



Wellbeing for all

As schools and colleges return, you may find it challenging to adjust to the new normal. The wellbeing of yourself, colleagues, pupils and students should remain a top priority. The articles in this special wellbeing section cover a range of topics to help you during this difficult time.

Managing anxiety

As many of you return to teaching, you may need to adjust to new procedures and processes. On pages 28 and 32 you can find out more about managing anxiety and spotting signs of situated trauma, both in yourself and those around you.

Encouraging wellbeing

Dundee and Angus College has cultivated a strong culture of

openness about wellbeing and mental health which has helped the People team support colleagues through lockdown. Read about their journey on page 34.

Cultivating coping mechanisms

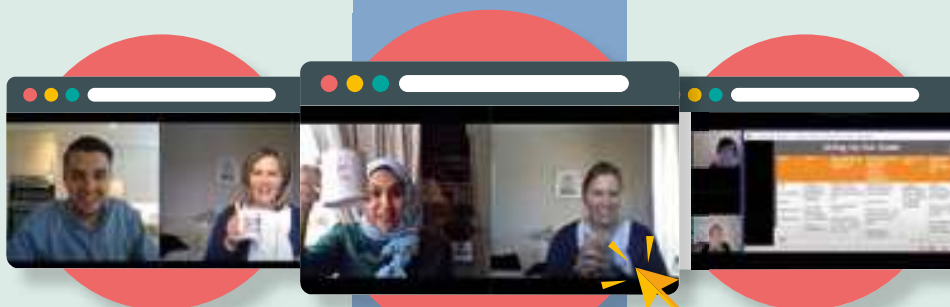
Practicing mindfulness is a great way to develop a coping mechanism that can be used at any time, to help you feel calm and bring

clarity to stressful situations. Paul Mills goes into more detail on page 28, and you can find supplementary webinars and recordings from him on MyPL.

Coaching conversations

Education coaches Margo Cunningham and Claire Lavelle discuss interference, the 4S model and compassion on page 30.

We have been working with wellbeing experts to create bespoke resources for teaching professionals. You can find these and much more in our Health and Wellbeing Hub at bit.ly/gtcsHandW



Coping with a new normal

Paul Mills discusses the importance of coping mechanisms

As schools reopen, it is essential that we have coping mechanisms to deal with a new reality after living in months of lockdown. We have to get back into the habit of being around a lot of people on a daily basis; something that used to be normal now feels different. Why is this?

The subconscious has many jobs it must carry out in an autonomic way. The subconscious protocols it operates under follow these three simple needs:

1. Are we warm? (comfortable in body and thought).
2. Are we safe? (I know this place, I know these people, I know the rules).
3. Are we happy? (this is what I do, I like this, I like the people around me).

When the answers to these three questions are “yes”, we are calm and collected and our autonomic system is in the parasympathetic mode of rest and relax. When the answer to any of those questions is “no”, we are immediately switched into the sympathetic mode, which most of you know as fight or flight.

In “normal” daily life situations, we continuously switch

between calm and clear thinking (parasympathetic) and alert, ready to act (sympathetic). In many cases, we are on autopilot. Think of your daily wake up routine when working at school. From our morning ablutions, breakfast, then commuting during term time, it is all wired in. We do not normally consciously think about each single action, we just do it naturally.

Re-wiring normality

Brains are wired naturally to live in a habitual reality. Any change to our daily routines will cause unease within our subconscious. We all went through this when lockdown first started. Over time we created new daily routines for ourselves. Things became the new normal.

Those of you who have been following my articles and webinars in *Teaching Scotland* and on the Health and Wellbeing Hub will have already been introduced to a basic understanding of the brain’s evolution. The brain evolved over a period of around 500 million years. The subconscious, controlling our autonomic systems, is programmed to be always right. The conscious, controlling our volition and choice,



You can find Paul's webinars and self-hypnosis recordings on MyPL. Keep an eye on our website for further information about his next webinar.

is programmed to be critical. To make things more complicated, the subconscious cannot discern between fact and fiction.

