

6 ways to wellness



GTC Scotland has created a Health and Wellbeing Hub to support teachers and lecturers at this challenging time

In the current circumstances, it can be challenging to balance wellbeing with managing uncertainty and changing expectations. We have been working with wellbeing experts to create bespoke resources for teaching professionals, to try and help you manage your mental health. Here is a selection from our Health and Wellbeing Hub. You can find all the resources at bit.ly/gtcsHandW



1. Write it down

Putting your thoughts down on paper can be a great way to clear your mind. A simple to-do list or even a plan for the week can help to keep you on track. It is also a great way to check on how you are feeling and help uncover if something is troubling you. Coach Sarah Philp has written some great blog posts on our Health and Wellbeing Hub including **Writing for Wellbeing**. This short

read is a great way to get you started with journaling and includes prompts such as “Things I am grateful for...” and “What worries me most?”



2. Watch

In **De-stressing stress**, Certified Medical Support Clinical Hypnotherapist Paul Mills talks to us about the science behind stress and how to deal with it. Director of The Hive of Wellbeing



Deep breath in

Overwhelmed and overthinking? Take a moment to relax

While reviewing case notes of past clients a few years ago, I was reminded how often some scenarios occur. In fact, I remembered how frequently I have found myself nodding along during investigatory interviews with new clients. On review, I realised this was not only as a sign of understanding their predicament, but as recognition of past occurrences in my own life.

It was this simple realisation that led me to the unequivocal understanding that many “modern” chronic stress problems had nothing to do with a constant real situation of danger or pressure, but were caused by the thought of a negative imagined outcome.

The scenario

John was tidying up his desk happy to be going home one evening, when the phone rang. It was the CEO’s secretary. He tells John that the CEO wishes to see him at 10am the following day. The company had been going through a restructure and, as John drove home, he began to worry about his position. By the time he got home his stomach

“The subconscious does not know the difference between real and imagined”

was churning and he had lost his appetite. When his wife asked him what was wrong he replied he thought he had a bug. She was worried about him and started to fuss. John was not in the mood and gave his wife a rather sharp reply. He did not mean to be rude or dismissive, but he knew his job was under threat and was starting to feel angry about the situation. He stormed off into his home office slamming the door behind him. He sat there until the early hours thinking about what he would do if he lost his job. Upstairs his wife was tossing and turning unable to sleep, worried about John and their relationship.

The next day John stands outside the CEO’s office at 10am. He has

updated his CV and is ready to upload it onto a job website. John is called into the office, the CEO stands, walks around their desk with their hand outstretched, shakes John's hand vigorously and says, "John I just wanted to congratulate you on the excellent report you submitted on the company restructure. I would like to promote you to project manager, more money in it of course, what do you say?"

All John can feel at that moment is relief.

Perspective

Many of you will have experienced a similar situation; imagining the worst outcome then it not being nearly as bad. I know I have.

Here is a fact: the subconscious does not know the difference between real and imagined. If we start to consciously worry about something in the future or dwell on a mistake in the past, the subconscious will react as if it is happening in the present.

This will activate the amygdala in the limbic system to trigger the "fight or flight" stress button, and activate the emotions linked to your past memory.

When the autonomic nervous system (ANS) is in the sympathetic mode it suppresses the digestive system. This is what caused John to experience butterflies, tummy flipping and eventually nausea. His higher mind analytical problem solving (the conscious mind) has also been suppressed. It was the conscious mind's suppression that made him snap at his wife even though he knew she was just trying to care for him. How many times

when you have been angry, have you snapped at someone, even though you knew it was wrong?

As John physically feels the body's response to stress, he consciously reacts to this with frustration, which in turn starts the whole stress cycle in flow once more. He is now caught in a spiral of stress reaction.

How do we stop this cycle? The basic answer is we must focus on something else. This is easier said than done, especially if we are already in the spiral, like John.

