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## Looking After Ourselves-for Staff in Schools

### *A guide to support the mental wellbeing of staff*

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During the coronavirus pandemic, staff are working in extraordinary and uncertain times and making significant changes to their personal and working lives; working from home as well as working at school, looking after their own children and caring for relatives, whilst coping with lockdown and living in this crisis. Understandably, this is causing enormous stress and anxiety and looking after our mental and emotional wellbeing has never been more important.

This short guide will provide you with some tips, things you can do and places to find support to help keep you and your families mentally healthy during this time.

These tips are based on the NHS 5 ways to wellbeing:

1. **Connecting**
2. **Being physically active**
3. **Taking notice**
4. **Learning new skills**
5. **Giving to others**

These 5 ways can help to support our mental health but it's also important to remember to:

- **Continue with your daily working routine;** waking and sleeping at the same time. If you are working from home, create a timetable that is varied and includes time for self-care and breaks, and if possible establish a workspace so that you can separate work life from home life.
- **Limit the amount of time spent reading about COVID-19.** The information can cause additional worry and is ever changing. Find a few trusted sources that you can check in with and limit this to perhaps, 2-3 times a day.
- **Give loved ones the benefit of the doubt.** A lot of time indoors together, can bring out both the best and worst in people. People react differently to stress. Try not to engage in every argument.
- **Remind yourself daily that this is a temporary situation** and that you need to be kind to yourself. Now is not the time to be hard on yourself if you didn't end up doing what you intended to. Every day may feel different and like a challenge so it's OK to not feel positive or motivated all the time. Also, remember you are part of a team; the school's response does not rest on you alone.



# 5 Ways to Wellbeing

**1. Connecting** can feel very challenging during these current circumstances. However, we can use technology to keep in contact regularly, socialise with friends and family, and when needed, share our feelings and experiences.

This period of self-isolation can be an opportunity to create virtual group activities such as:

- Meals together
- Quizzes
- Physical activity workouts and yoga
- Book Clubs
- Film nights
- Card Games
- Re-creating famous art work or your own personal photos or memories

If you have children, take the opportunity to spend extra time playing with them. Children will rarely communicate how they are feeling but they can do this through play. Play is cathartic and helpful for children, as it is how they process their world.

**2. Being physically active** may feel harder with leisure centres and gyms being closed and having to social distance when outside but being physically active is important to maintain a healthy mind and body.

Here are some ways you can exercise, indoors or whilst outside, where you can still keep safe and children/teenagers can also join with:

- Going for a walk/run/jog/bike rides
- Online workouts on YouTube (e.g. Joe Wicks, NHS Aerobics, Yoga, Pilates, Zumba)
- Instagram Live following fitness instructors in real time (e.g. @aileenmccann\_pt, @starksfitnessgym, @fitnesswithfab)

Finding time to stretch our muscles daily is also important when spending long periods of time at a desk or sitting down. Daily stretching is also a great activity to do with younger children.

Stay hydrated and eat well. This may seem obvious but during stressful times, we can find ourselves over-indulging, forgetting to eat, and avoiding food. Drink plenty of water, eat some healthy and nutritious foods, and challenge yourself and family members to learn how to cook something new.

**3. Taking notice or paying attention** to the present moment can improve your mental wellbeing. This includes your thoughts, feelings, your body and the world around you.

This can be achieved through practicing “mindfulness,” where you learn to become aware of your thoughts, feelings and physical sensations as they happen. The goal isn’t to clear your mind or to stop thinking but to be aware of your thoughts and accept them. For example, if you notice a feeling of nervousness, simply state “I notice I am feeling nervous.” There is **no** need to judge or change the feeling.

Some useful mindfulness exercises can be found at: <https://www.mindful.org/how-to-practice-mindfulness/>  
(There are more mindfulness resources on the next page)

**4. Learning new skills** has been shown to also improve your wellbeing by raising self-esteem and building a sense of purpose.

Some things you could try:

- Taking on a new DIY Project
- Taking an online course
- Learning a new language
- Taking up a new hobby/interest
- Writing a blog, short story or poetry
- Learning a new arts/crafts activity
- Colouring in mandala sheets
- Playing instruments, singing and dancing
- Textile activities; sewing, knitting, cross-stitch

**5. Giving to others** and acts of kindness can feel more difficult to do during the lockdown, however these types of acts can help create positive feelings within us.

