

Welcome to our Mayfield SEND & Well-Being NEWSLETTER!



Hello and welcome to the first summer edition of our newsletter! We are now fully in the swing of lighter evenings and brighter days, with the Jubilee bank holidays just around the corner. It seems like no time at all since we were covering the detrimental effects of darker nights and gloomy weather on our mood and well-being, so it's quite a shock to realise we are already well into exam season and halfway through the summer term.

In this edition of the newsletter, you'll find a piece about the myriad benefits of group exercise and the huge boost to mood and well-being that can be brought about by exercising with others. We also look at the use of physical coping strategies for learners who need them (or indeed anyone who fancies giving them a try!), and how to keep your teen calm during exam season.

As ever, if there's anything you'd like to comment on or any information that you'd like to see in the newsletter, just drop us a line (howard-verity@mayfield.portsmouth.sch.uk). We hope that you and your family have a wonderful break over half-term, ready to return for the final push before the summer holidays are upon us!

First up in this edition, we have an article written by our new Assistant SENDCo, Mrs Brawn! Read on for a truly motivational piece all about the benefits of group exercise. Much as lone exercise can provide some much-needed headspace at times, so group exercise has amazing benefits all of its own. Read on and get ready to get moving!

The Amazing Benefits of Group Exercise for Mind and Body

Have you ever found yourself lost in the moment when listening to music? The feel of the beat and melody of the moment urging you to dance along? It's a great feeling that nearly everyone can relate to.

We all know that exercise is good for us and, for me, exercise to music classes are the perfect blend. As a student at University, I started to take part in exercise classes such as BodyPump (weightlifting to music), BodyCombat (martial arts inspired), and Spin (stationary bikes), and found that I was far more likely to work harder and feel the burn than on my own at the gym.

Once I was out of University I decided to train as an instructor and now hold qualifications for a variety of styles of class. My current favourite is Sh'bam, a dance inspired workout class that really gets my heart rate up – and emotions! There's nothing like the feel of moving to music with a group of like-minded people, all having fun and getting a workout at the same time.

Aside from becoming healthier and fitter, the mental health benefits that come with taking part in these classes are extremely beneficial for me. I use the evening classes as a form of release, taking out the stress of the day or any pent-up energy I have left and channelling it into my fitness. Similarly, morning classes help prepare me mentally for the day ahead, especially if I am feeling worried about something coming up.

I have made many friends through my group ex classes and we all share the enjoyment of completing a challenging class together, so the social aspect also bolsters my wellbeing. There are so many different types of classes and different gyms; strengthening, calorie burning, stretching and calming – if you ever feel like you want to do more exercise but haven't the motivation, I suggest you check one out – or even find one online. Go out of your comfort zone and give it a chance and you will feel the benefit.



Should you ever need to contact a member of the Learning Support Department, then the key staff members you will need are as follows:



Mrs Anders

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Mrs Brawn

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GCSEs and keeping those teens calm at home

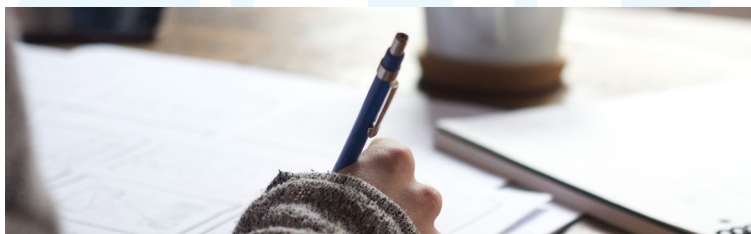
Exam season is here and, for teenagers, GCSEs are the culmination of their schooling to date. As such, they can also seem incredibly daunting – a bit like a huge obstacle course that they need to successfully complete before they can get to college at the other end. The good thing with GCSEs is that once you have them, they are indeed a door-opener to life on the other side of school. The bad news (or the scarier news) is of course that we need to pass them first.

