

Wellbeing Dos and Don'ts

Implementing a wellbeing culture?

Do:

- Include everyone – whatever you offer should be offered to all
- Promote the benefits of wellbeing
- Walk the talk
- Have contingency plans for people
- Think innovatively, there are no limitations, just a lack of ideas or input
- Understand the implications of resilience and the benefits of resilience reporting and coaching
- Invest time; be committed to the long-term journey of wellbeing in your environment
- Take it seriously
- Take inspiration from other education organisations, or consult with EPM
- Evaluate the impact of changes such as remote working or external environmental factors such as the Coronavirus Pandemic

Don't:

- Fail to deliver on a commitment
- Practice wellbeing unequally
- Rush implementation and botch the job
- Implement a contentious change that will not have a significant positive impact
- Act insincerely
- Buy into a service that is not tailored to your needs
- Initiate a large scale programme without the necessary research and training
- Fail to consult with employees

It may not be necessary or effective to make large scale initiatives. Wellbeing can be promoted for all employees through small changes which cumulatively impact your culture where genuinely implemented. For example:

Celebrate more

Don't just celebrate pupil's achievements, also recognise hard work of employees within team meetings. Alternatively, simply by saying thank you by email or in person.

Fewer emails, talk more

Try to discourage emailing where a conversation may be quicker and easier. When a message is coming from the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), ask if it is better to communicate the information in a team meeting where employees can engage by discussion and asking questions. Ensure all parties feel a part of the decisions.

Do not discourage all informal chats between employees, some talk regarding topics other than work can help build trust and forge relationships. This will also widen the support network of employees. It is also useful for line managers to talk to their team and see them as a whole person, not just see the work as the end-result. This fosters relationships to enable people to talk about the state of their mental health, stress management etc.

Consider the time emails are sent, and whether you want to introduce a policy that restrict emails being sent during unsociable hours such as between 7pm-7am. It is believed that this supports employees right to switch off and promotes an effective work/life balance.

Flexibility

In our digital age many of us can access work emails 24/7. An increasing number may be guilty of working long hours, not taking lunch or coffee breaks, or even not taking full annual leave entitlement. Employers are becoming more aware of 'presenteeism', where employees still go to work when ill. This kind of environment is not conducive to good mental or physical health.

Being able to see people physically sat at a desk is not an indicator of high productivity. In contrast, creating an environment that encourages some freedom can increase employees' output and become a great support to their mental wellbeing. We have seen an increase in the use of technology to give people the freedom to work in a different environment, not just in classroom, staffroom or office. Perhaps consider whether Planning Preparation and Assessment can be done from home?

But...

Offer flexibility, but not at the expense of breaks, you do not want a situation where employees work day and night because they have the technology to enable them to do so, as this can cause "burnout". Try to discourage working in the staffroom if possible so that the room can be purely for breaks. Setting up this area in this way can properly allow employee's shoulders to de-hunch and relax, reducing stress. Holding fewer lunch meetings is advisable, but, if there is a need to meet at lunchtime, consider providing food or maintaining a less formal environment.

Team Meetings

Line managers are an important resource within the school to establish your current culture and facilitate change. They are most likely to understand the grassroots issues through team meetings and individual line management meetings.

When line managers make wellbeing a key discussion point in team meetings, it demonstrates a school wide commitment but also allows you to remind colleagues that wellbeing is everyone's responsibility. Employees have a duty to monitor their own mental health and to report concerns regarding stress levels, workload, etc. to their line managers.

Here are some of our suggestions:

- Making employee wellbeing a key discussion point in school wide decision making
- Activities in INSET to educate and build resilience skills – mirror this work with students
- Activities every term to keep the discussion going
- Activities every term to build community
- Repeating activities to show long term commitment, build understanding, good habits and embed good working practises
- Keep reminding colleagues that wellbeing is everyone's responsibility
- Encourage all employees, especially managers, to set examples and lead from the front
- Try not to add workload; make supporting welfare fit into existing systems and processes
- Share any workload related to mental health activities - lots of employees doing a little is best
- Learn from others – what are other schools & organisations outside the education sector doing?
- For line managers to feel empowered to commence discussions with their teams, we have provided some suggested team meeting agenda items. These are based on the suggestions for how to manage conversations contained in the HSE document 'Preventing Work-Related Stress in Schools'. This is available on the EPM website.
- The purpose is for line managers to be able to encourage their teams to talk about how they are working, the concerns they have, and how they can improve how they are working. This gives them ownership of the practical steps needed to help them stay well at work or manage a mental health problem. It also opens a dialogue between management and employees to help better understand their needs and experiences and, therefore, better support their wellbeing. This in turn can lead to greater productivity, better performance and increased job satisfaction.
- Collective discussions with your employees could take place as part of the normal team meeting agenda, or could be discussed at a Team Training day. When mental health and wellbeing are standard items on the agenda, they become normalised. When wellbeing is normalised, people are naturally more willing to talk about it. The more supportive the culture, the better the gains with mental wellbeing.