Ways in which you could do this are:

- Checking in with elderly neighbours from a distance
- Delivering food and medicine to those who live locally to you, to their doorstep, (while keeping to the government guidelines)
- Writing or sharing wellbeing tips with others
- Online or over the phone tutoring for children of friends/family
- Actively listening to others and looking out for them

Notice the good in the world, in your community, in your family and friends. There are stories of people working on the front line, helping, donating, and supporting one another in miraculous ways.

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## *Support Services for Emotional Wellbeing*

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### **Camden Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)**

Schools that have signed up to the Workplace Options EAP can access free one to one counselling for themselves and their families via telephone, email, instant messaging and online.

Workplace Options also has a range of useful resources, including webinars to support staff that are available to listen to anytime.

<https://www.workplaceoptions.co.uk/member-login-2/>

Select Member Login at the top of the home page and enter the username (Camden) and password (employee) to have access to a wide variety of guidance and support, including online messaging with a trained counsellor.

**Or call 0800 243 458** you only need to state that you work for Camden and you do not need to give your name. Or email the EAP Team [assistance@workplaceoptions.com](mailto:assistance@workplaceoptions.com)

There is more information on how to access the EAP on MyDrive (schools will need a login for LGFL to access this).

**Able Futures:** This is a free, confidential mental health service for anyone employed or self-employed, delivered by qualified healthcare professionals:

<https://able-futures.co.uk/> email at: [hello@able-futures.co.uk](mailto:hello@able-futures.co.uk)

Call Freephone number 0800 321 3137 (8am to 10.30pm, Monday to Friday).

**Good Thinking:** - <https://www.good-thinking.uk/>

Tools to help your mental health developed in partnership with London Councils and Public Health England. Access to free wellbeing apps

**NHS:**

<https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/mental-health-services/how-to-access-mental-health-services/>

**Samaritans:** Telephone: 116 123

<https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/>

**Coronavirus and looking after your mental health:**

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

<https://www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/2020/13-march-coronavirus-self-isolation-how-to-look-after-your-mental-health-and-wellbeing-if-you-re-self-isolating/>

## **Mindfulness**

<https://www.bemindfulonline.com/>

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/articles/mindfulness-mindful-breathing/>

**Apps:** Headspace, Smiling Mind, Calm

Teachers and support staff can get a free year's subscription to Headspace:

<https://www.headspace.com/educators>

**Books:** Black, A. (2015) – The Little Pocket Book of Mindfulness (CICO Books).

Watt, T. (2014) – Mindful London: How to find calm and contentment in the chaos of the city (Virgin Books)

## **Bereavement Support**

Sadly, some staff will suffer the loss of a loved one due to coronavirus.

The Cruse Bereavement Care Freephone National Helpline is staffed by trained bereavement volunteers, who offer emotional support to anyone affected by bereavement. Call for free on 0808 808 1677.

They have also put together resources for different situations and emotions bereaved people may have to deal with and includes advice about grieving in isolation.

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief>

## **For Children and Families:**

### **Supporting bereaved children**

The Childhood Bereavement Network offers advice on talking to children about death and gives practical support. Winston's Wish also provides guidance on how to tell a child or young person that someone has died from coronavirus.

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/help-around-a-death/covid-19.aspx>

<https://www.winstonswish.org/telling-a-child-someone-died-from-coronavirus/>

### **Supporting children**

#### **Coronavirus Stories for Children**

<https://nosycrowcoronavirus.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/Coronavirus-ABookForChildren.pdf>

**Anna Freud** <https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/self-care/>

Provides resources around self-care for both children and families

**Young Minds** [www.youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-you-re-anxious-about-coronavirus](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-you-re-anxious-about-coronavirus)

General information for young people about managing their mental health

**Stop, Breathe and Think** <https://www.stopbreathethink.com/kids/>

Phone, tablet or web app to support mindfulness

**BBC Newsround** <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51204456>

BBC Newsround has a section on Coronavirus with guidance to keep children informed and tips to feel supported.