Calming down

There are three parts to taking back control and putting the body's ANS into parasympathetic mode: relaxation, focus, and visualisation. In future articles I will look at all three in depth; in the meantime here are some suggestions you can try to help you relax.

First, we must consciously decide to relax. The easiest way to do this is to take a series of diaphragmatic breaths. Breathe in through the nose into your stomach and blow the breath out of your mouth, hearing the sound of the breath leaving your body. The trick is to inhale slowly and exhale even more slowly. The exhalation must take longer than inhalation which requires practice.

We learn mostly through repetition, and the mind sets neurological pathways for things we do often: your brain goes into autopilot. If you practise the breathing exercises you will eventually have the effect of diaphragmatic breathing on autopilot as a normal conscious reaction to relax.



"We must consciously decide to relax. The easiest way to do this is to take a series of diaphragmatic breaths"

Resources

Paul has created some guided hypnosis audio clips for registrants, that can be accessed in the resources section of MyPL.

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.



Stress reaction within the body is triggered by:

- Information from the five senses;
- Conscious thought; and
- Subconscious/unconscious thought

AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM (ANS)

Sympathetic (SNS) Mode

- Fight or flight
- Stress response
- Suppresses immune system
- Suppresses digestive system
- Suppresses reproductive system
- Decreases higher mind analytical problem solving
- Relies on pre-programmed responses

Parasympathetic (PNS) Mode

- Safety response
- Maintains homeostasis
- Supports immune system
- Supports digestive system
- Supports reproductive system
- Supports higher mind analytical problem solving
- Applies the brakes to sympathetic functions



We got through today, tomorrow will be better

Hugh Smith highlights the importance of supporting teacher mental health and wellbeing during and beyond the current Covid-19 pandemic

We all find ourselves in home and workplace circumstances that are unprecedented and challenging.

The real life acting out of a story that has been the content of movie films is both surreal, worrying and heartbreaking. What is slowly being recognised by many is that our work and home life will never be the same again, and perhaps it is worth considering how things might change in our personal and professional lives.

The recognition of the teaching workforce as “essential workers” within the current pandemic context has been welcomed, and the teaching profession has stepped up to the challenge. However, this brings with it further change and demands within workplace and home settings. Teachers were

experiencing higher levels of stress and anxiety, with increases in mental health wellness challenges prior to the pandemic. Current circumstances and change to future circumstances will impact further, and colleagues should ensure they continue to remain resilient and evaluate their level of mental wellbeing.

Recognising and reaching out

Learning and teaching takes place in complex education environments that are specifically designed to encourage learning processes through physical, psychological and social interactions.

Keeping teacher mental and physical wellness high on the agenda is crucial in developing our “professional self”, which encompasses; self-image, self-esteem, professional motivation

TEACHERS SHOULD RECOGNISE THAT...

- ↑ change is inevitable and that what we do at work and at home will be different when the Covid-19 pandemic recedes;
- ↑ recognise that although we are part of the “solution” in supporting learners and learning communities work through and beyond the Covid-19 pandemic, we are unable to solve all of the world’s challenges;
- ↑ the focus of our personal time will change, so perhaps it is worth enhancing skills and knowledge (a new hobby; exploring technology – perhaps in relation to supporting learning and teaching);
- ↑ providing effective learning and teaching relies on a mental health and wellbeing check. Remember to enhance personal resilience by utilising support as a personal check mechanism, and not just when feeling overwhelmed.

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]

Online Resources

Coronavirus Resources Toolkit 1 (Mentally Healthy Schools) bit.ly/2RFwdhR

Coronavirus Resources Toolkit 2 (Mentally Healthy Schools) bit.ly/3414wu5

Coronavirus Resources Toolkit 3 (Mentally Healthy Schools) bit.ly/2RJgGO7

Dealing with Uncertainty and Worry during Covid19 (Wellbeing Glasgow) bit.ly/2RH88ak

Health and Wellbeing resources from GTC Scotland bit.ly/gtcsHandW

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

and commitment, task perception and future development/career expectations. However, teacher mental health and wellbeing support is not going to be automatically triggered for the teaching workforce by employers, although there are many excellent examples of employer and agency support that colleagues can and should engage with.

