

The Lilycroft and St Edmund's Nursery Schools' Federation



Mental Health and Well-Being

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Introduction

What is Mental Health and Well-Being?

Mental health is 'a state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to his or her community' (World Health Organisation).

The term "well-being" can be used to describe our holistic health, including our physical, mental and emotional health. When we have good levels of wellbeing we feel that life is in balance and that we can generally cope well. We feel motivated and engaged and are able to show resilience and "bounce back" from life's challenges.

Mental health and well-being are intimately connected with physical health, one affects the other. Indeed, poor mental health as indicated by depression and long-term anxiety can be a factor in many severe or chronic physical health conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes, and strokes. Therefore, maintaining good mental health can have a protective effect on our overall health.

Why is it important to Lilycroft and St Edmund's Nursery Schools?

Mental health is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is such a fundamental human need that it is considered a basic human right (WHO, 2022).

Good mental health doesn't mean that you always feel happy or that you never have bad moods or bad days. But if anxiety, low mood or other symptoms of your mental health condition are overwhelming or difficult to cope with, it's likely that you don't currently have good mental health.

Lilycroft and St Edmund's Nursery Schools believe that promoting and protecting mental health is an effective approach for targeting psychological wellness. Good mental health is vital. It encourages us to flourish in the present while feeling good about the future, with the capacity to handle stressful times and events in all areas of our lives. (Seligman, 2011)

At Lilycroft and St Edmund's Nursery Schools we believe that clear and honest communication is crucial in fostering trust and a collaborative environment where staff feel empowered to speak up, share ideas, and take risks.

Stress and its impact on our Mental Health and Well-being

Good Stress

Not all stress is bad stress. Stress that lasts for a short time can boost job performance while increasing alertness. Healthy amounts of stress can even help build relationships essential for our health. Stress is also vital for our memory. It allows us to recall the inevitable consequences of our actions to help us avoid them again in the future. Short, small, bursts of stress at work can be beneficial and harnessing this energy can boost emotional resilience when circumstances become challenging. Positive, healthy stress should feel like, 'OK, this is going to be hard, but I can do this, here we go,'

***'Stress should be a powerful driving force, not an obstacle.'* Bill Phillips**

Bad Stress

Bad stress, however, is the kind that wears you out, leaves you jittery and is harmful to your health. Bad stress, or distress, can lead to anxiety, confusion, poor concentration and decreased performance. Bad stress can be short-term (acute) or long-term (chronic).

Ways to tell if your stress is harmful:

- It interferes with your functioning: You start making mistakes on things that are routine — like accidentally putting your keys in the fridge or forgetting to feed your dog
- It affects your health: You stop taking care of yourself — maybe you start relying on substances every night to “take the edge off,” or you’re picking up fast food every night because you’re too overwhelmed to get groceries and cook, or you’re skipping your workouts or morning walks
- You’re spending tons of time and energy on small things: We often do this when we are trying to regain a sense of control, because we are stressed over things we cannot control
- You feel paralyzed: This is when small things seem impossible. For example, at a restaurant, maybe you genuinely agonise over which meal to order. Or you procrastinate on small household chores that pile up
- You isolate: You’re so stressed that you don’t want to see or talk to loved ones, you don’t ask for help, or you answer “fine” and change the subject when a friend asks how you’re doing

When our stress is chronic or long term, that’s a signal that we’re in an unsustainable situation. Sometimes, it can also signal mental health disorders. Chronic stress impacts almost every system in our bodies.

Health problems such as indigestion, heartburn can increase, as can the risk for cardiovascular disorders, heart disease, and in serious cases even heart attack and stroke. It affects the immune system’s ability to fight infections. And if you have existing chronic conditions like irritable bowel syndrome, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), or asthma, chronic stress can make them a lot worse.

It is important to work on what we think during stressful moments. When we’re stressed, we’re more likely to think harsh things about ourselves — “There’s something wrong with me” or “I’m so lazy” or “Nothing ever goes my way.” Instead, we can develop a gentler inner monologue, by actively countering these absolutes with more balanced thoughts like, “This is a hard situation and I’m trying my best.”

Communication

‘What mental health needs is more sunlight, more candour, more unashamed conversation about illnesses that affect not only individuals, but their families as well.’

Open communication can foster trust among colleagues, create a safe space for them to discuss mental health and well-being issues, and ultimately lead to better mental health outcomes for everyone. Open communication creates an environment where colleagues are able to offer each other emotional support and improve relationships within teams.

The simplest way to understand what people need to support their mental health is to ask them. This will be achieved through regular staff surveys to establish levels of well-being. Our ‘Open Door’ Policy means

that there will always be someone you can talk to. You do not need to wait for your appraisal - if something is worrying you, you have a question, need some support or just someone who will listen there will always be a member of the senior leadership team available.

