

# **WELLBEING TOOLKIT**

**A product of the College Collaboration Fund**

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# INTRODUCTION

This toolkit is one resource that forms one part of a specialist package of mental health and wellbeing support developed for the further education community. Its resources and toolkits will help staff and students to look after their mental health, emotional wellbeing and resilience so they can move forward and cope with the different challenges we face today. It has been created with funding from the Department for Education (DfE) via the College Collaboration Fund.

The project is a partnership between two large further education colleges and a specialist delivery partner:

- Weston College of Further Education
- City College Plymouth
- National College for Advanced Transport and Infrastructure

Fostering employee wellbeing is good for people and the organisation. Promoting wellbeing can help prevent stress and create positive working environments where individuals and organisations can thrive. Good health and wellbeing can be a core enabler of employee engagement and organisational performance and its vital that organisations, managers and employees understand the links between work, health and wellbeing, and their role within this.

We understand that your overall wellbeing is important and that working and managing your wellbeing at the same time can be a bit daunting. With that in mind we have developed this toolkit to enable you as an employee within an organisation to pull various resources, tips, tricks and hints together to help you manage overwhelming feelings and difficult emotions, while you are studying.

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- What is Workplace Wellbeing?
- What is Mental Health?
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# WHAT IS WORKPLACE WELLBEING?

Wellbeing is the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy which is very individual. To be able to support and encourage wellbeing within the workplace it is useful to consider wellbeing in four sections that interact with each other to create an individual's overall wellbeing:

- Emotions
- Physical
- Mental
- Spiritual

Feeling happy at work is important and is not something that should be neglected in order to reach various goals, targets or for the benefit of the business overall happiness at work might involve:

Psychological wellbeing within the workplace is around learning and development as well as goal and target setting. It encourages both employee and employer to work towards varied goals and targets which keeps individuals challenge and valued. For many of us define how we live our lives by the job we do, that's why it is important that at work we are given a sense of purpose.

Supporting Psychological wellbeing can be done by employees having:

- Regular 1-1 to discuss and monitor tasks and targets
- Flexible working
- Frequent breaks
- Open discussions and conversations

Physical wellbeing is being aware of the link between physical and mental which helps to build resilience.

Supporting physical wellbeing could involve:

- Offering discounts to gyms or fitness classes
- Running meditation or other classes
- Offering lifestyle and wellbeing sessions around diet, work life balance, time/stress management etc
- Encouraging regular movement especially if employees are based at their desks

Social wellbeing is building and developing relationships within the workplace which aids in developing stronger self-esteem and confidence in employees' abilities professionally. Social

relationships within the workplace sometimes happen naturally which can lead to social gatherings outside of the workplace other times due to personal commitments or preference this might not happen.

As an employer or line manager encouraging social wellbeing could be:

- Connect with local community or charity
- Host events with local business that match and complete your company's business
- Social events such as quiz nights
- Regular team meetings with agenda
- Team working on projects or supporting

Financial wellbeing is being aware that the salary is not everything and that financial difficulties is something we all might face as well as financial incentives might encourage employees to challenge themselves.

To support individuals' financial wellbeing as an employer it is beneficial to be aware of:

- Discounts that are available to your employees
- Signpost or support individuals if they are experiencing financial hardship
- Pension contributions
- Bonus pay if applicable
- Paying or contributing towards training

Environmental wellbeing is identifying if the environment is suitable. The working environment plays a key role in how employees feel within their role. Private spaces such as offices are important for private calls or for focus working however open communal spaces aid in building team relationships which enables a working together approach. The working environment also includes the way the office is set up from lighting, temperature, comfort, and noise. All of these factors can impact employees focus and productivity.

As an employer to support an employee's environmental wellbeing consider:

- The office set up does it provide the environment for productivity and focus?
- Where possible discuss with employees their needs and what they would benefit from within their working environment. This might include a quiet area, more communal space, more natural light, plants etc
- Adopt a positive company culture

As an employer or line manager you have a role that can make a significant difference in someone's wellbeing whilst at work. Here is a resource from Mind: An introduction to a mentally healthy workplace. [resource1 mentally healthy workplacesfinal pdf.pdf](https://www.mind.org.uk/resources/materials/mentally-healthy-workplaces-final.pdf) ([mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk))

# WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

We all have mental health, just as we have physical health. Mental health, like physical health, can fluctuate on a spectrum from good to poor. Poor mental health can therefore affect any of us irrespective of age, personality, or background. Mental health problems can appear as a result of experiences in both our personal and working lives – or they can just happen.

