Staff self-care at home and in school

During these unprecedented times it is normal to feel worried and stressed, both if you are in school or homeworking. We are often quick to help others without question, but do not take the time to look after ourselves. To support others we need to start with ourselves. We cannot pour from an empty jug! Looking after ourselves also gives us an opportunity to model to pupils healthy ways of coping with stress.

Here are some ideas of things we can do to keep well, whether in school or homeworking. We all fill our cups differently, so while some ideas may be your cup of tea, others might not:

1. Look after your physical health though sleep, food and exercise. Stick to your usual sleep routine by going to bed and getting up at the same time every day. This will help to maintain a sense of structure. Try to limit alcohol consumption: while a glass or two of wine may be your self-care act at night, alcohol can disrupt your sleep as well as increase anxiety and low mood the following day. Eating well can also help enhance our mood.

2. Exercise or physical activity can be a helpful way to de-stress e.g. go for a walk or run, try an online at-home exercise video, practise yoga, put on some music and dance, play with the children. Try to exercise when you finish or arrive home from work, as this also acts as a good transition from work to home.

3. Regulate yourself: check in with how you are feeling at the beginning of the day or before a class. This can help you identify if you are calm enough to reassure and support others. It may mean taking a few minutes before work to practise some calming strategies. Accepting that feeling anxious is a normal reaction to such a stressful and uncertain time can be a good place to start. Here are some strategies to help regulate your emotions:
   a. Practise grounding techniques – '54321 grounding' can help to anchor you in the present moment: note 5 things you can see, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 you can smell and one you taste.
   b. Practise breathing exercises – for example '4x4 breathing' can help to calm your nervous system and help regulate you: breathe in through your nose for a count of 4 seconds, hold for 4, breathe out through your mouth for 4, hold for 4, and then repeat.
   c. Label emotions – naming our emotions can help us to disentangle from them. For example, identifying "this is anger" can help you to feel some separation from it. Writing in a journal or keeping a note on your mobile phone can be useful.
   d. Self-compassion – remind yourself that you are doing the best you can right now, it is okay to feel uneasy and unsure from time to time. Reflecting on your thoughts can help you become more aware of negative thoughts. Once you have become more aware of negative thoughts, you can try to introduce positive ones. Be kind to yourself and remind yourself to take it one day at a time.

4. Schedule in time for self-care: whether in the morning, afternoon or evening, try to schedule in time for things that make you feel good. This will look different for everyone, but some ideas could be to go for a walk, watch your favourite TV show, read a book, have a bath, listen to music, phone a friend or family, exercise, practise yoga, meditate, get out in the garden, bake, make something. Other ideas can be found at www.wheelofwellbeing.org.

5. Maintain relationships: if you are in school you may see colleagues, if not connect virtually and make time to just chat. Stay connected with friends and family whom you may not have seen for a few weeks now. Arranging weekly video/phone calls can help you stay connected and utilise your support system during this time. You could also try writing letters to friends with encouraging messages.

6. Try to limit exposure to news/social media: we have become inundated with updates on Covid-19, which can be difficult to avoid. Controlling your exposure by turning off news channels and limiting social media may help reduce worry. Try to read reliable sources for factual updates on Covid-19, such as WHO or Gov.uk websites.

7. Set yourself 'worry time': if you find yourself excessively worrying, set aside 'worry time'. Worrying is a normal reaction during times of uncertainty. Worrying is different from thinking, in that it often involves thinking of the worst possible outcome, is negatively orientated and repetitive. It can be helpful to schedule time into your day for worrying – for example, 15-30 minutes towards the end of the day, but not just before bed, where you reflect on your worries from the day. You may want to write down your worries, which can be therapeutic in itself. Try not to put pressure on yourself to solve your worries (but if your mind naturally goes there, that's fine). If worrying thoughts come into your mind between worry times, try to acknowledge them (maybe make a quick note for later) and put them to one side until your next designated worry time.

If you're working from home:

1. Keeping a routine can help us feel more grounded. Make your bed, shower, get dressed – even changing clothes can help signify a change in environment and help 'prepare' you to work (even if into fresh pyjamas!)
2. Create a space to work – away from the bedroom if possible, as this will keep work separate from down time or sleep time.
3. Visual timetables or to do lists can be helpful to keep on track and help organise your day into tasks you can 'see'.
4. 'Chunk' days – split the day into morning and afternoon tasks and include achievable mini goals throughout the day.
5. Schedule in regular breaks. Make time for regular breaks away from your desk/screen/work – ideally once an hour get up and stretch your legs.
6. Incorporate a 'transition' activity at the end of your working day. For example, tidy away

books/laptop/work things, go out for a walk or away from your work space to help signify the end of work time and start of down time.

Being kind to ourselves and looking after our well-being is important. Feeling anxious, fearful, and overwhelmed are normal reactions to a stressful situation such as a pandemic. However, if these feelings persist longer-term and have an undue impact on your daily life, please seek support via your GP.

Some useful websites:

Mental Health Foundation
https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/your-mental-health/looking-after-your-mental-health

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

Anxiety UK
https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/blog/health-and-other-forms-of-anxiety-and-coronavirus/

Ever Mind Matters, NHS
https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg