies which many people may be aware of but are often forgotten about or overlooked when we are feeling stressed:

1. Stay connected with others via phone, social media, etc...
2. Talk to trusted people about any worries/fears.
3. Take care of your body i.e. eat well-balanced meals, drink water, get exercise, reduce alcohol/caffeine intake, get sufficient sleep.
4. Stay on top of difficult feelings i.e. set aside 'Worry Time', face things you cannot avoid, challenge anxious thoughts.

5. Shift your focus via relaxation, mindfulness, or breathing exercises e.g. deep breathing.
6. Try problem solving rather than worrying by taking control of the things that you can.
7. Play games/puzzles or engage in creative activities which distract the mind.
8. Relaxation exercises e.g. Sit on a chair with your back straight and your feet on the floor. Close your eyes or focus on a point in the distance and then clench your toes and release. Continue this while moving up the various muscles in the body.
9. Draw a circle on a page and keep going over the circle or draw a pattern within the circle while keeping the pencil on the page.
10. Connect with nature or go for a walk.
11. Focus on the present moment by engaging the senses i.e. what you can see, smell, hear, touch, and taste.
12. Use positive affirmations e.g. “I can get through this”.
13. Take each day one at a time and try to find the positives.
14. Be kind to yourself.



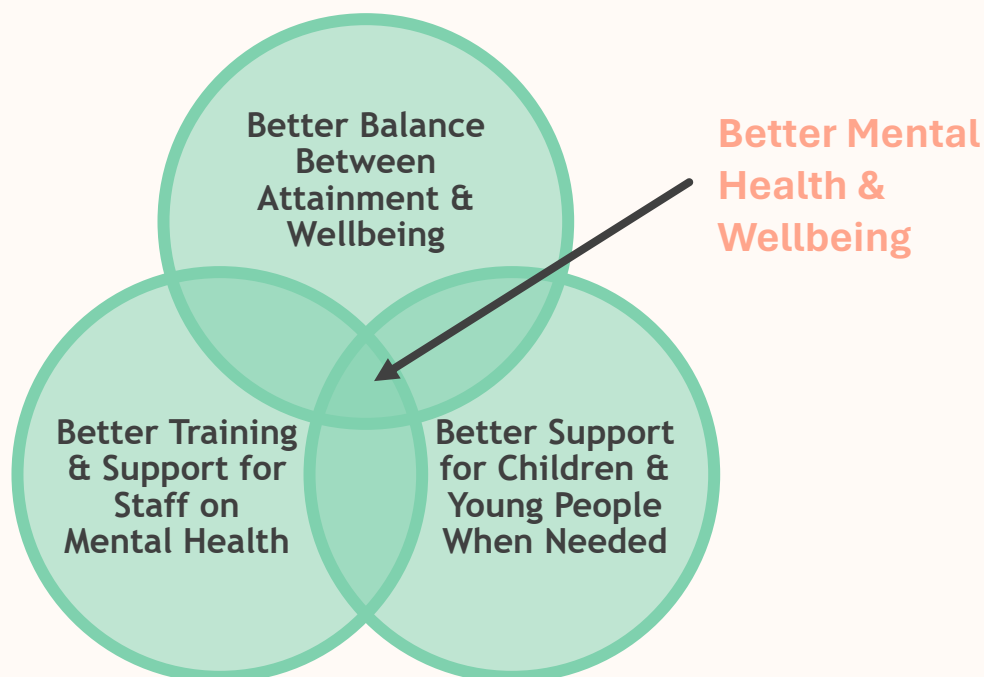
Session 3: The Wellbeing Lead, School Development Plan, and Wellbeing Policy

The Whole-School Approach to Mental Health

When looking at health and wellbeing in relation to school staff, it is useful to recognise the importance of a whole school approach to mental health to ensure the successful promotion of wellbeing in the workplace.

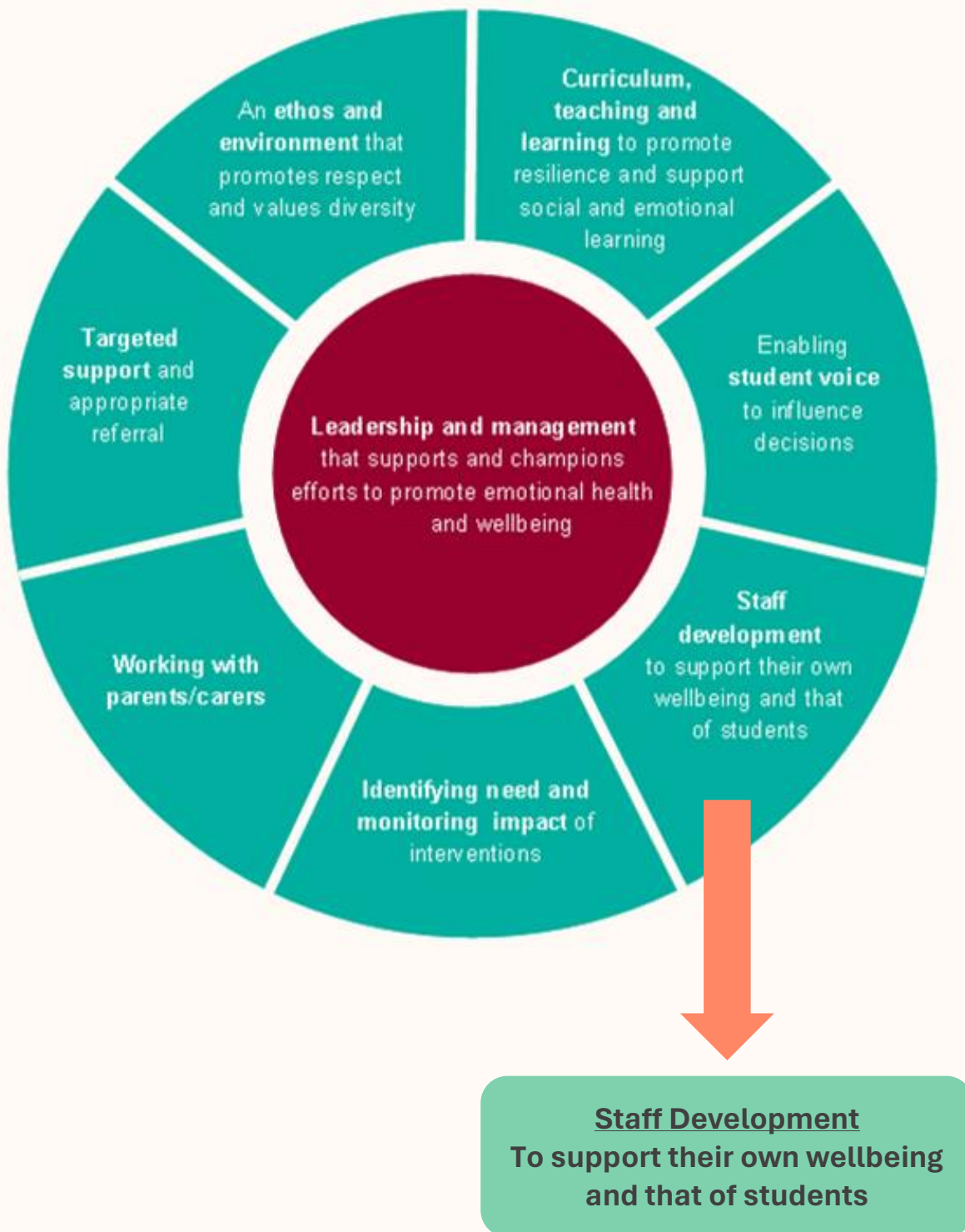
This means the responsibility for promoting the wellbeing of all staff does not fall to any one individual or the wellbeing lead, but instead is the responsibility of every single person working within the school environment. The role of the wellbeing lead is one of promotion and overview, and not one of responsibility or problem solving.

The following diagram from the Children and Young People Mental Health Coalition, demonstrates how ‘Better Mental Health & Wellbeing’ falls between a balance of attainment and wellbeing, training and support for staff, and better support for children and young people. This illustrates the importance of balance and the right support for staff and pupils as part of a whole school approach.



Public Health England (2021) have outlined the areas involved in a whole school approach to mental health. Within these areas, the wellbeing lead will only be concerned with Staff Development and focusing on supporting the wellbeing of staff.

