



me TIME

It's important!

Mental Health Education Guide for Primary Schools

*Health is the state of complete harmony of
body, mind and spirit*

What is 'M.E. time'?

'M.E. time' is a new school wide initiative for **M**ental **E**ducation, wellbeing and awareness

"I am delighted to introduce 'ME time' into the school for all pupils, staff, parents & caregivers. As part of our holistic approach to our children's overall development, it places equal importance on mental education to compliment our existing physical education curriculum. Expanding on existing national guidance and developed by our staff and mental health professionals I am confident this initiative will help our children be resilient, safe, happy and healthy."



Mrs L Halling
Headteacher



Child Mental Health

"There is an unprecedented crisis in young people's mental health, further evidenced by these record numbers of young people needing help from the NHS"

Olly Parker, Head of External Affairs at Young Minds, 2022

"What we've seen across our frontline services in UK schools is rising numbers of young people struggling with anxiety, self-harm, eating difficulties and suicidal thoughts."

Catherine Roche, Chief Executive, Place2Be

- More than 400,000 children a month are being treated for mental health problems
- 50% of mental health problems are established by age 14 and 75% by age 24
- 70% of children and adolescents who experience mental health problems have not had appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age
- Rates of self-harm amongst younger children have doubled in the past six years

What is 'M.E. Time'?

M.E. Time is a preventative education initiative. By empowering children to understand their emotions, and how they react to them, their awareness and resilience will build to increase overall wellbeing. Its effectiveness will be measured by ongoing evaluation using the Kirkpatrick model.

The majority of children have good mental wellbeing most of the time. The starting point should therefore be teaching pupils the factors that contribute to and help them maintain wellbeing.

Once understanding of wellbeing is established we can teach pupils to understand and identify:

- when someone may be experiencing poor mental health
- contributing factors to poor mental health
- positive strategies to improve wellbeing
- when people need help from others

Elements of 'M.E. Time'

- Age-appropriate wellbeing lessons
- Daily mindfulness/breathing before every first lesson & after breaks
- Introduction of a Gratitude Journal for each child
- Introduction of a child-to-child support system for pupils
- Use of a mental health continuum by staff and parents
- PPP - Parent & Pupil Pledges



Age appropriate wellbeing lessons

Teach pupils that, like physical health, mental wellbeing is an important part of daily life that is influenced by different factors, including exercise.

Explain to younger pupils that things they value, enjoy or are good at can all support mental wellbeing. Positive relationships, and eating and sleeping well can also help.

Prompt older pupils to reflect on ways they can contribute to others' mental wellbeing, and establish which activities help them maintain their own wellbeing



Age appropriate wellbeing lessons

Teach pupils to identify and name the range and degrees of emotions in daily life. Pitch lessons to match developmental stage.

Stage 1: Recognising fear, joy, disgust, surprise, sadness, anger, happiness.

Stage 2: Recognising pride, shame, dismay, jealousy, embarrassment, empathy.

Stage 3: Recognising multiple emotions (feeling good, bad or indifferent at the same time), false emotions (pretending to like a present).





The Scale of Emotions

Teach younger pupils to recognise:

- emotional triggers (losing a toy, routine change)
- that the behaviour of others can affect their wellbeing
- their own behaviour and emotions can affect others

Build older pupils' awareness of:

- the impact of life events (parents separating, arrival of a new sibling)
- the many factors that can affect mood such as responsibilities, personal preferences, exercise
- how events can affect the intensity of our emotions

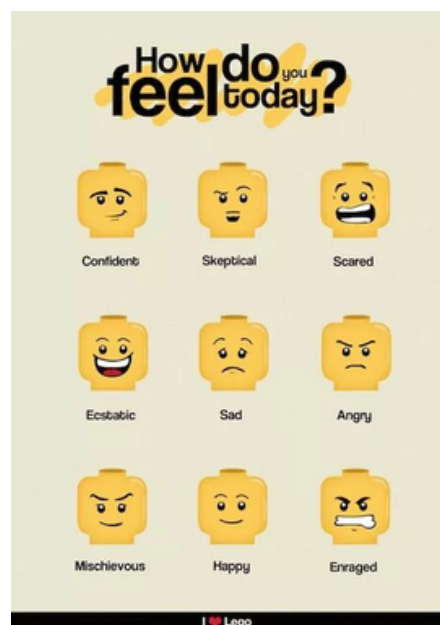
Emotional Vocabulary

Establish and build younger pupils' vocabulary for:

- things that make them feel happy or sad
- things that could make someone else feel happy

Challenge older pupils to talk in more complex and nuanced ways about:

- how events and people can make them feel happy, sad, anxious or upset
- others' emotions and how to recognise them
- how someone might feel in an abstract scenario



Physical activity and wellbeing

Teach pupils that physical activity (activity that gets heart pumping) has been proven to be good for mental wellbeing.

Pupils should be physically active every day for at least 60 minutes. Ensure pupils know and experience the benefit of activity, such as:

- PE at school
- walking or cycling to school
- physically demanding activity out of or inside school (e.g. daily mile-long walk, jogging, sports)

Explain that this is **the minimum** and that the more exercise they do the better their wellbeing is likely to be.



Social activity and wellbeing

Explain that contact with other people has also been proven to be good for mental wellbeing.