Communication is a two-way process. Communication enables us to tailor well-being activities specifically to the needs of staff at Lilycroft and St Edmund's Nursery Schools. This involves continually learning from what works, what doesn't, and what needs to be modified. Regular communication about wellbeing reinforces the message that wellbeing is important, and that something is being done. If you are worried about yourself or others, communicate, let someone know and always remember we are here for you.

'When 'I' is replaced with 'We'. Illness becomes Wellness'

What can we do to support our Mental Health and Well-Being?

Individual Responsibilities

'Mental health is not given. It is something we must tend to, nurture and hold sacred.'

Looking after your own mental health and well-being:

1. Knowing your personal limits and having the ability to say 'no' when necessary. This helps you to have more balance in life and will enable you to take better care of others.
2. Identifying supportive people that you have in your life. If you would like to increase your support networks then you might consider taking up new hobbies or activities. You can also speak to a professional for more support.
3. Being flexible around change. Even with the best plans, sometimes-unexpected events or situations occur. Our ability to accept change and plan and adapt can help us to manage any potential feelings of stress and anxiety and cope better overall.
4. Self-compassion. If you take some time to stop and reflect on the thoughts in your head, are they more positive or critical? Once you have identified any negative thoughts, you can begin to introduce more positive thoughts and 'turn the volume down' on the critical voices.

The building blocks of good mental well-being

1 Reaching out and connecting with other people

Good relationships are important for our mental health and well-being.

They can:

- Help us to build a sense of belonging and self-worth
- Give us an opportunity to share positive experiences
- Provide emotional support and allow us to support others

If possible:

- Take time each day to be with your family, for example, try arranging a fixed time to eat dinner together
- Arrange a day out with friends you have not seen for a while
- Try switching off the TV to talk or play a game with your children, friends or family
- Have lunch with a colleague

- Visit a friend or family member who needs support or company

2. Be physically active, eat well and maintain a good

sleeping routine Being active is not only great for our physical health and fitness, evidence shows it can also improve our mental well-being by:

- Raising our self-esteem
- Helping us to set goals or challenges and achieve them
- Causing chemical changes in our brain which can help to positively change our mood
- Our body needs to be nourished even in times of stress. Skipping meals can disturb our blood sugar levels, leaving us susceptible to mood swings
- During sleep complex electrical activity occurs, supporting learning, our ability to memorise, make logical decisions and choices. We need sleep to process thoughts and memories, support healthy brain tissue, keep our vital organs healthy and replenish our energy

3. Learn new skills

Learning new skills can also improve our mental well-being by:

- Boosting self-confidence and raising self-esteem
- Helping us to build a sense of purpose
- Helping us to connect with others

4. Supporting others

Creating high quality connections through small acts of kindness, like making someone a cup of tea, strengthens connections and feelings of support between colleagues. Acts of giving and kindness can help improve our mental well-being.

- Saying thank you to someone for something they have done for us
- Asking friends, family or colleagues how they are and really listening to their answer
- Spending time with friends or relatives who need support or company
- Pay attention to the present moment (mindfulness). Paying more attention to the present moment can improve our mental well-being. This includes our thoughts and feelings, our body and the world around us. Mindfulness can help us enjoy life more and understand ourselves better. It can positively change the way we feel about life and how we approach challenges.

“I am not afraid of storms for I am learning how to sail my ship.”

Leadership Responsibilities

Lilycroft and St Edmund’s Nursery Schools are dedicated to deepening the value given to mental health by all individuals in our schools; matching that value with commitment, engagement and investment to enable a transformation towards better mental health for all of us. Lilycroft and St Edmund’s Nursery Schools will strive towards developing a culture which is supportive and open regarding mental health, providing appropriate levels and manners of support enabling staff to develop suitable emotional resilience.

At Lilycroft and St Edmund's Nursery Schools we will:

- Communicate clearly with our staff, particularly around any changes that might be taking place at school. Whenever possible we will consult with staff about changes and offer reassurance
- Offer professional supervision for reflection, learning and development around a professional identity with children and families with staff well-being at its heart
- Encourage a sense of community with opportunities for all staff to get together to engage in non-work related activities and events
- Maintain an open door policy and time for all
- Keep staff mental health and well-being on the agenda. Normalise the process of speaking about mental health and well-being
- Provide school staff with regular opportunities to feedback on any thoughts or concerns regarding staff mental health and well-being and how to improve it. This can help to develop a more inclusive culture
- We understand that promoting positive well-being is about feeling supported, recognised and appreciated. We will offer praise and feedback on the positives and things that are going well!
- Our governing body has an ethical and moral duty to ensure the quality of working conditions at our schools. This includes ensuring that adequate support and consideration is given to staff mental health and well-being

Team Responsibilities

Promoting good mental health is everyone's responsibility. As a team, you need to know each other to be able to support each other. The more we know and understand about mental health and well-being the better we can support one another and recognise the signs when one of our colleagues is experiencing poor mental health and well-being.