➤ Source: Liverpool CAMHS



With this project, we want the focus to be on staff wellbeing and supporting schools with developing long term strategies that will become embedded in the school's culture. We want to future proof support for all schools, as **staff wellbeing is vital for healthy schools**.

The Teacher Wellbeing Index

Each year the *Education Support* organisation conducts research into teacher wellbeing across the UK which they publish annually in the *Teacher Wellbeing Index* (TWI). The TWI is designed to provide an evidence base for the experiences of education staff and issues of workforce wellbeing.

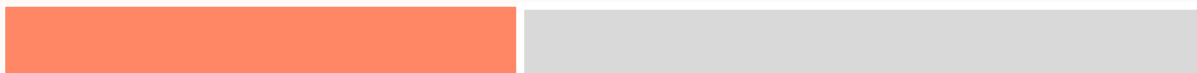
Topics discussed in the TWI include *Stress at work, Work culture, Mental health issues, Loneliness at work, The impact of inspections, and Suicide risk factors*. Some key findings from the TWI are presented below and the full report can be accessed at this link:

➤ [Teacher Wellbeing Index, 2023](#)

26% of staff experience feelings of isolation, being left out or lacking companionship



43% overall wellbeing score (Lowest in 5 years)



55% of staff feel their school culture negatively impacts their wellbeing



78% of staff describe themselves as 'Stressed'



81% experience symptoms of mental ill-health due to working



What is a Wellbeing Lead?

All school staff members should prioritise wellbeing, but it is important to designate an individual who actively advocates for mental health and emphasises its significance. The role of the wellbeing lead within a school is to champion mental health for the entire school community, without assuming direct responsibility for it.

A wellbeing lead plays a key role in developing and supporting a culture that contributes to improved wellbeing of all staff. In effect, wellbeing leads are ambassadors of a school's wellbeing policy, supporting staff to be mental health prepared, and recognising that mental health is a spectrum and we all have mental health needs.

The role of a Wellbeing Lead is not about training people to be happy, and you are not responsible for people's happiness. You do not have to be happy to have good mental health.

Wellbeing Lead Essentials

This is what we consider an essential part of the wellbeing lead role:

- The promotion of wellbeing materials
- Encouraging self-help and self-care
- Providing a 'listening ear'
- Promoting the development of an empathetic school staff
- Providing clarity on issues impacting on staff wellbeing through questionnaires
- Signposting for other services or professionals
- Relaying ideas and information to senior staff that could further improve wellbeing in school.
- Oversight of school improvement plans to ensure that mental health promotion has a key place.
- Helping to reduce barriers to mental health in school by promoting positive language in relation to mental health.

This is not an exhaustive list and there is so much more that a wellbeing lead can do to provide support. We know that staff members day to day role

might be demanding, and time can be scarce, but understand that every activity, big or small, is an important step towards changing how people think and act about their wellbeing, and we will support staff who take on this role.

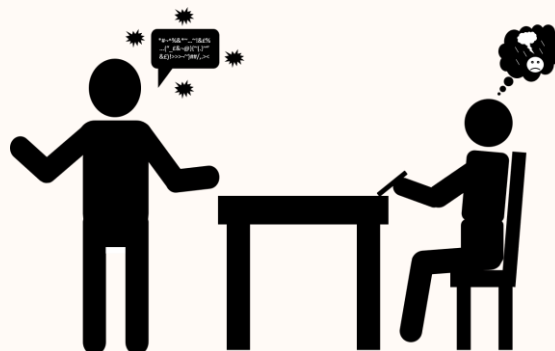
Every Lead will do different things to help the people around them to understand and learn about wellbeing, but they should consider the list of essentials as key components of the role. It is important to always remember that your role as a wellbeing lead is to have oversight of all of this, how much or how little you do as an individual is up to you e.g. encouraging self-care and self-help; this could be promoting webinars that already exist on the EA’s Healthwell Hub or organizing putting up posters around the staffroom. Or if you are very motivated, do a short presentation to the school staff. It really is up to you.

Teacher Wellbeing and Self-care by Adrian Bethune & Emma Kell- [Amazon](#)

What a Wellbeing Lead is not

The role of a Wellbeing Lead is to facilitate, promote and encourage, and it is important to understand that you are not taking on the role of *counsellor, therapist, problem solver, complaints manager or party planner*. You are not responsible for the mental health, emotional wellbeing, or job satisfaction of your colleagues. Your mantra needs to be:

“I am not a therapist; this is not therapy”



Self-care as a Wellbeing Lead

Some tips to support your self-care include:

- Knowing personal limits.
- Identifying supportive people in your own life.
- Talking with other people to help process what has happened that day.
- Flexibility around change.
- Self-compassion – turning the volume down on critical voices.

Supporting Staff Wellbeing in Schools and Colleges- [Anna Freud](#)

How Could it Look in Your School?

An individual's wellbeing at work can be influenced by various factors in their immediate environment. The below image highlights some of the areas that work together to impact on wellbeing at work.

➤ Source: [Xavier CET](#)



As a Wellbeing Lead, you can decide which of these would have the most impact in your school or which area you may feel most confident in tackling. The findings from your **school questionnaires** should give you some starting points.

For some schools it may be improving the relationships between staff, whether that is teaching and non-teaching staff or SMT and other staff. For other schools it may be improving the work-life balance – looking at timings for meeting/trainings, setting limits on when you can be reached by email/phone calls, looking at workload etc.

Staff Wellbeing is Key to Success- [Wiltshire Healthy Schools](#)

Levels of Support

Support for wellbeing can take place on many levels:



Most schools will choose to implement ‘universal’ strategies before moving onto more targeted strategies. Most of the universal support will centre around the whole school/school culture approach, and the creation of a work environment that is supportive and encourages openness and communication can be the first step in prioritising and hopefully improving wellbeing for all staff.

It will be up to the individual school to determine what is right for them. For example, **peer supervision** may be something you wish to offer as universal support depending on the size of your school, while training on specific mental health issues might be something you find you want to explore once you've had feedback from staff about their concerns etc.

The specialist end of things is about encouraging staff to seek appropriate help when they need it, whether this is through their GP or a charity etc. Research carried out by the *Anna Freud Centre* indicated that **11% of staff** questioned would not talk to anyone if they felt they needed help with their mental health, and we would hope that by doing this training and encouraging a focus on staff mental health that this number will decrease.

Below are some examples of **ideas for practical wellbeing support** that we have seen in schools, and which some of you may have already implemented in your own schools. As your role develops, you will be able to engage with your colleagues to see what has the most impact and which ideas work best for you.



Peer Supervision: A Big Idea

Peer supervision isn't about formal counselling or management and is more like a 'listening ear'. When engaging in peer supervision, your role is to empathise and provide a safe and dedicated space for your peer to talk freely and express themselves. Setting aside protected time and planning ahead for these interactions tends to yield better results than responding reactively to specific incidents that occur.

Supervision is different from staff support or counselling, which focuses on the staff members job experiences. The purpose of supervision is to **support members of staff** who are facing issues or challenges at work. One of its key benefits is alleviating the sense of isolation when managing problems. Regular, planned supervision contributes significantly to ensuring that staff receive necessary support. Here is an example of what peer supervision could look like:

- At the beginning of each term every staff member anonymously chooses the name of another staff member, to whom they will become a mentor to for the rest of the term.
- The school's senior management should then provide protected time for these meetings to occur.
- Staff could also anonymously write out positive messages for each other and display them in a communal area, which may sound cheesy, but will be guaranteed to make people smile and give them a lift.



Messages to staff can be as simple or straightforward as: ‘I like the way Caroline encourages the pupils to try new foods when they are reluctant during dinner service’ or ‘I love hearing Gerry whistle in the corridors whilst he works, this gives me a smile and reminds me to take pleasure in my job and not to always focus on the negative’.

The School Development Plan and Wellbeing Policy

Part of the Wellbeing lead’s role will be to ensure staff wellbeing is properly addressed on your School Development Plan (SDP). The SDP is a strategic plan for improvement, which should bring together, in a clear and simple way, the school’s priorities, the main measures it will take to raise standards, the resources dedicated to these, and the key outcomes and targets it intends to achieve.