It is important to remember is that everyone's experience of poor mental health is different – two people with the same condition may have entirely different symptoms and coping mechanisms. It is imperative to ensure individuals are supported with their mental health on an individual basis.

“1 in 5 people take a day off due to stress. Yet, 90% of these people cited a different reason for their absence”

## Types of Mental Health

It is important to remember that mental health is like physical health. We all have it and need to take care of it. To do this we have to be able to understand what good mental health is, good mental health means being generally able to think, feel, and react in a way that you need and want to live your life. However, you may experience poor mental health in which you frequently think, feel or react become difficult, or even impossible, to cope with. This can be as impacting as physical health.

There are many mental health problems, some diagnosed, some not. As an employer It is important to remember that there is a difference between a diagnosed mental health condition and words commonly used to describe how oneself it is feeling. For example, there is a difference between having a clinical diagnosed of depression and using the word 'depressed' to describe feeling low.

Every individual is affected differently by their mental health including which symptoms they may experience or how they are diagnosed weather that be with just one condition or many. They may still be waiting to be diagnosed or to receive support and treatment for their condition.

As their employer it is vital to focus on the individual and how their condition may impact their work rather than their diagnosis.

Below are some of the commonly diagnosed mental health and their symptoms:

**Depression:** Depression is a feeling of low mood that lasts for a long time and affects everyday life. It can make someone feel hopeless, despairing, guilty, worthless, unmotivated and exhausted. It can affect self-esteem, sleep, appetite, sex drive and physical health. Depression is almost on a sliding scale at its mildest form, depression doesn't stop someone leading a normal life however it makes everything harder to do and seem less worthwhile.

**Anxiety:** Occasional anxiety is a normal human experience however Anxiety is what people feel when they are worried, tense or afraid – particularly about things that are about to happen, or which they think could happen in the future. If feelings of anxiety are very strong, or last for a long time, they can be overwhelming. Someone might also experience physical symptoms such as sleep problems and panic attacks. There are different diagnoses of anxiety such as generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), social anxiety (social phobia), panic disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). But it's also possible to experience problems with anxiety without having a specific diagnosis.

**Panic attacks:** Sudden, unexpected bouts of intense terror leading to difficulty breathing; rapid, pounding heartbeat; choking sensations; chest pain, trembling; feeling faint. The memory of a panic attack can provoke fear and trigger another.

**Obsessive-compulsive disorder:** Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is a type of anxiety disorder. The term is often misused in daily conversation – for example, people may talk about being 'a bit OCD', if they like things to be neat and tidy. But the reality of this disorder is a lot more complex and serious. OCD has two main parts: obsessions (unwelcome thoughts, images, urges, worries or doubts that repeatedly appear in your mind), and compulsions (repetitive activities that you feel you must do to reduce the anxiety caused by the obsession).

**Phobias:** A phobia is an extreme form of fear or anxiety triggered by a particular situation (such as going outside) or object (such as spiders), even when it's very unlikely to be dangerous. A fear becomes a phobia if the fear is out of proportion to the danger, it lasts for more than six months, and has a significant impact on how you live your day-to-day life.

Please note that this is not an exhausted list as everyone mental health is unique to them as are the symptoms, it is important to not dismiss any symptoms.

If you wish to have a better understanding of common terms used within mental health please visit [The Mental Health Jargon Buster | The Blurt Foundation \(blurtitout.org\)](https://www.blurtitout.org/)

### Discussing mental health

To be able to offer an employee support for their mental health and wellbeing it is important to take the right approach. To do this there are a few things to consider:

- Create the right conditions, chose the right place and time. Consider going for a walk, getting a coffee or a quiet meeting room.
- Choosing the right time, perhaps when there will be less interruptions. Consider a break after the meeting.
- Create the right environment for active listening, give affirmative physical or verbal nobs. Remember silence is okay this gives opportunity for processing.
- Take into consideration if the conversation is better face to face, via phone or video call.

Ask open questions to encourage conversations and offer reassurance, let them know you are there if they want to talk.

- “How are you today?”
- “I have noticed you don’t seem yourself lately, tell me how you are feeling”
- “How are you looking after yourself?”
- What support do you have in place? Do you have someone to talk too?
- Is there anything I can do to help support you whilst at work?

Please see link for a conversation guide from Mental health UK which has useful information on spotting the signs of poor mental health and the dos and don’ts to having a supportive conversation.

[Mental Health UK Conversation Guide: Talking to someone about mental health](#)

## CREATING A SUPPORTING ENVIRONMENT

To create a supportive environment, it is vital to ensure your employees and colleagues feel comfortable to openly talk about their mental health. To do create this environment it’s important to:

- Treat mental health and wellbeing as significant as physical health
- Ensure regular 1-1, supervisions and peer support are offered adopt a mentoring system if possible
- Encourage mental health and wellbeing awareness by encouraging regular breaks, staff training, team involvement with fundraising
- Consider wellbeing champions – individuals who are interesting in mental health and wellbeing and could offer additional support. A wellbeing champion is somebody who can be an informal listening ear for colleagues, helping them to find further support or talk things through outside of the line management structure. So, establishing a champion programme in your organisation can be a great step towards encouraging positive mental health among staff.

Please see the link below for additional recommendations to encourage a supportive workplace.

[The Things Employers Can Do To Cultivate A Supportive Workplace Culture \(blurtitout.org\)](#)

Having read the first two sections and the resources, what 3 ‘quick-wins’ can you do to improve the wellbeing in your workplace?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

# EMOTIONS

During the 1970s, the psychologist Paul Ekman identified six basic emotions that he suggested were universally experienced in every human culture. The emotions he identified were happiness, sadness, disgust, fear, surprise, and anger. These have been described as hardwired, neural pathways within the brain that can trigger behaviours with a high survival value. He later expanded this list of basic emotions to include such things as pride, shame, embarrassment, and excitement.



Fig 1:  
Ekman's Universal  
Emotion Wheel  
(Ekman., P 1972)

## PRACTICAL TOOL 1:

Try the emotion recognising exercises online here: [Are There Universal Facial Expressions? - Paul Ekman Group](#)

## SELF-AWARENESS DEVELOPMENT TASK.

1. What is the strongest emotion you have experienced this week?  
.....  
.....
2. How did you become aware of this emotion?  
.....  
.....
3. Did you instantly recognise the emotion, or did you notice body language/gestures that told you?  
.....  
.....



# NAVIGATING EMOTIONS AND EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOURS

Psychology notes that it is not necessarily the presence of negative emotions that directly impact upon our emotional health and well-being, but how we react and process them when we do experience them that really counts. It can be useful from an emotional literacy perspective to try not to label emotions as either “good” or “bad” but to practice awareness and acceptance and learn what the emotion is trying to tell us. Often, our emotions can be key to understanding our own moral compass and innermost values.

(David, 2016) identified two ways that may be ineffective that human beings utilise to deal and cope with negative emotions as and when they occur. These ways are:

- Bottling up emotions
- Brooding up emotions.

According to David (2016), through these ways, individuals may attempt to avoid the processing of internal emotions without understanding the negative consequences this may pose to our wellbeing. We may use mechanisms such as humour to deflect from the emotion that we are feeling because on occasions, they can be uncomfortable. This is where the literacy skill of empathy is important.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF BOTTLERS & BROODERS (DAVID, 2016)

Bottlers	Brooders
Push away the negative emotions.	Get stuck in negative feelings.
They avoid the discomfort of the feelings thinking of expression as a sign of weakness.	They relive (ruminate) hurts, failures, and other negative feelings.
You simply forget what happened and suppress your emotions.	You pay too much attention to your internal chatter.
Bottling up emotions suppress them and surface in life through unintended ways.	Brooding up emotions makes them more powerful thus causing discomfort.

(David, 2016)

# COGNITIVE REFRAMING

Cognitive reframing is based on the ABC model constructed by Albert Ellis, (1957) one of the founders of cognitive therapy. Cognitive reframing could be deemed to be changing our response when we can't change what has happened. It allows us to take negative events and attempt to turn them into something more positive and allows us to reflect upon the emotions that we have experienced.

## Who Can Benefit from Cognitive Reframing?

As humans, we are quick to judge and react to seemingly negative situations. Fortunately, cognitive reframing allows us to take a step back and be the devil's advocate for our own conclusions.

Reframing is especially beneficial for high-stress environments, such as a person's workplace. Employees and managers alike can experience the benefits of positive thinking and find solace in reframing techniques.

## ABCDE Model for Cognitive Reframing



### Activating event:

The event that troubles you and leads to automatic dysfunctional thinking is called an activating event. As the first step, try to describe what happened as accurately as possible. It can be useful to draw this also.

### Belief:

Describe how you view the situation as accurately as possible. Try to identify your key beliefs around the event that happened. Help yourself with the following three questions:

- What caused the situation to happen?
- What does the event say about you?
- What do you think should happen?

Consequence:

The consequence of what happened interpreted through your beliefs results in a certain way of thinking, feeling and acting. Consequently, there are three more questions to answer:

- What kind of automating negative thoughts go through your mind?
- How do you feel about the event? Identify all the negative emotions (on a scale from 0 – 10)
- What's your automatic action?

This reflection can provide us with highly useful information about our subconscious responses to situations.

Dispute:

Dispute is about challenging your thoughts and beliefs in order to understand reality truthfully. This technique enables us to respond from a rational mindset, rather than an emotional one and is a common feature of emotional regulation skill sets. There is a set of questions you should answer in the dispute process:

- If the same thing happened to your best friend or someone you love, what would be your interpretation of the event then?
- How would someone else interpret this situation?
- What are other potential explanations besides blaming yourself?
- What was under your control and you could have done better, and what was completely out of your control?
- What is the most positive interpretation of the event you can think of?

Effect:

The closing effect should be a more precise interpretation of the situation with an upgraded account, deactivated negative thoughts and feelings, and an action plan for responding more constructively in the given situation. Self-Awareness should have been built upon to allow us to connect the Emotion-Feeling-Behaviour. When we have confidently identified this pattern, we should be actively more aware of it when it occurs again- the more we practice, the more we become familiar with the chain. It may help if you

- Write down your new thoughts about the event.
- Write down your new feelings about the event.
- Write down the action plan you will put in motion.

### **TASK**

Put the ABCDE model into practice. Think of a recent example at work and work your way through the model.

# WELLNESS ACTION PLAN

A wellness action plan (WAP) is:

- A personal proactive tool we can all use regardless of if we have mental health or not
- It is a collaborative tool between an employee and their manager
- It helps us identify what can keep us well whilst at work
- What might cause us to become unwell
- What support the employee would like to receive (Reasonable adjustments)

A WAP enables support to be tailored to the employee and ensures the manager has awareness of what may or may not help their employee which may reduce the likeliness of problems such as work-related stress or absences.

What should a WAP cover?

- Approaches the staff member can adopt to support their mental well-being
- Early warning signs of poor mental health to look out for
- Any workplace triggers for poor mental health on performance (if any)
- What support they need from you as their manager?
- Actions and positive steps for you will both take if your employee is experiencing stress or poor mental health
- An agreed time to review the WAP and any support measures which are in place
- Anything else the individual feels would be useful in supporting their mental health at work

It is important to note that WAP is intended to work as an informal agreement between employee and managers to encourage and support mental wellbeing within the workplace. There are also WAPs for home working. WAP templates are available for free from:

[Wellness Action Plan \(download\)](#)

## USEFUL RESOURCES

<https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-your-staff/employer-resources/wellness-action-plan-download/>

[https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/mental-health-at-work-1\\_tcm18-10567.pdf](https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/mental-health-at-work-1_tcm18-10567.pdf)

<https://www.acas.org.uk/health-and-wellbeing>

[Home - The Blurt Foundation \(blurtitout.org\)](http://www.blurtitout.org)

[Mental Health UK - Forward Together \(mentalhealth-uk.org\)](http://www.mentalhealth-uk.org)

[resource1 mentally healthy workplacesfinal pdf.pdf \(mind.org.uk\)](#)

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