Some example questions to ask during team meetings to encourage wellbeing discussion:



- Which tasks take up the most time and how do we cope at busy times?
- What concerns do we have about work environment and how can we improve this?
- Do you feel involved in the decisions being made? How can we improve how we communicate as a team?
- Do you know who to talk to and where to go when you need support?
- Do you know where to go and what to do if you experience or witness unacceptable behaviour?

Such discussions can also help line managers assess the impact of any changes which have been implemented without the need to wait for annual survey results. Based on these discussions and open dialogue, you can adapt your approach to change based on the response it has or to suit the needs of different teams.

Open Door Culture

Hold one-to-ones and meetings routinely to check up on how the teams are feeling and managing workload, etc. Reflect on what might be causing them stress. If employees are afraid to talk about their struggles, problems can spiral. Notice and look out for each other. Support collaboration and mutual supportive attitudes among employees.

Also, ensure to foster a culture of talking about issues as soon as they arise – make sure leadership doors are always open.

Social Events

Get moving – physical activity is very beneficial for the mind as well as body. Schools are in the enviable position of having sports fields and green spaces nearby. Could you implement fun sports tournaments, or walking meetings? Could you host end of term parties? Summer BBQs, for example, on the sports field (which have the benefit of being low cost) are great for employees and students.

Mental Health First Aid

Consider training a mental health first aider. This is prominent in the news currently, best practice dictates that all workplaces should have a trained first aider to support employee's mental health in emergency situations.

This person would be a non-judgemental listener able to offer supportive conversations, assess someone's risk to self and / or others, and signpost further professional support, e.g., EAP.

There is a national level push to Government to consider making MHFA a statutory requirement.

A recent educational survey revealed that 77% of respondents said that they did not have a mental health first aider.



Reminders

Ensure staff know what support is available (e.g., EAP) – this will help employees feel well-supported, more loyal, enhance their morale, create better relationships within team and build easier rapport with pupils

- Include as an agenda item in team meetings
- Discuss as part of other meetings
- Consider as part of decision making
- Reiterate to staff that whole school holds responsibility – everyone is responsible



Recognise stress factors

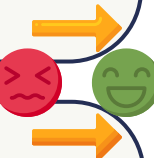
Something that is relatively easy to implement and will have a big impact, is to provide line managers with the tools to recognise stress in staff to prevent stress developing to harmful levels where it could result in sickness absence and/or impact on morale, engagement, or retention. EPM have produced a separate webinar on stress management which is available on our website. This provides the tools to identify causes and symptoms of stress to act proactively, whilst also giving guidance on managing stress after it has become a cause for concern.

In reality, everyone is responsible for their own and others wellbeing. Maintaining or enhancing individual self-worth, for yourself and others, should be the norm not the exception.

Effective cultures promote wellbeing as the norm and senior managers re-enforce wellbeing at every opportunity. The culture of a company is largely set at the top and cascades down. A senior leadership team that supports a good work/life balance and encourages the 'whole' person to come to work – rather than simply focussing on the part of the person that produces work – is one that is conducive to a good mental health environment.

Culture change is initiated by those shaping the culture – the senior and middle leaders. It is essential that line managers work to progress change. However, change must be gradual so that you take people with you and build trust.

Line managers can help influence the tone and culture of an organisation. They have day-to-day contact with a number of employees, so are in a perfect position to support positive mental health behaviours. However, line managers can also be an inhibitor if they are not embracing the wellbeing shift.



How line managers' actions and behaviours model wellbeing culture

Employees will take their lead from senior management, so it's important that they lead by example and exhibit positive leadership behaviours. In practice there are a number of ways to do this, e.g., taking lunch breaks; using their PPA time for planning, preparing and assessing only; not working overly long hours on a regular basis; not emailing out of hours; etc.

Try not to add workload, make supporting wellbeing fit into existing systems and processes, and distribute evenly workload related to mental health activities – take a 'lots of staff doing a little' approach.

You can ensure line managers buy in to the changes you want to affect and lead the way by:

Reminders

- Ensure staff know what support is available (e.g., EAP) – which will produce well-supported employees who are, loyal, have enhanced morale, have better relationships within a team, and experience easier rapport with pupils.
- Explain the benefits – reduced cost, more time, greater retention and productivity.
- Engagement and accountability – involve line managers in the development of wellbeing initiatives and policies.
- Ensure line managers know how to identify when an employee starts to experience signs of poor mental health or stress.
- Ensure line managers know how to support employee's wellbeing. We will look at how LMs can start discussions with staff, collectively and individually, in order to support wellbeing shortly.



When should we implement wellbeing culture?

- There is no time like the present, starting as soon as possible ensures you can reap the gains as quickly as possible.
- However, do not rush to fail, plan, and implement in a controlled manner.
- Research, and seek advice from EPM: we can help, and we come with a great amount of pragmatic experience and advice.
- The bigger picture awareness of wellbeing shouldn't be underestimated.
- Looking at the behavioural concepts of wellbeing is really important as a first step and will ensure that your programme will address root causes rather than just the cosmetic aspects of wellbeing. EPM can help with behavioural change as we have the in-house expertise to assist you in establishing a successful wellbeing culture.