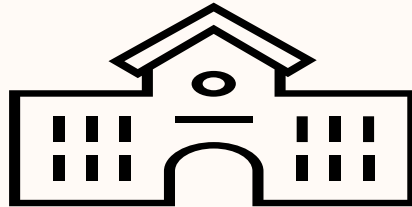
Staff wellbeing is not a new idea and has already been identified as a priority of *The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010*. By being part of the SDP, the wellbeing lead role will be given some credence and clarifies to all staff that their wellbeing is something that is valued and important. It will also help the wellbeing lead gain support in implementing strategies to support wellbeing as all staff have a duty to engage and promote a school’s development plan.

Children & Young People’s Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework- [Department of Education](#)

The Children & Young People’s Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework was launched on 26 February 2021 and is a joint document by the Department of Health and Department of Education. The main emphasis of this framework is to support educational settings in promoting emotional health and wellbeing at a universal level within schools, through a holistic, multi-disciplinary approach.

Section 2 of the framework emphasises ‘**wellbeing for all**’ and calls for school leaders to prioritise a culture that promotes caring, belonging and respect for all and plans strategically to improve emotional wellbeing throughout the school community.

The ‘*Every School a Good School*’ policy for school improvement emphasises how school improvement is first and foremost the responsibility of the school. This is based on the premise that schools themselves are best placed to identify areas for improvement and implement changes.



What could a Wellbeing Policy look like?

There are several things to consider when drawing up a wellbeing policy for a school, such as:

Does your school have a staff wellbeing policy?	Are there clear policies and procedures around staff wellbeing and are the same processes and expectations applicable to all staff?	Is there clarity and fairness around implementing policies and processes and a supportive environment	What practical strategies does your school have in place to promote good staff wellbeing?
Is the workplace a positive environment for staff? activities	Is there a dedicated space where they can go and take time out? Is it appealing and looked after?	Are there any low cost ways to promote wellbeing and make staff feel valued?	Do the senior leaders in the school model good working practices and self-care to encourage an appropriate work-life balance?
Is there a culture of clear communication about workplace wellbeing?	Do all senior staff members have an open-door policy and do staff know they can discuss anything with them?	How are staff consulted about change and involved in developing problem-solving strategies?	Are staff and the school leadership team confident and encouraged to notice and offer support early when a colleague’s wellbeing is under threat?
	Is there clear information for staff about how they can get help inside and outside the school environment if they need it?	Are there good training and development opportunities for staff?	

It is important to recognise that having a policy is only the first step and that the policy must be communicated clearly to all staff to become embedded into practice. The **policy will be individual to each school** and can include targets related to the school's ethos and environment, as well as specific strategies and resources to be used.

There are numerous examples of staff wellbeing policies that can be found online, which could serve as useful guides or templates for helping you develop your own policy. It is also useful to seek the views of your colleagues and staff for determining which aspects of wellbeing they would like to see prioritised.

Key Principles of the School Development plan and Wellbeing Policy

Wellbeing policies and SDP's will be slightly different for each school, so it is important to keep in mind a few key principles:

Staff centred: The wellbeing needs, and the best interests of staff are a central focus of this policy. This requires us to respect and value the voice of individuals and foster their belonging and connectedness to the school community.

Equitable, fair and inclusive: All staff need access to equitable, fair and inclusive opportunities to develop their wellbeing in ways that are responsive and suitable to their particular needs and contexts. Practices need to be tailored, responsive and relevant, building on the existing strengths of school staff and school communities.

Evidence-informed: This policy promotes the use of evidence-informed practice, which brings together local experience and expertise with the best available evidence from research. It acknowledges that what works in one context may not be appropriate or feasible in another.

Outcomes focused: This policy promotes continuous improvement practices and the use of data relating to outcomes to guide practice in our schools in relation to the promotion of wellbeing for all staff. This policy and framework for practice will ensure the use of a self-reflection process for the identification, monitoring and review of outcomes.

Partnership/Collaboration: The wellbeing of staff is a shared responsibility. Working in partnership with other departments and agencies is key to ensuring this policy is implemented.

Including Wellbeing on your School Development plan- Examples

Here are some ideas of what staff wellbeing could look like on your school development plan.

Sample 1

To ensure a whole school focus on Wellbeing and Mental Health for staff:

- To develop the work of the *Wellbeing Lead* within school
- To develop and implement a staff *Wellbeing Policy*
- Leaders consider *teacher workload* and staff wellbeing.
- School embeds an ethos that encourages all stakeholders to develop their understanding of mental health and wellbeing issues.
- Resources which promote good mental health are reviewed and updated.
- Staff are developed and supported to manage their own mental health and wellbeing.
- Areas are created in school for staff to connect, reflect and relax.
- Monitor and review the implementation of wellbeing strategies to gauge their effectiveness.

This example highlights the role of the wellbeing lead and the wellbeing policy. It also references the school ethos and a commitment to monitoring and review. This example also has specific plans for the school which include workload and the creation of designated areas for staff wellbeing.

Ten Ways to Support School Staff Wellbeing- [Anna Freud](#)

Sample 2

To improve the mental health and wellbeing of all staff:

- To establish a Wellbeing Warriors team within school
- Development of outdoor space for staff at break/lunch
- Staff are supported to build resilience and enjoy good mental health.
- Staff who are struggling will be quickly identified and have access to skilled support.
- Teaching staff directed hours are shared with staff to ensure clarity.

- Paperwork and monitoring systems are reviewed to ensure minimal duplication and less workload for staff.
- To monitor improvement through the health and wellbeing questionnaire

Here is another example of what staff wellbeing could look like on your school development plan. It highlights how every policy will be unique, it will depend on measures your school has already taken, and how every school will have a different starting point.

Staff Welfare

Officers with the responsibility for the welfare of staff are employed within the Education Authority (EA) and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS).

➤ Source: [Staff welfare | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/staff-welfare)

Staff welfare issues may include:

- **work-related stress**
- **relationship problems in or out of work**
- **alcohol/drug dependency**
- **domestic problems**
- **bereavement**
- **coping with change**
- **ill health**

BODY	CONTACT	TELEPHONE	EMAIL
EA	Health & Wellbeing Team	02890 418023	healthandwellbeing@eani.org.uk
CCMS	Locality HR Advisor	02892 013014	info@ccmsschools.com

A Toolkit for Modern Life by Dr Emma Hepburn- [Amazon](#)

Session 4: Peer Supervision

What is Peer Supervision?

Peer supervision offers a professional reflective space that ensures good ethical practice within an educational and supportive relationship. It offers an opportunity for reflection which helps the practitioner gain a greater understanding of themselves and the work they do. This awareness is key to continued professional growth and development, and providing supervision to education staff can support them in working through stress and vicarious trauma experienced in their job role without any judgement or blame.

Kinman, Wray and Strange (2011) found that workplace social support is very important for reducing stress and burnout. The ability to disclose emotions in a supportive environment can improve coping mechanisms and helps us normalise feelings rather than feeling judged.

Peer supervision is not therapy or counselling and can be either formal or informal. Sessions can be one-to-one or in a small group.