What works really well is when colleagues engage with support and advice before the development of personal challenges, so that available support is used as a checking mechanism for maintaining or topping up resilience. We all need to get better at this and change the perceived mind-set that engaging with

support is exclusively for when we become overwhelmed. The saying “forewarned is forearmed” is valid in the context of enhancing personal resilience, and the benefits of engaging with any support and advice before challenges become an issue can be helpful to share. Colleagues too often believe that they have it covered in terms of mental health and wellbeing, but the reality is somewhat quite different. Taking time to check your personal level of mental health and wellbeing can pay dividends in the long term.

It is within the gift of teachers to ensure they remain mentally and physically well, and engaging with available support will help. To this end, GTC Scotland has developed online support and advice through their website and I would encourage colleagues to explore this along with support that is available from other agencies and charities.

Teachers are amazing people and generations of learners remember those who inspire, motivate, care and go that extra mile. It is time to refocus and for teachers to empower themselves to continue to inspire and motivate by enhancing personal resilience through the support and advice that is available.

“Taking time to check your personal level of mental health and wellbeing can pay dividends in the long term”

How coaching can help manage personal wellbeing

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

WHAT IS COACHING?

Coaching involves two people: the coach and the coachee. It is a confidential, supportive, thinking space that allows the coachee to articulate how things really are for them. The coach helps the coachee explore possible solutions and ways forward that may be helpful. It's not for the coach to tell someone what to do, offer advice or try to solve something for the coachee.

Coaching can support teaching professionals in their roles as it offers the space and time for them to be really listened to, supported and challenged in their thinking and to help find solutions that work for them. In some ways it's about hearing themselves think things out loud or in the words of Charles Handy: "How do I know what I am thinking till I hear myself say it?"

How can coaching help teaching professionals manage their personal wellbeing?

Jacqueline Morley

A good starting point for a coach to open up a conversation is scaling, e.g. on a scale of one to 10... 10 representing 'the best for you' and one the opposite of that. Scaling helps distil very complex information into a reference point for discussion. Whatever number the coachee has chosen, it is their meaning that a coach helps to explore.

Some questions coaches might ask are:

- Explore first 'on a scale of one to 10, how healthy is your work/life balance right now?'
- How did you arrive at this number?
- Where would you like it to be? (This allows exploration of the possible gap between where the coachee feels they are now and the aspiration for where they would like it to be).
- Where is the best it has been? (This question helps explore strategies and experiences that enabled this).
- Where is the worst it has been?

(This allows the coachee to explore how this improved to where they are now).