Ensure that pupils know and experience the benefits of social interaction inside and outside school, including by:

- taking part in clubs (e.g. sports clubs, beavers, cubs etc)
- participating in groups of people who share interests (e.g. drama clubs)
- helping out with volunteering projects at school
- volunteering elsewhere (e.g. litter picking with people in the local community)



Positive routines and sleep

Teach pupils that good mental wellbeing depends on getting the right amount of sleep every day:

- children aged 3 to 5 need 10 to 13 hours
- children aged 6 to 12 need 9 to 12 hours
- young people aged 13 to 18 need 8 to 10 hours

Explain pupils can develop a routine to reduce screen time and prioritise sleep, social interaction and physical activity, which are **vital for wellbeing**, for example, by:

- agreeing a weekly online limit with their parents
- switching off their phone 2 hours before bed



Self care techniques

Teach younger pupils to make positive connections between things they enjoy (activities, friends) and feeling good.

Challenge older pupils to reflect on how rest, time with others, hobbies and interests, rationing time online, help to maintain and increase their wellbeing.

Ensure older pupils are taught and know of a range of self-care strategies they can use to regulate their emotional experience (for example, some people enjoy mindfulness, colouring, exercise, setting a time to 'unwind' before bed as well as getting enough sleep).



Isolation and loneliness

Teach pupils the difference between boredom, isolation and loneliness.

Anyone (including adults) can experience these feelings – whether or not they have people with them.

Encourage younger pupils to use creative activities (such as telling or writing stories) to tackle boredom.

Emphasise that they can seek out a trusted adult or friend when they feel lonely.

Explore strategies with older pupils to reduce loneliness (for example, seeking companionship or joining clubs).



Bullying

Teach that:

- bullying can make people feel bad and negatively affects mental wellbeing
- all types of bullying can hurt people (including 'cyberbullying')
- you can't always tell if someone is being hurt by bullying
- bullying can affect someone long after an incident has happened (it can affect their whole life)

Emphasise that bullying should not be tolerated and that pupils should ask for help if they need it.





The Internet & Gaming

Teach that:

- the internet is an integral part of life and has many benefits.
- the benefits of rationing time spent online,
- the risks of excessive time spent on electronic devices
- the impact of positive and negative content on their own and others' mental and physical wellbeing - such as false narratives not necessarily reflecting real life
- how to consider the effect of their online actions on others and know how to recognise and display respectful behaviour online
- the importance of keeping personal information private
- why social media, some computer games and online gaming, for example, are age restricted
- that the internet can be a negative place where online abuse, trolling, bullying and harassment can take place, which can have a negative impact on mental health

When to ask for help

Tell younger pupils that they should always ask for help when they need it, such as when they or someone else is worried or upset.

Explain and encourage older pupils to recognise scenarios when they should ask for help, such as when they're concerned about:

- their wellbeing / emotional reactions
- someone else's wellbeing / emotional reactions

This could be in response to face-to-face or online behaviour.



Who to ask for help

Ensure all pupils know their appropriate adults to ask for support when they or somebody else is feeling hurt, upset, worried or angry (including about issues arising online).

Identify their key trusted adults at school and remind pupils they can also talk to any other teacher.

Older pupils should also know who they can speak to outside school (e.g. parent/carer, a friend).



Wellbeing is a spectrum

Teach pupils that feeling emotions such as sadness doesn't mean we are unwell - feelings often change throughout the day and over longer periods.

Sometimes mental wellbeing can be affected, e.g. by life events or seemingly lower-level stressors and:

People sometimes need help to get better or cope, e.g. help from family, friends, a doctor

Wellbeing is a spectrum and addressing issues early can minimise the negative impact

People can seem happy but still need help



Daily Mindfulness

Studies show that daily mindfulness increases overall wellbeing and improves concentration and emotional intelligence.

Pupils will do guided breathing for a few minutes at the start of every day and after each break session, to ground them back to the classroom environment.

Audio files of breathing exercises and guided mindfulness can be accessed on the school website for parents and care givers to use at home if they wish.

4/7 breathing technique
Guided body scan



Gratitude Journal

From key stage 1 children will fill in a daily gratitude journal during the school day.

They will record how they are feeling and something that they are grateful for that day

Younger pupils will use mood charts to indicate how they are feeling

Once introduced to the home environment, parents and caregivers should encourage children to continue this daily practice.

Research evidences that keeping a gratitude journal increases positivity, self-esteem, wellbeing and aids sleep.

It is also a useful tool for teachers, parents and caregivers to measure a child's mental wellness over time



Child to child support system

A child-to-child support system is an essential first line defence against mental distress.

All staff and chosen pupils from each older class will be given additional skills in compassionate communication & signposting.

They will wear a school badge to indicate that they can be approached in a non-judgmental way by any pupil for support.

Although usually referred to as 'mental health first aiders', they will be known as 'M.E. Time Champions'



Mental Health Continuum



A basic mental health continuum is a useful tool to monitor a child's mental wellbeing.

It should be used over several days or weeks, rather than as a single snap shot.

It is not for pupils to use, but rather for staff, parents and caregivers as an aide memoire.

The Parent/Pupil Pledges

A recent study published in October 2022 in the Journal of Pediatrics found that children who spent more than one hour on electrical devices per day have less memory, attention span, concentration and executive brain function than those who spent less.

It also highlighted the higher risk of obesity, low self-esteem and ADHD directly linked to prolonged screen time.

Therefore, as part of this initiative, all pupils, parents and care givers are encouraged to pledge the following:

I will limit my screen time at home to 45 minutes daily

I will be physically active for at least 60 minutes daily

I will do my gratitude diary and mindfulness daily

I will always be kind to myself and others



Summary

We all have mental health. It is a normal thing for us all. It is as important as our physical health, and we need to look after it in the same way.

Being aware of it, talking about it, keeping active, sleeping well, eating well, learning new things and spending time with our friends and family are all really important ways to keep ourselves mentally healthy.

We all have a duty to be kind and look after each other



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The author

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He is a school governor and is passionate about improving education and awareness of mental health.



"Prevention is better than cure"

Desiderius Erasmus circa 1500