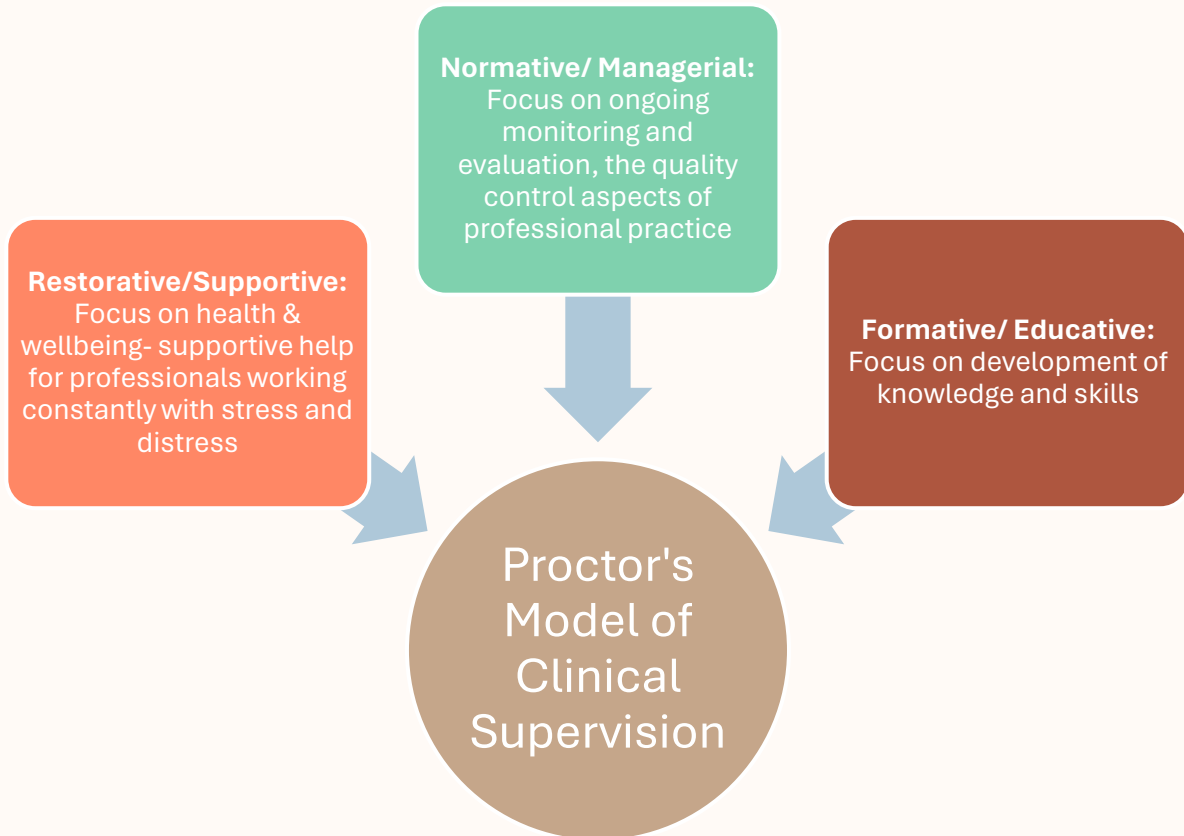
The Proctor Model of Supervision

Proctor's model of clinical supervision was first developed by Brigid Proctor in 1986 before being developed further with the help of Francesca Inskipp in 2009 (Litherland, 2023). The Proctor Model was designed to provide supervisors with a tool they can employ to collaboratively develop professional goals for clinical supervision. It was originally intended to be used in nursing practice and has since become adopted for use in behavioural health settings and for use within the Educational Psychology Service.

The model outlines three essential functions that supervisors and supervisees address during supervision. It is important for the supervisor to tailor their approach based on the needs of the supervisee. The Proctor model recognises the importance of management, learning, and emotional support in the supervisory relationship.

Proctor’s Model identifies three essential functions in clinical supervision:

1. **Normative/Managerial:** Addresses administrative and surveillance aspects.
2. **Formative/Educative:** Focuses on learning and development.
3. **Restorative/Supportive:** Provides pastoral support and emotional wellbeing.



Guidance for effective Peer Supervision

For peer supervision to yield positive outcomes, several critical functions and tasks must be thoughtfully addressed. Let’s explore these key considerations:

- **Setting Clear Boundaries:**
 - From the outset, it’s crucial to establish clear boundaries. Participants should understand that this is a peer supervision arrangement.

- These boundaries can be either **unwritten and implicit** or explicitly outlined in a **signed contract**.
- **Creating a Trusting Environment:**
 - Supervision occurs within a **trusted relationship**. Participants should feel safe to share openly without fear of judgment.
 - Confidentiality is paramount: **what is discussed in supervision stays there**.
- **Choosing the Right Space:**
 - Supervision sessions should take place in a **private, safe environment**.
 - Minimize interruptions to ensure focused discussions.
- **Allocating Protected Time:**
 - Designate specific time slots for supervision sessions.
 - Prioritize these sessions to ensure their effectiveness.

Remember, successful peer supervision relies on mutual respect, trust, and a commitment to growth. It should be a recurring and integral aspect of your professional work. You should consider scheduling it approximately once every term or half term, with sessions that typically last around 30 minutes.

Many teachers have firsthand experience with supporting others and lending a listening ear. However, peer supervision stands apart due to its need for confidentiality, privacy and trust, and well-defined boundaries. It should provide a dedicated space for reflection and learning. Participants should be encouraged to bring forth challenging issues where they feel stuck, fostering growth and collaborative problem solving.

- **Charlie Waller Trust ‘Top tips for setting up staff supervision groups in schools’:** [LINK](#)
- **Talking Heads’ Supervision curious – why supervision in education is essential’:** [LINK](#)
- **Co reflection:** [LINK](#)

Benefits of Peer Supervision

Peer supervision offers practitioners a valuable opportunity for **reflection**, leading to a deeper understanding of themselves and their work. It contributes to **improved mental health and wellbeing**, as evidenced by teacher wellbeing index statistics ([TWI](#), page 50).



Through increased self-reflection and awareness, it enhances **communication, connection, and organisational culture**. Moreover, peer supervision actively supports **professional development**, ultimately leading to better outcomes for children. It bolsters confidence in managing safeguarding and behavior issues.

Most importantly, we must recognize the crucial role of caring for the caregiver. As Davys and Beddoe aptly explain:

“It can allow at the very least for the doors to be shut, noise to be reduced and a quiet space for a satisfying professional conversation”- Davys & Beddoe, 2010

Models of Peer Supervision

Informal peer supervision has its merits, allowing staff to build relationships. However, as many of you may have experienced in your own staffrooms, these informal discussions about work and difficulties can sometimes lead to a spiral of negativity. It's common for everyone to conclude, "Things are just very difficult at the moment," perpetuating the "it is what it is" culture, which can be a significant barrier to change.

To counter this, introducing formal peer supervision methods becomes crucial. Such structured approaches ensure that conversations about difficulties remain positive and solution focused. Rather than succumbing to negativity, staff can actively seek ways to overcome challenges.

Below we will outline some formal models of peer supervision that can be implemented for use within schools. Both models, whether in a paired one-to-one relationship or a larger group setting, share a common goal, which is to propel situations or problems forward. By focusing on positive strategies, these models empower you to move beyond feeling stuck in the mud and embrace proactive problem solving.

Peer Supervision- No-one knows as much as all of us- [Coaching Mentoring Centre](#)

SOAR Model

The SOAR model operates within the framework of Appreciative Inquiry and offers an approach to peer supervision that focuses on strengths and seeks to understand the whole system by including the voices of the relevant stakeholders.

SOAR stands for:

- **Strengths** What can we build on?
- **Opportunities** What are our stakeholders asking for?
- **Aspirations** What do we care deeply about?
- **Results** How do we know we are succeeding?

SOAR is a useful strategy for both one-to-one peer supervision and group contexts. It provides an organised framework for discussing challenges and promotes a positive mindset for future aspirations. By using a SOAR analysis, you focus on what you are doing well and what can be improved.

While its language may sometimes sound business-oriented, the underlying rationale and adaptable methodology make it equally suitable for individual supportive conversations. Through SOAR, organisations can effectively steer toward positive outcomes while maintaining a supportive and constructive atmosphere.

How does the SOAR work?

When you meet one-to-one, one person can bring an issue to discuss, and the other person helps them work through it by looking at the four areas of the SOAR. Below you can see examples of how to work through the four areas.

SOAR Model Analysis (Appreciative Inquiry)

S	<p>Strengths: <i>What can we build on?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are we most proud of as an organization? • What makes us unique? • What is our proudest achievement in the last year or two? • How do we use our strengths to get results? • How do our strengths fit with the realities of the marketplace? • What do we do or provide that is world class for our customers, our industry, and other potential stakeholders? 	<p>Aspirations: <i>What do we care deeply about?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>When we explore our values and aspirations, "what are we deeply passionate about?"</i> • <i>Reflecting on our Strengths and Opportunities conversations, who are we, who should we become, and where should we go in the future?</i> • <i>What is our most compelling aspiration?</i> • <i>What strategic initiatives (projects, programs and processes) would support our aspirations?</i>
O	<p>Opportunities: <i>What are our stakeholders asking for?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we make sense of opportunities provided by the external forces and trends? • What are the top three opportunities on which we should focus our efforts? • How can we best meet the needs of our stakeholders? • Who are possible new customers? • How can we distinctively differentiate ourselves from existing or potential competitors? • What are possible new markets, products, services or processes? • How can we reframe challenges to be seen as exciting opportunities? • What new skills do we need to move forward? 	<p>Results: <i>How do we know we are succeeding?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considering our Strengths, Opportunities, and Aspirations, what meaningful measures would indicate that we are on track to achieving our goals? • What are 3 to 5 indicators that would create a scorecard that addresses a triple bottom line of profit, people, and planet? • What resources are needed to implement vital projects? • What are the best rewards to support those who achieve our goals?
A		

SOAR Analysis Template Step-by-step Guide for Strategic Planning- [Digital Leadership](#)

Solution Circle Model

Solution circles are a valuable approach within the context of peer supervision. These circles provide a structured and collaborative method for addressing challenges and finding solutions. Participants come together to share their insights, experiences, and ideas, fostering a supportive environment. By collectively exploring potential strategies and alternatives, solution circles empower individuals to overcome difficulties and enhance their professional growth.