One of the effects of conscious and subconscious programming is, while the conscious is doing its job of being critical, thinking of the negative possibilities of any future action, the subconscious will react immediately as if the negative thought is happening in reality. We then immediately feel the negative emotions associated with the event we were thinking of.

Unfortunately, as soon as the conscious feels the negative emotion it will start analysing it, and in doing so, the subconscious gets another message about something negative,

“We have to get back into the habit of being around a lot of people on a daily basis; something that now feels different”

and hits the emotional stress button again. We are now in a cycle of negative stressful thought.

Creating a habit

Hopefully, you have all been practising your diaphragmatic breaths (*Teaching Scotland*, issue 84, page 26): this physical reaction of slow diaphragmatic breathing stimulates the vagus nerve into hitting the sympathetic nervous system's start mode, stopping the stress cycle.

It is not only the physical act of slow breathing that stops the cycle. Before we start to take the breaths, we must consciously make the decision to take them. In doing this we automatically and immediately change our focus. It changes from one of being negative/uncomfortable about a situation, to consciously wanting to relax. This sends the signal to the subconscious that everything is fine/safe, and it hits the parasympathetic start button immediately releasing the corresponding safe and happy emotions. As you carry on with your breathing exercises you enter into a cycle of peace, focusing on the fact that your exhalation must take

longer than your inhalation.

In practising this you create a habit and help rewire your neural pathways into letting you calm down, just by focusing on diaphragmatic breaths. You must make the conscious decision that you want to master this tool of control. Some people have found that after around 28 days practice, just the thought of focusing on their breathing has a calming effect.

Finding calm

“There are more things that frighten us than injure us. We suffer more in imagination than reality.”

Seneca the Younger, Roman philosopher, 4 BC - AD 65

What we choose to dwell upon has a direct effect on the quality of our day-to-day existence. If I find myself in a cycle of worry or doubt, I will eventually catch myself at it.

With our conscious programmed to be critical it is easy, even for the adept, to fall into focusing on the future. When I realise this, I take my breaths then act. When possible, I visit a place or object that I know; my garden, inside my car, a favourite tree, or a favourite walk. Once there I look for three things that I have never noticed before. Just this act of refocusing has the effect of taking away the feelings of anxiety. If I go on my favourite walk, I look for 10 things.

This does not change the situation that gave me the feelings in the first place, but it brings me back to the reality and peace of the now and I can then come up with practical ideas on how to cope with the situation tomorrow. I also use my own self-hypnosis recordings, which are based on visiting a place of healing and serenity. I wrote the first version for my partner while she was going through her cancer treatment.

The tools that I wish to help you learn are not just for bad days, it should become a way of life.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul Mills is a certified Medical Support Clinical Hypnotherapist and a Fellow of the International Board of Hypnotherapy. He works with clients of all ages dealing with the consequences of mental stress.

How coaching can support teachers' return to school

In this column, education coaches explain how different coaching techniques could help teaching professionals tackle an issue

MARGO CUNNINGHAM

As practitioners we want the best for our learners and the return to our workplaces in August will be like no other. It is important to be mindful that the “interference” that is either within our own minds or within the system can be a barrier to reaching our potential which in turn can affect our performance. This is summed up in this equation:

$$\text{Performance} = \text{Potential} - \text{Interference}$$

A quote from one of my favourite books by Timothy Gallwey about coaching captures this well: “A tennis player first confronts the Inner Game when he/she discovers that there is an opponent inside his/her head more formidable than the one across the net.”

Coaching is a positive and proven approach for helping yourself or others explore a goal or an outcome. The coach has the ability to raise the coachee's awareness and generates responsibility for the coachee to act. As a coach, I believe that the coachee has the answer within themselves: they can achieve the success and realise their goal.

