

Healthy bodies, healthy minds

Lesson 3: Taking care of our mental health



Lesson context and overview

This is the third of three lessons exploring how best to take care of our bodies and minds to feel good about ourselves. This lesson focuses on ways to maintain good mental health and looks at aspects of mental ill health, including how and where to get help if needed.

Curriculum links

Physical health and mental wellbeing: Mental wellbeing

Pupils will learn:

- that there is a normal range of emotions and scale of emotions that all humans experience in relation to different experiences and situations
- how to judge whether what they are feeling and how they are behaving is appropriate and proportionate
- simple selfcare techniques, including the importance of rest, time spent with friends and family and the benefits of hobbies and interests
- it is common for people to experience mental ill health. For many people who do, the problems can be resolved if the right support is made available, especially if accessed early enough.

Resources

Presentation slides
 Large sheets of paper and post-its (or markers)
 Pupil worksheet: *My mind as a balloon*
 Signs and symptoms cards (one set per group, cut up)
 Paper and pens
 Anonymous question box

Key vocabulary

mental health, mental ill-health, wellbeing, symptoms, mind

Learning objectives

We will be learning:

- what mental health is
- about some of the symptoms of mental ill-health and where and how to get help if needed
- about ways to look after our mental health.

Learning outcomes

We will be able to:

- explain what we mean by mental health
- describe some symptoms of mental ill health and identify some sources of help
- describe some ways to look after our mental health.

Essential teaching guidance

Please ensure you have read the guidelines on creating a safe teaching and learning environment before delivering these lessons. To create a climate of trust for safe and effective learning, ensure that ground rules are established or revisited before delivery. Be aware that pupils will have a range of experiences in relation to their own and others' mental health, and may have direct experience of mental illness. There may also be stigma around mental ill-health which should be gently explored and challenged. It is useful to have an anonymous question box available in case pupils want to ask questions or share thoughts that they may not want to ask in front of the rest of the class. This can also give you the opportunity to look at and consider any trickier questions to prepare responses. Assure pupils that you will respond to questions, either in the lesson or soon afterwards, and make sure to plan some time in which to do this.

Starter/baseline activity

Introduce pupils to the objectives and the key vocabulary for the lesson. Organise pupils into groups and give each group a large sheet of paper and a marker or some post-its. Ask the groups to write 'Mental health' in the middle of their sheet, then to discuss the term and write anything they know about it on separate post-its and place these on the sheet (or write them on with the marker). Take some feedback from the groups. Ask if they can give you a definition of what mental health is, then show the NHS definition of mental health on slide 5 and ask why they think certain words are highlighted. Show the definition of mental ill-health on slide 6 and ask them what they notice (use of the word 'negative' rather than 'positive').

Ask the groups to look at their post-its and to sort them into things that are about mental health and things that are about mental ill-health (if they have used a marker they can underline these aspects in two different colours). Which pile of post-its is bigger? Discuss the outcome, and make sure the following points are covered:

- everyone has mental health, just as they have physical health
- often people use the term 'mental health' when they actually mean mental ill-health
- many people in life will experience difficulties with their mental health or mental ill-health, in the same way as we sometimes we have a physical illness, like chicken pox or a cold
- sometimes people may get very poorly or develop a mental illness – this is different to the everyday emotions and feelings that we all experience.

Core activities

1. Tell pupils to imagine that their minds are like balloons, then use a real balloon to demonstrate how our minds can become overwhelmed by doing the following:

- Ask pupils to suggest some everyday things that people use their minds for. Each time they mention one, blow into the balloon. Examples might include:
 - working out a maths problem
 - deciding what to have for lunch
 - learning how to spell new words.
- Explain that as well as all of these things that we might experience every day, sometimes we have extra things on our minds. Ask pupils for examples, or use some from the list below, and again blow air into the balloon for each one:
 - a test
 - falling out with a friend
 - losing something important.
- Ask pupils what would happen if you kept on blowing more air into the balloon without letting some out? Explain that if we have too much on our minds at once, our minds might feel as if they were 'exploding' like the balloon. If these things made our minds feel this way, we might find it hard to concentrate, or get angry, or feel sad and cry.
- Tell pupils that to help to prevent our minds from becoming overwhelmed we need ways to deal with anything in our minds that is causing the pressure. Ask them to tell you some ways to deal with a worry (e.g. exercise, talking to someone else, etc.). Each time someone mentions a strategy, let some air out of the balloon to show them how the pressure is released.

Organise pupils into pairs and give each pair the *My mind as a balloon* worksheet. Ask pairs to complete the worksheet, filling the balloon with all the things that might fill up the mind of someone of around their age and put it under pressure, including everyday things and things that don't happen as often (they can include some of the examples already mentioned). At the bottom of the balloon, ask them to fill in the things that could help someone to empty their balloon and relieve the pressure. Take some feedback from the pairs, then show slide 8 to cover any remaining ideas.

2. Explain that the balloon analogy demonstrated how important it is to have ways to ease some of the pressures that our minds might feel under. Tell pupils that when someone is not able to ease this pressure for a long time, they may start to experience symptoms of mental ill health.

Organise pupils into small groups. Give each group a set of Signs and symptoms cards and ask them to sort the cards into two piles: those that show mental health and those that show mental ill-health. Once the activity is complete, go through the answers, reminding pupils that many people will experience these symptoms at some point in their lives, in the same way as people get physical illnesses, and that for most people the symptoms can be managed before they develop into ill health. Explain that sometimes, when someone has mental ill health, they may also have physical symptoms such as headaches or stomach aches.

Ask: If someone was experiencing any of these symptoms, where could they go for help? Take responses and make a list of suggestions on the board. Outline support mechanisms within the school and any local or national support, including Childline.

Tell pupils that there is also information and support about children's mental health on the Annafreud.org, mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk and youngminds.org.uk websites. Explain that sometimes signs and symptoms of mental ill-health might be part of a specific mental illness, but that only a doctor can diagnose this.

3. Use slide 9 to outline the five steps to mental wellbeing from the NHS.* Discuss these to ensure clarity, and ask for, or give, examples to illustrate each of the five steps. Then ask pupils to create an action plan of things they could do themselves, using each one of the five steps to wellbeing as a header. Examples might include:

- connect with other people: join an after-school club
- be physically active: walk or cycle to school
- learn new skills: write down a skill you would like to learn and find out how you could learn it (e.g. on a website or app, in a library book, by talking to an adult)
- give to others: donate to a food bank
- pay attention to the present moment: listen to the birds when you are outside.

* <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/improve-mental-wellbeing/>

Extension activity

1. Demonstrate some mindfulness or yoga techniques to pupils and ask them to practise over the course of a week, or practise them in class.
2. Create a class mental wellbeing calendar by asking pupils to think of one simple thing per day that they could do to improve their own or others' mental wellbeing. Examples could include smiling, saying hello to someone you don't know, going for a walk in a park or countryside, stroking a pet, etc. Ask pupils to feed back if and when they do the action, and share how doing it made them feel.

Plenary

Return to the starter activity and ask if there is anything more that pupils would now like to add to their definition and ideas around mental health.

Finally, give each pupil a post-it or a piece of paper, and ask them to privately write down one thing that they will take away from today's lesson. This could be something they've learned, something they would like to try, or something they would like to find out more about (they may also want to write a question to put in the anonymous question box).

Assessment

Returning to the starter activity can help demonstrate progression in knowledge and understanding. The balloon activity can be used to assess understanding of the pressures people face and also what can help. Return to the 'five steps to wellbeing' action plan and ask pupils to self-assess how well they followed their action plan over a week or month.