Key points of solution circles:

- This is a group supervision strategy.
- A solution-focused circle aims to help staff discuss school issues as a group, and to generate solutions.
- It is an effective approach for getting ‘unstuck’ from a problem in any aspect of school/work life.
- It is a tool of ‘community capacity’ – which means that people have the capacity and ability to make a change and bring about positive outcomes if they are given the space and the time to do so.
- It builds capacity within schools based on the knowledge and skills that are already there.

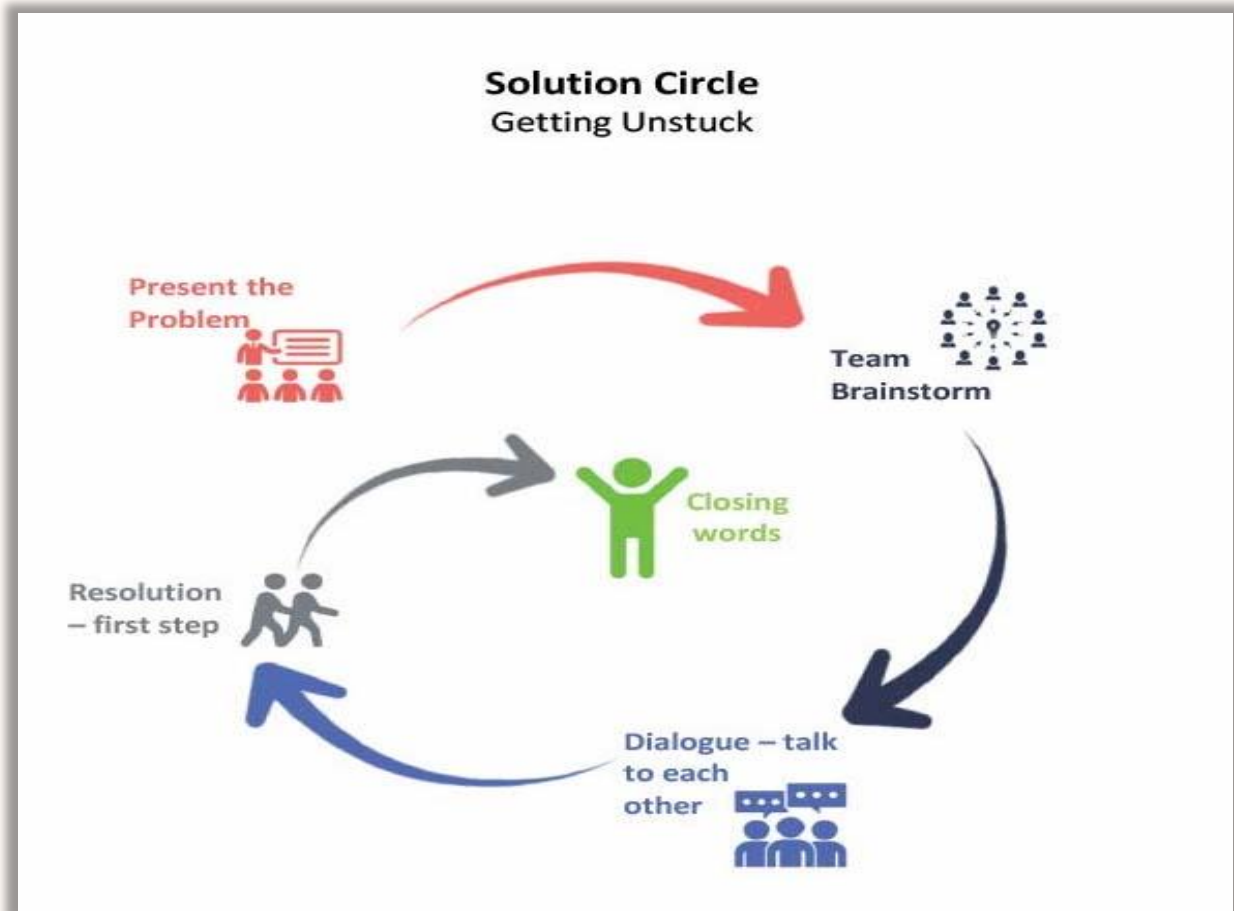
Solution Circles- [Milton Keynes City Council](#)

Solution Circle – How does it work?

Each circle takes no more than 30 minutes. It works best with a group of about 8 people but can be flexible (minimum 4). One person brings a ‘problem’ for discussion which can be anything school-related.

Roles in a solution circle:

- Presenter of the problem
- Facilitator – Timekeeper
- Note taker
- Brainstorm team



Each stage lasts for 6 minutes.

1. **Present the problem:** The person presenting the problem gets 6 minutes to outline the problem they are having. The timekeeper keeps the time, and the recorder takes the notes. At this stage only the problem presenter is allowed to talk and everyone else listens until the 6 minutes pass. It is important to provide the whole 6 minutes even if the person presenting the problem cannot fill the whole time, quite often during periods of silence the person presenting the problem can use this space to develop new thoughts and perspectives of their own regarding the problem.
2. **Team brainstorm:** During this stage, it is now the turn of the person presenting the problem to stay silent. It is not a time to clarify the problem or ask questions. Everyone in the team should have an opportunity to chip in with ideas and creative solutions to the problems.

The facilitator should take a role here in ensuring everyone gets an equal opportunity to present ideas and that no one person is dominating the discussion.

3. **Dialogue:** At this stage, the group, can have a discussion led by the problem presenter. The problem presenter may wish to talk about some of the suggestions raised in the brainstorm. The wider group may have questions for the problem presenter to help clarify the problem. This is the time to explore and clear up the problem.
 - a) It is important that the focus remains on the positive points that you have some control over, and NOT, on what cannot be done. It's okay to recognise areas where you cannot find solutions within a short space of time, but it is the role of the facilitator at this point to move discussion onto areas where little bits of change can be achieved. The focus of the circle is to stay within the here and now, what do we have control over and what can we make a difference too.
4. **Resolution – First Step:** The focus person, with the support of the rest of the group, will decide the first steps that are doable within the next 3 days. At least one step should be actionable within the next 24 hours, this is important as research suggests that you are much more likely to implement a strategy and make a change if one of the targets is in place straight away. They have to feasible/achievable actions. (Potentially SMART targets). Someone from the wider group is nominated to meet with the focus person after 3 days to check to see if they took their first step (accountability).
5. **Closing words:** this is an opportunity for the whole group to reflect on the process and the note keeper give the record to the focus person.

Session 5: General Wellbeing Strategies

If you look back to Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (p. 18), you will recall how individuals both develop in, and are influenced by the layers of environment around them, with the most influential areas being closest to the individual in the centre.

The factors that influence an individual's wellbeing can be viewed in the same manner as the bioecological model, and similarly, effective interventions to promote wellbeing within a system such as a school, should consider all elements of the model and how they interact with and influence each other.

We will now look at some factors that research have shown to be associated with workplace wellbeing. Most of this information has been drawn from the work of Harvey et al. (Harvey, Modini, Joyce, & Milligan-Saville, 2017).