As long as your child is revising to the best of their personal ability, and is prepared for the exams having followed the advice of their teachers, then they are already set to go and to succeed. We all have our 'personal best' – nobody can do more than their best – and that goes for adults and kids alike. However, we can sometimes get very anxious before formal testing of any kind, and what's super important is that our teens stay as calm as possible. A degree of anxiety is, of course, totally normal – without anxiety we would never have progressed past the stage of Neanderthal! But what we need to do, is harness that feeling, keep it in check, and work with it.

If you have a Year 11 at home at the moment (or if you are a Year 11 reading this!) then follow some of these handy hints and guidelines to keeping calm and prepared:

- 1) Get enough sleep!
- 2) Put your phone away when you revise (or, parents, remove it for a couple of hours!)
- 3) Make sure that you are eating – and try not to eat too much junk food during the exams because it won't fuel you properly, and nor will it help if you're dehydrated. Make sure you are drinking enough water.
- 4) Factor in some down time to spend with friends and family.
- 5) Talk about how you're feeling with your family – let your parents and the adults around you in school know how you feel. They've been there and done it, and teachers are exam experts – they have supported literally thousands of kids taking their GCSEs!
- 6) Parents, try to avoid putting pressure on your teen during the exam season. Be more flexible than usual about things like the tidying of bedrooms. Schedule in some little treats here and there to help your child switch off and rest when they need to.

If your child is overwhelmed at any point, then contact school and seek support. There are numerous resources online but do voice any concerns to school staff too – we have a lot of experience of exam angst and are always willing to calm students down or give advice and a listening ear.



And now for a piece written by our Autism Ambassador, Mrs Groom-Radford, about the use of physical coping strategies in schools. This is for staff, students and families alike:

The Pull of Physical Sensation Strategies and why we need to Utilise them in a Learning Environment.

We all have our own coping strategies to get us through the day.

It may be tapping your nails, chewing a pen or humming. Coping strategies are as diverse as the people who rely on them and can help to ground you when stress and anxiety hit. They can be a source of relief for when an anxiety attack is bubbling on the horizon.

Coping strategies focus on emotions and are often characterised as self-soothing or self-care. They often involve the five senses, smell, touch, sight, sound and taste. Your skin is the largest organ on your body and is exceedingly sensitive to external stimulus. This makes it an important consideration in your ability to relieve yourself from stress and unwind. Water for example can help you feel instant relief, such as soaking in a warm bath. Or feeling the sensation of fur on your skin from a pet or animal. These can be amazingly beneficial to a child's mood and lowers their anxiety.

However, seeking out these physical sensations to soothe yourself is very hard to do in a classroom, or can even be seen as purposeful distracting behaviour when in fact they are strategies to reduce anxiety. Being away from a classroom during the pandemic has made it is easy for us to forget that a classroom can be a stressful place for anyone, let alone a child. You are tested every day and feel expected to keep up, focus on the task at hand, make notes, provide answers, and so on. It can be a lot to take in. It is no small wonder that there has been an increase in self-soothing behaviours in a learning environment.

For teachers, there are many ways to incorporate Physical Sensation Strategies in lessons. You can encourage pupils to stand and stretch during quick fire question times to help them relieve stress. Get them involved in kinaesthetic based learning. Encourage them to use their equipment to tap on the desk to repeat key information in unison as a class. The art of making sound will help stimulate memory and may relieve the tension of a too quiet room. Have lessons that encourage students to touch and feel and squeeze an object, even if it is something as everyday as a dictionary, before using it. It will remind them that these objects are to be used as a learning tool and will help them feel less anxious about using them. There are thousands of ideas at your disposal to help aid in learning and promote wellbeing. Do not be afraid to try them.

Run your hands under cool water	Focus on your breath (can use online tools and animations for pace if slowing breath down is tricky)	Touch different objects eg, squeeze your pen, grip your chair, gently press your nail into your fingertips	Carry a grounding object eg. A stone, piece of ribbon, bracelet, fiddle toy	Stretch your body, wiggle and clench your toes
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