Some examples of signs and symptoms include:

- Seeming 'sad'
- Lacking energy
- Loss of interest in day-to-day life
- Withdrawn
- Negative thoughts
- Anxious
- Low self-esteem

If you identify these signs in one of your colleagues or if they let you know that they are experiencing difficult thoughts and feelings, it's common to feel like you don't know what to do or say – but you don't

need any special training to show someone you care about them. Often just being there for someone and doing small things can be really valuable.

For example:

- Listen - Simply giving someone space to talk, and listening to how they're feeling, can be really helpful in itself. If they're finding it difficult, let them know that you're there when they are ready
- Offer reassurance. Seeking help can feel lonely, and sometimes scary. You can reassure someone by letting them know that they are not alone, and that you will be there to help
- Stay calm. Even though it might be upsetting to hear that someone you care about is distressed, try to stay calm. This will help your colleague feel calmer too, and show them that they can talk to you openly without upsetting you
- Be patient. You might want to know more details about their thoughts and feelings, or want them to get help immediately. But it's important to let them set the pace for seeking support themselves
- Try not to make assumptions. Your perspective might be useful to your colleague, but try not to assume that you already know what may have caused their feelings, or what will help
- Keep social contact. Part of the emotional support you offer could be to keep things as normal as possible. This could include involving your colleague in social events, or chatting about other parts of your lives

A range of helpful contacts could be found on St John's Ambulance website ***"It was only a sunny smile, and little it cost in the giving, but like morning light it scattered the night and made the day worth living."***

F. Scott Fitzgerald

Our Journey

At Lilycroft and St Edmund's Nursery Schools we understand that work plays a crucial part in most people's lives and not just in providing a source of income. It can give us a sense of purpose and achievement and boost our self-esteem, as well as an opportunity to socialise and build friendships with our colleagues. Promoting the mental health and well-being of our staff is central to the ethos of Lilycroft and St Edmund's Nursery Schools. We aim to cultivate a supportive culture that prioritises everyone's mental health and well-being by encouraging open communication and reducing stigma.

Connection: *The power that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued.* Brene Brown

What have we done so far:

- A Mental Health and Well-Being Group was created. Some of the actions implemented by this group and as a result of feedback from staff were: installing a water cooler (St Edmund's only), fresh fruit to be available throughout the week and organising local walks
- Mental Health and Well-Being has become a priority on the School Development Plan supported by the Governing Body
- The whole school staff received training from MIND

- Four members of school staff trained as Mental Health First Aiders
- Two members of staff trained as Mental Health Champions
- Mental Health and Well-Being surveys were conducted with all staff and the points raised were discussed at appraisals
- A Well-Being Bench was installed on the school grounds in a quiet leafy place for staff to use when they feel overwhelmed. (St Edmund's only)
- Two hours Well-Being time was rolled out in the Summer 2024. All staff can book two hours per term to do something nice for themselves
- We celebrated an Employee Appreciation Day by sending a 'Thank You' card to all staff expressing our gratitude for the work that they do (St Edmund's only, Lilycroft staff opted for an hour off instead)
- All staff were released for a well-being party hour during work time for team building. This was covered by SLT. (St Edmund's only)
- Appreciation Book was introduced, where staff write appreciation notes to each other (Lilycroft only)
- A Well-Being Package for all staff was purchased in September 2024. All staff received information on what is available such as 24/7 access to a GP, counselling or Physio treatments
- A bespoke survey was designed, relevant to Lilycroft and St Edmund's staff to regularly gather the views of everyone and monitor wellbeing

What Next?

At Lilycroft and St Edmund's Nursery Schools, mental health and wellbeing is central to our development and improvement planning. By fostering a supportive culture, implementing comprehensive mental health policies and programs, and providing accessible resources, Lilycroft and St Edmund's Nursery Schools aim to create environments where our staff feel valued, supported, and empowered to maintain their mental health and well-being.

Current plans include:

- The SLT staff are receiving Supervision which will be followed by training to enable them to carry out correct and high quality supervision with all staff
- The Lilycroft and St Edmund's Nursery Schools' Mental Health and Well-Being Policy will be regularly reviewed, updated and communicated to staff. When it comes to staff mental health and wellbeing this is vital, because the needs of our staff will consistently change

"Just because no one else can heal or do your inner work for you doesn't mean you can, should, or need to do it alone." **Legal framework**

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- The Mental Health Act (1983)
- Mental Health Act 2007
- Draft Mental Health Bill 2022
- Sir Simon Wessely's Independent Review of the
- Mental Health Act in 2018
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- Employment Rights Act 1996
- Employment Relations Act 1999
- Equality Act 2010
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- DfE (2024) 'Education staff wellbeing charter'
- DfE (2024) 'Improve workload and wellbeing for school staff'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Health and Safety Policy
- Staff Attendance and Absence Policy
- Induction of New Staff Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Grievance Policy

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Next update due: Autumn 2026