Job Design (Macrosystem)

Job Design might be construed as a *macrosystemic* factor – that is, part of the wider economic and cultural systems and largely beyond our control or influence. The following Job Design factors have been linked to workplace wellbeing:

- Demand and Control: Research shows that jobs that are high in demand (e.g. those with greater time pressure) and low control (e.g. less decision-making authority) bear the greatest risk of illness and reduced wellbeing. Conversely, offering employees more autonomy and agency has a positive impact (Karasek & Theorell, 1990)
- Variety and learning: Having a varied range of tasks along with opportunities to refine existing / learn new skills is associated with greater employee engagement, work absorption, and job satisfaction (Halbesleben, 2010)
- Job characteristics: This refers to more immutable qualities of a job such as remuneration, contract type (e.g. permanent or temporary), the potential for promotion, and also perceived job value – all with obvious links to wellbeing (Stansfeld S. A., Rasul, Head, Singleton, & Lee, 2003). Interestingly, recent research from University College

London (UCL) indicates that, despite high perceived stress and burnout, teachers do tend to report high perceived job value and job satisfaction (Bryon, Erhel, & Salibekyan, 2019).

- Exposure to trauma: The degree to which a job exposes someone to trauma is associated with higher levels of stress, burnout, poor mental health outcomes and PTSD (Stansfeld et al., 2003). Whilst this might call to mind professions such as first response medical staff, firefighters and so on, school-based roles are certainly not exempt from this. Further, roles such as teaching are high in what is known as “emotional labour” which involves a high degree of managing emotions throughout the workday – for example “putting on a brave face” or suppressing feelings of anger or sadness. Doing this over prolonged periods can lead to exhaustion and poses a risk factor for both depression and anxiety.

YouTube: Workplace Mental Health, All You Need to Know (For Now)- [TEDx](#)

Organisational Factors (Exosystem / Mesosystem)

Most of these factors refer to the wider organisation of which the workplace (e.g. school) is a component, however some are applicable to the school environment itself.

- **Organisational change:** This refers to the perceived stability of a company or organisation. It will be no surprise to learn that uncertainty and insecurity breed discontent and poor mental health outcomes, e.g. (Bohle, Quinlan, & Mayhew, 2001).
- **Perceived organisational support:** This is a very influential factor, with low levels of perceived support being consistently associated with poor wellbeing outcomes (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002)
- **Recognition and reward:** This refers to the gratitude provided where employees have performed well. Research shows that where good effort goes unrecognised, both job dissatisfaction and poor wellbeing outcomes result. This is known as the “effort-reward” imbalance e.g. (Siegrist, et al., 2004).

- **Organisational justice:** Organisational justice refers to the perception of fairness of rules within an organisation – for example in terms of distribution of resources, perceived social norms, and management of conflict. Low levels of perceived justice are linked to higher levels of stress (Elovainio, Kivimaki, & Vahtera, 2002).
- **Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC):** This concept refers to the degree to which mental health is promoted within an organisation – for example, how strongly it is prioritised, the degree to which senior management promote wellbeing-focused activities, and the communication to employees regarding mental health (Dollard & McTernan, 2011).
- **The physical environment:** This factor refers to characteristics of a working environment such as noise levels, temperature, hygiene, lighting, and so on which also have a role to play in perceptions of wellbeing. Specifically, poor environmental conditions have been associated with mood changes, anxiety, erratic sleeping patterns, and episodes of depression e.g. (Partonen & Lonnqvist, 2000).

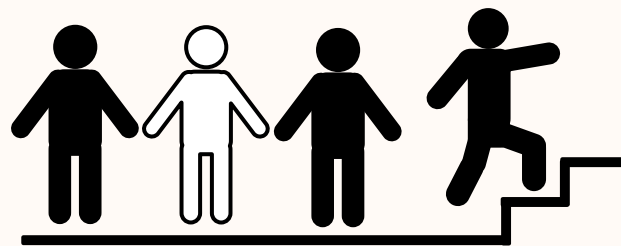
What are the policy implications for these factors? Think of two ideas for a health and wellbeing policy that follow directly from the above findings on organisational factors.

Team/Group Factors (Mesosystem & Microsystem)

- **Support from colleagues / Quality of interpersonal relationships:** Research shows that these group-based factors are key to mitigating the negative impact of high-strain jobs. A recent review of 14 studies showed that low perceived social support was consistently associated with episodes of depression, work-related sickness absence, and general mental health difficulties. On the flip side, high levels of reported social cohesion (group closeness) and perceived social support were associated with indicators of psychological wellbeing (Netterstrom, et al., 2008); (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).
- **Leadership:** Strong leadership is crucial. Research has shown that managers who had training in wellbeing support reported that they

were more confident in discussing mental health matters with colleagues. Training in leadership skills – such as providing high-quality performance feedback, motivating, and inspiring individuals, was also shown to have been associated with higher levels of general workplace wellbeing (Tsutsumi, 2011).

How are your school staff members supported upon their return from maternity/paternity leave? How could this be improved?



Home/Work Conflict (Microsystem)

Obviously, individuals will vary according to their home and life circumstances and may have stressful situations at home that can spill over into work. Such factors increase the likelihood of experiencing stress and burnout. Though these are beyond the control of the organisation, it is important to reiterate that good supervision and a supportive work environment can help soften negative impact of challenging external events. Examples of such events include births, bereavements, caring responsibilities, relationship difficulties and familial separation.

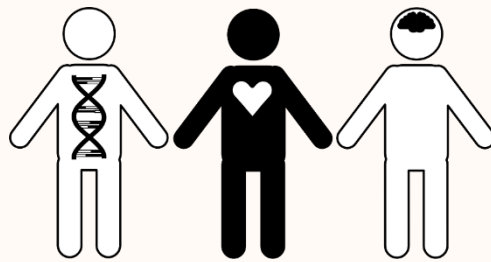
Biopsychosocial Factors (Individual)

Individuals all possess unique characteristics that enable them to cope or increase their risk of poor mental health outcomes. These include, and are not limited to:

- **Genetics**
- **Personality**
- **Early life events**
- **Cognitive / behavioural patterns**

- **Mental Health history**
- **Lifestyle**
- **Resilience**

It is important for organisations to consider individual factors as some of these may be modifiable, for example through resilience training or promotion of physical activity, good sleep hygiene, etc. Further research is required to determine the efficacy of such workplace initiatives.



Reminder: Wellbeing is not a tick box exercise!

Before you read through the 10 Step Toolkit, it is worth reminding yourself of what staff wellbeing is NOT. **Wellbeing is not a tick box exercise**; it is not another bullet point to present to the school inspector. Wellbeing has become something of a buzzword in recent months to the extent that its true value and impact has become lost.

Expensive, one-off training days will have **minimal impact** if the key foundations for wellbeing – such as safety, trust, and connection, are not in place. Smaller gestures may even be resented by staff if the bigger systemic issues are not addressed. As you have read in the section on school culture, wellbeing is about the formation of deeply ingrained habits that are embedded in everyday practice in schools.

School Staff Wellbeing: Your 10-Step Toolkit

This section comprises ten key strategies that may be referenced when designing or reviewing your wellbeing policy. Note that some of these topics have been covered previously; they have been included here to form part of a “go-to” checklist when planning to implement strategies within your school. Some additional pointers and considerations have been included for your reference.

1. Identify a ‘Health and Wellbeing Lead’

The role and duties of the Health and Wellbeing Lead is described in some detail on p. 28. In choosing a Health and Wellbeing Lead, it is worth considering their role within the school and the potential issues this might generate.

If wellbeing is exclusively the domain of Senior Leadership, there may be a danger that wellbeing is associated with “**management speak**” and is a top-down phenomenon. Conversely, if the role is led by a member of teaching staff, for example, they may feel trapped in a role of “messenger” and find that they are powerless to implement change. Some schools have circumnavigated these difficulties by setting up “**Wellbeing Teams**” including various members of the school team. Irrespective of choice, it is crucial that the School Leadership Team provide clear guidance as to the specifics of the role and desired outcomes.

Finally, whilst we may identify as named Lead, it must be emphasised that wellbeing is the right but also the responsibility of every single member of staff; no one person should bear the burden. This applies, crucially, to Senior Management as well. It may be the case that those in positions of leadership neglect their own wellbeing in endeavours to promote that of others. The mantra “**You cannot pour from an empty cup**” reminds us that it is vital to place a premium on our own wellbeing in the first instance.

2. Enshrine staff wellbeing in policy.

On p. 34 you will find guidance in relation to including staff wellbeing in your School Development Plan. The wellbeing policy should not be construed as something that is filed away and then sits on a shelf; rather, it is a ‘**live**’ **document** that is regularly reviewed, updated, consulted upon, and communicated to staff members.