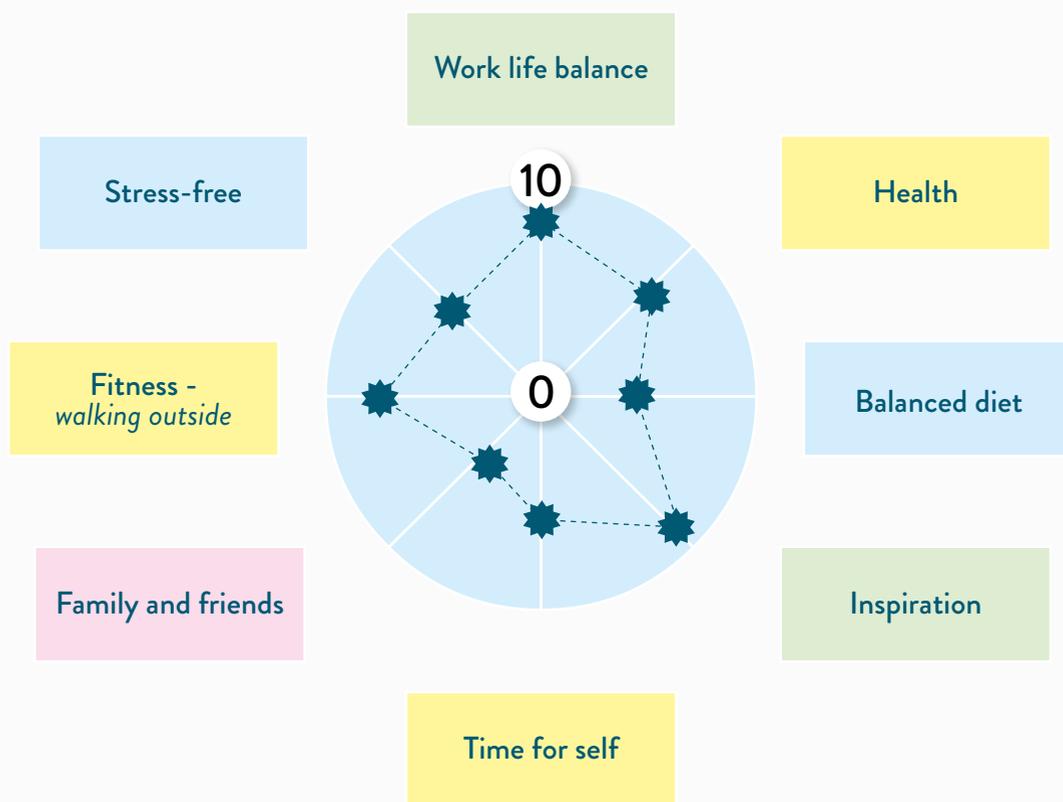
The coach can then start to tease out what the coachee feels is key to their wellbeing. Is it their work/life balance, health, etc. A coaching wheel is a great way to do this and it can also be used to self-coach. Ask the coachee to plot where they are in relation to each of these areas. Coaches can open up the conversation by asking:

- What do you notice?
- What are big issues/questions arising?
- What's working well?
- What do you need to develop/focus on?
- What are the challenges or barriers for you?
- Where would you like to be in six months?
- Identify one or two key action points for you
- Who and what can support you?

Abi Adam:

For me, coaching is about facilitating success and feelings of being successful. Feeling successful can lead to feelings of wellbeing. As

The coaching wheel:



coaches, as long as there are no presenting issues of serious anxiety, depression, risk or other possible mental health issues - which the coach would need to follow established protocols for - it would be a great place to start with what the coachee understands by their wellbeing and what is their definition of success. It can be a game-changing question to ask someone what this means for them. As a coaching culture expands, I believe that professionals will be better placed to outline their own definition of success and emphasise wellbeing for teachers.

I am passionate about promoting self-care for teachers. Acknowledging that we are exposed to significant emotional challenges is important for our wellbeing. We need to try to have

“Start with what the coachee understands by their wellbeing and definition of success”

an appropriate work-life balance, otherwise we risk ‘burning out.’ The current climate of uncertainty and challenging circumstances means that coaches must bring the work of how to deal with dilemmas and live with uncertainty into the foreground. More and more teachers and leaders are being trained in Mental Health First Aid and are tuning into the idea that it is part of a line manager’s role to be aware of the wellbeing of their staff. So, in addition to asking, ‘What do success and wellbeing look like for you?’ I would also be curious to discuss with the coachee if they are making time for themselves, scheduling rewards for themselves and taking time to deal with niggling negative thoughts. Quality coaching conversations can and do make such a difference.

DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION FOR OUR COACHES?

Send this to teachingscotland@gtc.org.uk. Thanks to the Professional Update specialists who set our first question.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jacqueline Morley is Senior Education Officer at GTC Scotland.

Coaching has been an ongoing, essential part of her work and professional learning for many years. Jacqueline’s enquiry always revolves round coaching conversations as an enabler to professional learning and development as professionals.



Abi Adam has more than 20 years’ experience in education. Abi is Depute Headteacher at Broxburn Academy in West Lothian and delivers the West Lothian Introduction to Leadership Programme and the Coaching for Success programme to staff in the West Lothian region.