A helpful model is the 4S Model (see right) as GROW (Goal, Reality, Options, Will) questions can be used in conjunction with it. The coach wants to enable the coachee to establish a clear goal (Success): *what do you want to achieve?* For the coach to discover more about the coachee and their talents/strengths (Self) they may simply ask: *what would you say are your three greatest strengths?* If it was appropriate you may want to use a coaching wheel to help the coachee identify their strengths (refer to issue 84 of *Teaching Scotland* for a coaching wheel template).



Getting the coachee to think outside of themselves is also helpful, finding out if others have the same or similar goal: *how can they use this and their strengths to share with others?* (Synergy) Ask the coachee: *what would others say your top three strengths are? Who have you worked with in the past? How effective was that working relationship? Who could you work with now? What would be the benefit of working with X?*

Thinking about how the coachee will use their three identified strengths to enable them to achieve their goal relates to the decision and action the coachee will need to make (Strategy) in relation to their goal.

CLAIRE LAVELLE

During the lockdown, I have been aware that everyone has had their own experience, impacting differently on their emotions and thoughts about work and themselves as educators. Some recalibrated from reconnecting with family life; others found home/work pressures overwhelming. Some spent lockdown alone; some felt challenged by time in Hubs, although enjoyed the routine. Sadly, some of us suffered losses and the full impact may not yet be fully realised, but compassion for self and others will be essential.

It made me revisit the ideas of compassion at work and our relationship with work, as we each have our own meaningful connection with it. In times of adversity, we may tend to default to old, unresourceful responses making internal attributions such as, “not doing enough” or “not feeling supported”, or unkindly comparing ourselves to others and feeling we should do more. With uncertainty surrounding the new term, we will want to be in the most resourceful place mentally and emotionally to deal with the challenges.

Having a coaching conversation can provide us with the safe, mental space to express our doubts and fears while also resourcefully exploring and re-evaluating our relationship with work. It may also support our self-care at this time.

“We will want to be in the most resourceful place mentally and emotionally”

Compassion may be something that we believe is necessary for others, but not always for ourselves. Yet, “coaching with compassion” is an effective approach developed by Richard Boyatzis to help the coachee articulate a compelling personal and professional vision. This model places a great focus on engendering empathy and providing space for understanding, amidst our perceived limitations. This approach can also allow a coachee to reduce their stress. Professor Paul Gilbert describes this as: “where the role of compassion reduces our feelings of threat and soothes us instead.” Having a supportive connection with a trusted other, therefore, increases our cognitive functioning to explore possibilities in making enduring changes.

Engaging our emotions, as well as thinking our way towards an “ideal self,” enables us to feel positive emotions about life and work changes. These aim to outweigh negative emotions that may be associated with perceived challenges. We are asked to consider our “actual self” - how does our situation feel right now? What are the realities for us at this time? From this discussion, the coach supports the coachee to develop a learning agenda made up of intentions which will aim to reduce the gap between actual and ideal. Critical to the success of the learning agenda is the flexibility and adaptability of intentions which will continue to motivate the coachee. This flexibility allows us to experiment and practise with possibilities as we move towards the ideal self.

Finally, we identify the resonant relationships that will support us to move forward. We may find a compassionate coaching relationship offers new ways of thinking, working and wellbeing for August.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

For over 20 years, **Margo Cunningham** has been involved in the learning and development of staff at all levels. This has included designing, and leading leadership and coaching programmes in the private and public sectors. For the last five years Margo has delivered the Coaching for Success programme to staff in East Lothian Council.



Claire Lavelle is a professional coach with over 20 years' experience in education. Claire has been a teacher, a principal teacher, a primary headteacher in Scotland and abroad, and a quality improvement officer in a Scottish local authority. Claire is Managing Director of The Hive of Wellbeing



If you would like more information about Accredited Professional Recognition programmes including the Coaching Diploma visit bit.ly/39kxtP6

Situated trauma in the new academic year



Hugh Smith highlights the importance of responding to the surge of situated trauma that will be experienced by learners and teachers

We have all had to deal with a global pandemic that has changed our way of living. There has been considerable impact on our personal, work and home life, social interaction, travel, not to forget loss of relatives, friends and colleagues who were unable to recover after contracting Covid-19.