Regular surveying of staff can provide a feedback mechanism whereby policies are revised and reviewed depending on the staff’s response to various strategies. It is reasonable to expect that some changes will be met with friction, no plan will arrive in a fully realised, perfected state! On the other hand, you may be surprised to find that small changes, implemented

faithfully, have positive impacts that cascade through unexpected facets of school life.

Templates for wellbeing plans or policies are available at the Education Support, Anna Freud, and the Mentally Healthy Schools websites:



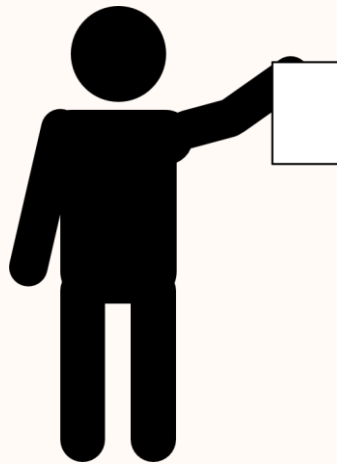
➤ [Education Support](#)



➤ [Anna Freud](#)



➤ : [Mentally Healthy Schools](#)



3. Promote openness.

It is important to cultivate a climate of openness regarding wellbeing / mental health related issues.

Get to know the staff: The value of knowing staff members as individuals as well as employees cannot be overstated. Do you know what your staff member's children's names are? What motivates them? Where their strengths lie? Who is vulnerable to certain types of pressure? Knowing our fellow staff members contributes to a culture of open dialogue that does not exclusively focus on school-based targets.

Normalise by checking in: It is helpful if school leaders speak regularly with team members to check how they are doing and reflect on may be causing

them stress. The “Education Talking Toolkit” document produced by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) outlines some useful conversation starters that may be used with staff to promote discussion of these issues e.g.

- *Do you feel that your skills are used to good effect?*
- *Does your workload feel achievable?*
- *What improvements or support could be put in place to help?*

➤ **Health & Safety Executive**

Model discussion: The best way to avoid the perception of paying “lip-service” to wellbeing promotion is to model good practice ourselves. School leaders can model discussion by reflect on what they themselves are finding stressful and what is helping them cope.

Buddy up: Mentoring and buddy schemes may be implemented to ensure that line management is not the only vehicle for discussions.

Ensure wellbeing is always on the agenda: Having wellbeing on the agenda at team meetings ensures that it is not a once off consideration but has priority status.

4. Offer supervision.

Supervision has long been a core component of health service practice but has been less developed within the education sector. Supervision is separate from line management, and therefore can be usefully conducted by peers, as well as managers.

As we have already seen, supervision offers an opportunity to tackle problems in relation to work tasks, reflect on an individual’s stress / mental health, touch on successes and achievements, and make suggestions that can be actioned.

To be effective, it is critical that supervision is both **valued** and **protected**. Unfortunately, supervision is often the first item to be cancelled when

pressing matters arrive. Before striking through that appointment in our diaries, we should remind ourselves that even 10 minutes spent with an individual can have an immense impact and group emails, which can take considerable time to compose, generally have much less value.

5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing-[NHS](#)

Research shows that the predictability of supervision is more important than the frequency. There are multiple different approaches or methods of conducting supervision: a simple, pragmatic method that suits the organisation at hand will work best. It is always good to have an agenda and for the supervisee to set the agenda for discussion.

A useful method to consider is the “**3 As**” – where the employee brings one thing to **applaud**, one thing to **action** or do, and at least one thing to **ask** (SecEd, 2020). The supervisor may then steer the discussion through open ended questioning. In many settings, supervision is conducted by the line manager, however other approaches (such as peer, 1:1 or group supervision) may be considered more conducive. Staff may be consulted to find their preferences.

5. Promote Self-Care

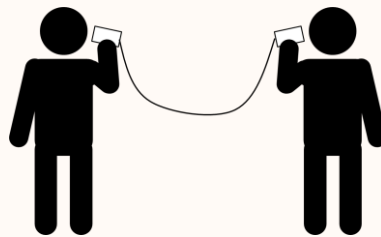
Self-care refers to the ways we intentionally look after our physical and emotional wellbeing. It is important to prioritise self-care and to encourage others to do the same. What constitutes self-care i.e. what feels restorative will be unique to each of us and to each situation, for example it may be a quiet cup of tea, seeing a friend or time to do something we enjoy.

The basics of self-care can get neglected when we are under pressure and it may be helpful to focus on our daily routines, for example eating regularly, taking steps to promote restorative sleep, and taking breaks. Finding ways to build self-care into our daily routines may be useful, for example finding a few minutes to check in with yourself at the start or end of the day, listening

to a favorite playlist in the car or taking a five-minute walk or shower at the end of a long day.

The NHS and PHA often talk about the [5 steps to wellbeing](#) which can be useful to think about. They outline five evidence-based areas shown to improve wellbeing. These are – **connect, keep learning, be active, take notice and give.**

Self-compassion is a key component of self-care and refers to our ability to be compassionate toward ourselves. One way we can begin to explore and implement this is to consider the advice we would give a loved one in a similar situation.



6. Foster relationships

As we have already noted, in research involving workplace wellbeing, interpersonal relationships take centre stage. The following ideas may be used to foster and develop relationships among staff members.

Collaborative working: Opportunities to pair up on projects are always valued. Collaboration is particularly effective where it draws on particular employees' skill sets, thereby boosting perceived self-worth and job satisfaction.

Social activities: Schools may consider forming a staff social group for outings to dinner, theatre etc. with participation obviously being optional. Outdoor pursuits have the dual advantages of promoting social and physical wellbeing. A simple lunchtime walk is easily organised, or weekend trip to one of the many beauty spots in Northern Ireland.

Morning meditation: Some schools report success in implementing regular mindfulness classes, yoga, or “wellbeing days”. However, these can be both expensive and time-consuming, and are not always received warmly by staff members. A suggested alternative is to implement a simple 5–10-minute guided meditation as a protected spot of calm before the chaos of the day unfolds. This could be led by a staff member or simply played on audio if no-one volunteers! You may find that some staff members are cynical about this initially but once the practice becomes embedded in school routine begin to experience the benefits.

Team breakfasts: Whilst we are aware of the benefits of breakfast clubs for our pupils, we might often find ourselves rushing out the door without so much as a bite of toast. Team breakfasts are a relatively cheap method to start the day right, promote good nutrition and bond over food.

Fun Friday: Staff members may wish to pair up on an alternate basis to organise treats for an extended Friday lunch break.

Every School Needs a Staff Wellbeing Team- [The Guardian](#)

7. Raise awareness.

Raising awareness is an obvious way to reduce stigma and encourage a culture of openness around mental health. All staff should be familiarised with those external services available to provide support where they are feeling overwhelmed. A directory of services can be downloaded from the Public Health NI website. Pocket sized booklets may be requested for your organisation.

Staff may wish to consider offering training in Mental Health First Aid to help recognise signs of difficulty, encourage discussion, signpost to services, and boost resilience. It is important to note that Mental Health difficulties are a separate – if related – issue to wellbeing. This said, if staff feel prepared and equipped to assist with Mental Health issues, it can contribute to overall levels of staff wellbeing. Both Aware NI and Assist offer training in Mental

Health First Aid to organisations. Awareness can also be boosted through participation in Mental Health campaigns e.g. World Mental Health week.

8. Reconfigure workload.

Many wellbeing resources refer to reducing workload. This can be frustrating for teachers due to the implicit work-intensive nature of the profession – it is impossible to make work “disappear”! It is worth remembering, however, that “work” and “workload” are not the same thing, and that it is always possible to reconfigure how you work to avoid unnecessary erosion of precious teacher time. **Some suggestions are:**

Detox digitally: Rules (or guidelines) can be adopted in relation to responding / checking emails outside of work time. This may be modelled by school leaders by not responding themselves outside of work. Some schools adopt a “No Email Friday” policy. Group WhatsApp’s can be muted during holidays, weekends, etc. – the constant stream of information can be overwhelming, even when it is non-work related!

Reduce admin: Admin tasks are a huge bugbear of teachers and should be streamlined as much as possible. Examples include sharing pre-prepared schemes of work, having templates with drop-down menus for report writing and planning, making all proformas available electronically, prepopulating forms with basic details. Efficiency should always be promoted over excess – as the mantra says “Work smarter, not harder...”

