

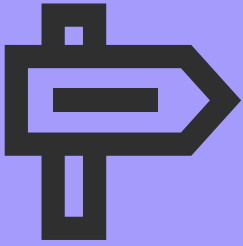
NCFE



Creating mentally healthy environments

A practitioner's guide to supporting the
mental health and wellbeing of learners

[ncfe.org.uk](https://www.ncfe.org.uk)



This handbook has been designed to help educators create and maintain a healthy environment in the classroom and promote positive mental health and well-being of learners.

Getting the full picture

There are factors that increase a person's vulnerability to mental health problems, such as an abusive experience or a life changing transition, but for many people, mental health problems are likely to be caused by a combination of different factors.

This is why it's important to recognise and appreciate that everyone has different needs and responses to situations, and to never undermine how someone may be feeling.

Most people who experience mental health problems recover fully, or are able to live with and manage them, especially if they get help early. It's important to recognise the benefits of early intervention and the successes associated with such information.

Did you know?

- 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem in their lives
- 1 in 10 children experience a mental health problem
- 450 million people worldwide have a mental health problem
- At any time, 1 in 6 adults has a mental health condition and 1 in 100 has a severe mental illness
- Those with mental health problems often have poorer physical health compared to the general population

Mental and physical health

All aspects of health are interdependent and by maintaining positive physical health we can impact emotional wellbeing. However, your mental health is just as important as your physical health and needs an equal amount of focus and care.

Think about your learners:

- Are they getting enough rest and sleep?
- Are they tired most of the time or complain of not having enough energy?
- Do they eat healthily?
- Do they have the opportunity to be physically active during their study time or daily activities?
- Do they look after their own personal care needs?

In recent years there has been a greater policy focus on achieving 'parity of esteem' between mental and physical health.

Our mental health affects everything we do; how we approach things, interact with others and how we cope when things do not go to plan.

We need good mental health to:

- Feel confident with positive self-esteem
- Build and maintain healthy relationships
- Feel a sense of purpose and engagement
- Work and learn productively
- Cope with the stresses of daily life
- Be able to adapt and deal with change.

Spotting the signs in the classroom

By getting to know your learners, you will be more able to recognise the signs of distress and any mental health problems.

Signs to look out for in your learners:

Increased irritability and restlessness

- Unusual reactions and responses to situations
- Low mood
- Seeking isolation
- Changes in attendance
- Changes in friendship groups
- Changes in behaviour
- Weight changes.

More serious signs and symptoms, requiring intervention from professionals, may include:

- Psychosis
- Suicidal feelings
- Paranoia
- Self-harming
- Hearing voices.

Time to act

Once you've identified possible signs and symptoms of mental health problems, it is important to know what steps to take to provide the best level of support to your learners.

Conversation starters

- "Are you okay?"
- "I've noticed that..."
- "Do you want to take a walk?"
- "How are you, really?"
- "You look sad/worried today. Do you want to talk about it?"
- "Is there anything I can do to help?"

What are the most common mental health problems you are likely to encounter in the classroom?*

Anxiety

Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) is a long term condition that causes someone to feel anxious about a wide range of situations and issues, rather than one specific event.

Depression

Clinical depression is when someone feels persistently sad for weeks or months, rather than just a few days.

Bipolar

Bipolar disorder affects a person's moods, which can swing from one extreme to another – causing episodes of depression and mania.

Eating disorders

This is when someone has an unhealthy attitude to food, which can take over their life and make them ill. The most common eating disorders are: anorexia nervosa, bulimia, binge eating disorder and other specified feeding or eating disorders (OSFED).



Find out about other mental health problems that may affect young people at mind.org.uk

*Definitions from NHS website



Points to remember:

- Find an appropriate time and a relaxed place to talk
- Listen carefully, be patient and friendly
- Give your full attention
- Take what they're saying seriously
- Don't over-react but don't try to minimise or dismiss what they are saying
- Ask open questions to encourage them to talk
- Sometimes it's easier to talk side-by-side instead of face-to-face: on a walk, or during an activity.

What can you do to contribute to a healthy classroom environment?

- Engage with a curriculum that encourages Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- Get to know your learners
- Provide opportunities for learners and colleagues to access healthy eating options
- Ensure learners have access to mental and physical health services
- Look after yourself and be a positive role model.

Think about the services that are available in your organisation:

- Would you know the action that you should take to ensure an individual receives the care and support they need within your organisation?
- Have you read through the Safeguarding Policy, guidance and support documentation for your organisation recently?
- Where would you go to seek support or to advise colleagues appropriately?

Looking after yourself

It's important to take care of your own mental health first, as if you are struggling, it will be difficult to offer the best support to others. Spend some time recognising triggers to your own mental health and causes of stress, and reflect on how you can minimise the effect of such emotional challenges.

- What causes you to feel stressed?
- What helps you relieve stress?
- Do you neglect your physical health in periods of stress?
- Do you ever talk to others about your mental health?
- What can your organisation do to improve mental health?

Sources of support

Remember mental health affects us all. We can all make a positive difference in times of need and with early intervention most are able to overcome or manage mental health problems.

Inspired to make a difference and find out more? Look at the CPD opportunities on our website: www.ncfe.org.uk/learning-for-work/cpd-qualifications/