Learning contexts have been different and colleagues have stepped up to the challenge to support learners remotely and in hubs. However, as we begin a new academic year all will find learning and teaching contexts different.

What will be challenging for colleagues is the emergence of 'situated trauma' which will be experienced by learners and teachers as we return to education settings that look and operate differently. Some will experience situated trauma almost immediately, for others there will be a delay. Some will be

overwhelmed, while others manage personal impact effectively. Our personal level of resilience defines whether we can work through the experience of situated trauma or whether other interventions might be required.

What is situated trauma?

Trauma is the shock and/ or psychological impact of an event or events. Situated trauma is a combination of mental health and wellbeing challenges that share a common trigger, i.e. the situation an individual finds themselves in. This can initiate a range of mental health and wellbeing challenges that cause personal trauma. It draws on elements of social anxiety disorder (SAD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety and stress. Not every element within each of these challenges is experienced and, indeed for more severe cases of situated trauma, elements from other mental health challenges might be present.

A range of mental health challenges can cause personal trauma:

SAD elements that may be experienced include fear of social situations; speaking quietly or quickly; increased breathing and/ or heart rate; feeling stressed, anxious, apprehensive or nervous; feeling nauseated or dizzy.

PTSD elements that may be experienced include irritability and concentration difficulties; anger or getting easily upset over little things; separation anxiety when going to school or workplace.

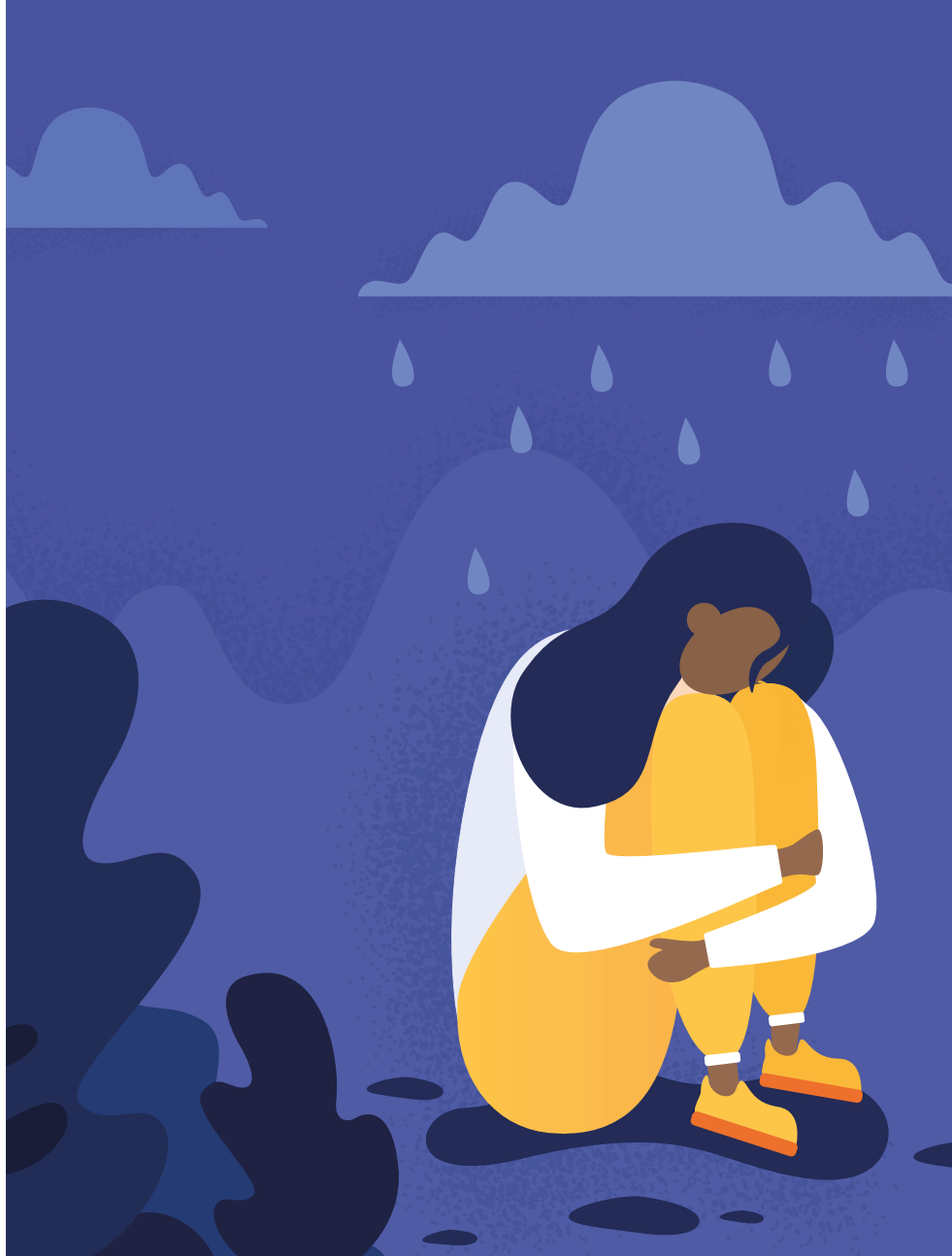
Stress elements that may be experienced include worry and anxiety; difficulty relaxing; mood swings and depression.