Encourage collaboration: Collaboration is generally recommended for planning purposes and to avoid unnecessary duplication of work. It also presents an opportunity for having more experienced colleagues buddy with NQTs.

Supervision: This can be a useful forum for joint problem-solving in relation to workload burden.

Advocate a work-life balance: A healthy work-life balance should be promoted by school leaders, for example by protecting holidays, discussing

matters that don't always relate to school, modelling good practice regarding as out of office emails, etc. Some schools have been creative with this, for example arranging timetables so that every other Monday a teacher could receive a lie in. Another arranged teaching schedules so that every week contained a no-marking day. These interventions might seem small, however do contribute to the message that staff wellbeing is a priority.

Work-reducing toolkit: Department for Education has created a workload reducing toolkit for schools which is available at the following link. It contains guidelines for marking, planning, resourcing, and using coded communication (e.g. for recording behaviour):

➤ [Gov.uk](#)

9. Adapt the environment.

If the foundations of safety, trust, connection, are in place, environmental adaptations may be used to promote workplace wellbeing.

Safe space: Due to the limited space availability in many schools, you may chuckle inwardly at this suggestion. However, if possible, having a place where staff can retreat to – for alone time or a 1:1 with a colleague – can make a difference to someone who's having a tough day.

Lighting and space: Evidence suggests that natural light has mood-boosting properties. Suggestions to boost lighting include opening windows to help air circulate, decluttering, and ensuring windows are clean and not blocked. Where natural light is not possible, lamps may be considered. Fresh air has obvious benefits – you might want to think about whether there is somewhere for staff to take a quick walk at lunch (not the school yard) or have an outdoor coffee.

Toilets: Unfortunately for many of us, the toilets ARE the safe space at work. In so far as possible, toilets should be clean, bright, not too cold or warm. Additional suggestions include having bundle of toiletries, an affirming

message on the door or a notice highlighting service. Plenty of hand sanitiser and good hygiene standards can alleviate Covid-related anxieties.

Plants: Staff may wish to consider adding some greenery – some local garden centres will donate plants to organisations on request.

Staff room: Staff rooms are the central hub of social activity among employees, however, can become neglected when school life becomes particularly demanding. Tips to improve the staff room include having the tea and coffee ready to go at breaks (perhaps done on rota basis), ensuring cups etc. are clean and that there are enough for everyone, assembling a mood board which includes positive images and messages or information about upcoming events. Some schools have adapted a “coffee order board” – where everyone lists their beverage of choice and a nominated individual does a coffee run every so often.

The seating arrangement should also be considered – for example, does it lend itself to cliques or is there room for staff to manoeuvre.

What bothers you about the staff room in your school and how could this be changed/improved?

Technology: This is reported time and time again as a stressor in the daily life of teachers, for example in relation to photocopiers breaking down, etc. It may be worth investing in some additional equipment and ensuring good maintenance where necessary.

Where environmental adaptations are being considered, input from staff themselves will be the most valuable, as they will be most familiar with the school and be aware of what would be most beneficial and what is / is not possible. As previously emphasised, having input into workplace decisions leads to increased employee satisfaction.

10. Appraise and appreciate.

Recognition of achievement should form an integral part of staff culture. Staff appraisal should ideally be conducted on a regular basis and outcomes monitored. Staff may be encouraged to record successes and to compile a “wish list” to document desired career directions, learning opportunities, and resources. Praise can be transformational, and not just for children.

Self-appraisal may be modelled and encouraged as part of supervision. Emails or messages of gratitude are often well received, and some schools may wish to set up a “shout-out” board or nominate a Staff Member of the Month. The AI model of SOAR which looks at the individual’s strengths, opportunities in our workplace, our dreams and aspirations, and the support/resources we need to support us to achieve our goals.

As with anything, the staff members themselves are best placed to determine what interventions would be well-received within the culture of the school. Appreciation will obviously be best received if it is genuine and not tokenistic or applied too liberally– we know from our own work that the “Pupil of the Week” award can lose its oomph after a period!

The research has shown the power of gratitude in improving well-being and specifically improving happiness. The research on happiness shows that a happy workforce is a more productive and successful workforce.

Dame Carol Black claims that every £1 spent on workplace wellbeing can yield between £3 and £6 in gained productivity and efficiency - [HSENI](#)

Gratitude can improve our physical health, emotional/psychological wellbeing, and our relationships. An interesting study (reported in Harvard Business Review) showed that social workers who received letters of praise felt more valued, appreciated, and supported than those that did not – to a statistically significant degree. Crucial factors were the messenger (who the praise was from), the timing of the letters, whether the recognition was

public or private recognition and the level of specific detail included in the letter.

We know that **gratitude journalling** for 2 minutes each day, for 21 days has a positive effect on psychological well-being. An example would be the **Three Good Things method** - Each day write about three good things, being as specific as possible with details.

You can deepen your thinking with the prompts – **why did this happen? what does this mean to me? and how can I have more of it?** Examples might be something that went well at work, however small, moments of connection with family and friends, a walk on a bright and sunny morning, as small as the perfect cup of coffee of you have nothing else to write about that day.



Related Links

WEBSITES

- Resources for individuals- [Education support](#)
- Mental health and wellbeing resources for teachers and teaching staff- [gov.uk](#)
- Mental health and wellbeing support for teachers- [BBC.co.uk](#)

NEWS STORIES

- Pupil Violence and abuse driving teachers from profession- [BBC News](#)
- Nine in 10 teachers say their job has made mental health worse- [Belfast Telegraph](#)
- Mental health: Teachers in west Belfast take part in wellbeing day- [BBC News](#)

PEER SUPERVISION

- Peer supervision within the counselling professions- [BACP](#)
- Supervision in Education - Healthier Schools For All- [Barnardo's](#)
- The Solution-Focused Circle Technique: A Visual Tool for Discovering Strengths and Facilitating Change in Therapy and Counselling- [Journal of Solution Focused Practices](#)

PODCASTS

- Teachers with Boundaries- [Spotify](#), [Google Podcasts](#)
- Teachers Inspire Ireland- [Spotify](#), [Google Podcasts](#)
- Teacher Wellbeing- [Spotify](#), [Google Podcasts](#)
- Well-Led Schools- [Spotify](#), [Google Podcasts](#)

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Appendix

Practical tools: example of a workload and wellbeing action plan -

<https://emotionallyhealthyschools.org/school-leaders/workload-and-wellbeing-action-plan/>

Sample Wellbeing Policy

<https://www.therosehillsschool.com/staff-wellbeing-and-workload/>

<https://welbee.co.uk/learning-centre/school-staff-wellbeing-policy-free-draft/>

<https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t2-lf-409-staff-wellbeing-policy-template-adult-guidance>

Free Webinar on Supervision

<https://www.traumainformedschools.co.uk/webinars-schools/webinar-supervision-schools-2>

Anna Freud Centre

<https://www.annafreud.org/schools-and-colleges/resources/supporting-staff-wellbeing-in-schools/>

<https://www.annafreud.org/schools-and-colleges/resources/ten-ways-to-support-school-staff-wellbeing/>

Support for Teachers and Education Staff

<https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/>

www.mindfulteachers.org

Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018–2023 Revised October 2019 (Government of Ireland)

<https://assets.gov.ie/24725/07cc07626f6a426eb6eab4c523fb2ee2.pdf>

[Mental Health in MHF Northern Ireland Fundamental Facts 2023.pdf](https://www.mentalhealthchampion-ni.org.uk)
(mentalhealthchampion-ni.org.uk)

<https://www.cipd.org/uk/views-and-insights/thought-leadership/cipd-voice/sickness-absence-rate-jumps/>

https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/files/niauditoffice/documents/2023-05/00293490%20-%20Mental%20Health%20Report_WEB.pdf

[General Pharmaceutical Services Annual Publication 2022/23 \(hscni.net\)](https://www.hscni.net)

<https://yespsychology.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Self-Care-and-Resilience-Tips.pdf>

<https://www.psychologyassociates.org.uk/the-importance-of-self-care-and-how-to-implement-it-into-your-busy-schedule/>

<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/take-5-steps-wellbeing-english-and-11-translations>