Anxiety elements that may be experienced include panic attack; fear of embarrassment or humiliation; avoidance behaviour; sweating, difficulty breathing or feeling nauseous.

Facing the challenges

There will always be a small percentage of learners who refuse to attend school, but this should not be confused with an increase in the number of learners who may refuse to attend school after lockdown restrictions. Learners in this situation may be grappling with the onset of situated trauma caused by imposed changes to their learning environment. There will also be colleagues who may find the return to their education establishments difficult as they might perceive their learning and teaching experience not in alignment with imposed changes.

Situated trauma should not be ignored as this can lead to more serious challenges that become complex to resolve. Minimising the personal effect on learners and colleagues is within the gift of us all, and we should continue to engage with levels of professional values and personal commitment that is synonymous with being an effective teacher. It is essential to share what you do, share what you think, and support one another. Be ready for the challenges ahead.



Supplementary Reading

Smith H, McGrandles A (2018) *The Impact of Mental Health and Wellbeing on Effective Learning and Teaching: A Practical Guide for Those Responsible for Learners (Book 1)* Scotland: Swan and Horn [ISBN 978-1-909675-05-6]

Smith H, McGrandles A (2018) *The Impact of Mental Health and Wellbeing on Effective Learning and Teaching: A Practical Guide for Those Responsible for Learners (Book 2)* Scotland: Swan and Horn [ISBN 978-1-909675-06-3]

Duffield S, O'Hare D (2020) *Teacher Resilience during Coronavirus School Closures* bit.ly/2WemoJY

Day C, Edwards A, Griffiths A, Gu Q (2011) *Beyond Survival: Teachers and Resilience* University of Nottingham bit.ly/3foZqHv



Online Resources

Coronavirus Resources Toolkit 4 – Resources for Managing Anxiety and Improving Wellbeing (Mentally Healthy Schools) bit.ly/32dhHEb

Coronavirus Resources Toolkit 7 – Managing Transitions (Mentally Healthy Schools) bit.ly/32e1jTC

Coronavirus Resources Toolkit 8 – Returning to School (Mentally Healthy Schools) bit.ly/2W9oTNJ

Preparing for Your Probation During Covid-19 bit.ly/3241a5a

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hugh Smith is an experienced teacher educator, author and speaker who provides mental health and wellbeing consultancy for schools, colleges and universities. Colleagues can email him at hughsmith@mentalhealthandeducation.com and find out more at mentalhealthandeducation.com

Vulnerable children professional learning

The University of Strathclyde and CELCIS have developed the free Caring for Vulnerable Children course, exploring topics such as communication, characteristics and attachment theory. Find out more at futurelearn.com/courses/vulnerable-children