



M E N T A L

H E A L T H

&

W E L L B E I N G

## WHAT IS WELLBEING?

Wellbeing is about feeling happy, healthy, connected, loved and inspired. It can lead to friendship, personal growth and a curiosity about the world. It is the ability to bounce back from failure and disappointment. It can be effected by a combination of social, emotional and physical factors.

Wellbeing is not about feeling good all the time. Sadness, fear, anger and frustration are all normal human experiences, and can help children to learn, grow, stay safe and build meaningful connections with others.

Children that have good wellbeing will be able to process and regulate difficult emotions in a way that is positive for their development. This ability will allow children to adapt to life's many challenges, in and out of school.





## MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

A mental health condition is any kind of illness that affects an individual's thoughts, feelings, behaviour, and relationships with others.

For example:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Phobias
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Eating disorders
- Stress

Children can experience stress and anxiety just like adults can.

This has many different causes such as instability, transitions, bereavement, trauma, feeling overwhelmed as well as difficulties with schoolwork, friendships, health or sleep etc.

Sometimes it can be difficult for children to put words to what they are feeling. Instead, complex emotions may end up being expressed in other ways. Anxiety, stress or trauma may manifest as sensations in the body (body signals) like pains in the tummy, nail biting or hypervigilance, for example. Often, we will notice changes in behaviour like angry outbursts, withdrawal, an inability to concentrate or lethargy<sup>1</sup>.

# SYMPTOMS OF MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

Stress, anxiety and depression are the most common mental health conditions. Below explores some symptoms you could see both in children and adults.

Crying more than usual

Changes in sleep

## DEPRESSION

Feelings of guilt

Feelings of worthlessness

Irritability or anger

Social withdrawal

Thoughts of suicide

Low self-esteem

Changes in eating

Poor concentration

## ANXIETY

Feeling frightened

Poor appetite

Feeling overwhelmed

Avoiding certain situations

Difficulty concentrating

Feeling faint

Diarrhoea

## STRESS

Headaches

Constant sense of dread

Feeling panicky

Being clingy

Trembling

Sleeping problems

Muscle aches

## SIGNS TO LOOK OUT FOR

Changes in a child's behaviour can indicate they are struggling with their mental health.

Reduced engagement in school/learning

- Lack of concentration
- Wanting to give up
- Memory difficulties

Heightened aggression

- More frequent outbursts
- Less able to regulate their anger

Communication

- Difficulty in articulating themselves
- Doesn't say what they need
- Confusing behaviour or body language

Sleeping and eating changes

- More or less than their usual
- Sleeping more to shut themselves away

Emotions

- Feeling overwhelmed
- Intense crying or anger
- Confused emotions such as laughing when someone is upset

Low self-esteem

- Lack of self worth
- Comparing themselves to others negatively
- Intense shyness or embarrassment
- Fear of making mistakes

Also, children are not the only ones who may experience mental health difficulties. It can be anyone.



## ART AND MENTAL HEALTH

All children benefit from mental health and wellbeing support!

One way we can support children is through art.

'Whether it be through colouring, sculpting, painting or drawing, or tactile processes, activities like these have been shown to have a huge effect on our health – both physically and mentally'.<sup>2</sup>

How does art support our mental health?

- By raising self-esteem
- By relieving stress and relaxing
- By expressing yourself without words
- By exploring emotions and feelings
- By boosting confidence

'Emotions, particularly those that result from trauma, crisis, or loss, are hard to articulate. Art can be particularly beneficial in circumstances when complex emotions need to be expressed'.<sup>3</sup>

Artist-led projects are an intervention within the school setting offering a creative space that may be calm, safe, nurturing, non-judgmental and pressure-free.

When children are invited to engage in expressive, playful or therapeutic art making, they can often regulate their mood. Ideally this can be a reset for them to re-enter school or home life in a more happy, relaxed or resilient frame of mind.

Art can provide a very natural and safe way for children to express themselves.

Children can express themselves creatively through:

- Play
- Experimentation
- Make a mess
- Creating stories, narratives and world building
- Using metaphors to represent feelings.

Materials and processes can become a language of expression, such as:

- Colour
- Texture
- Mark-making
- Found objects
- Photographs
- Collage
- Sculpture
- Assemblage
- Filming
- Book making

The possibilities are almost endless and can be adapted to suit the individual needs of each child or group of children.<sup>4</sup>

## ADULT BEHAVIOUR

The most important thing you can do as an adult is demonstrate 'positive behaviour' by showing compassion, respect, kindness, warmth, and dignity to every child.

Children pick up the behaviour of adults so if you're interrupting, you're showing them that behaviour is okay.

Being calm helps children be calm. If you're stressed, they'll sense that, and their stress levels may heighten which can escalate into behaviour that challenges.

Avoid shouting as it nearly always makes the situation more volatile. Being shouted at while feeling anxious or stressed doesn't make you feel better, and it doesn't support relationship building.

*How can I support strong emotions?*

- Create a safe and calm environment.
- Validate and support their feelings.
- Sit next to a child, show that you're available to talk but equally don't over talk. Give them space to share if they want to.
- Try using drawing as a way for a child to express themselves. Draw together.
- Demonstrate warmth, respect, empathy and listen.
- Treat every child as unique.
- Keep calm.



## HOW MENTAL HEALTH CAN AFFECT BEHAVIOUR

### Scenario

A child criticises themselves and all their artwork, saying 'it's terrible, I can't draw'. They would typically sit with their friends but the last few weeks they've opted to sit alone.

### What could I do?

- Make them feel seen and noticed.
- Allow them to feel the way they do but offer praise and validation.
- If you notice a child becoming withdrawn, flag it at the debrief or raise with the Safeguarding Lead.
- Acknowledge to yourself/your team if it's hard for you, but don't take it personally.

### Scenario

A child is always eager to help clear up at the end of the workshop. They keep making excuses as to why they can't go home yet.

### What could I do?

- It's essential to flag concerns at the debrief or to the Safeguarding Lead.

### Scenario

One child attends afterschool club, they are very shy and don't often communicate verbally. During one session they write that they feel nervous around new friends.

### What could I do?

- Make the environment feel safe and calm.
- Seat them with another child with similar interests.
- Acknowledge and validate their feelings.
- Offer encouragement and gently support social interaction.
- Flag at the debrief to make others aware.





Children who struggle with their mental health or have difficulties regulating their emotions can experience behaviour that challenges, as they may feel overwhelmed and disconnected.

#### Scenario

It's a child's first time at afterschool club and they are immediately withdrawn and say, "I don't want to be here." Every time they start to draw, they become more agitated and upset. This escalates to them being rude to the other children in the club.



#### What could I do?

- Don't judge.
- There could be multiple reasons a child is withdrawn and agitated e.g., low self-esteem, anxiety, stress, tiredness etc.
- Try to make them feel listened to and heard.
- "Yes, I can see why you feel frustrated."
- "I can see that you feel upset. Shall we go and sit somewhere quiet?"
- Make sure both sides of the conflict are supported and bring them together to share, if appropriate.
- It's OK if they don't engage with the art making.
- Find out what they like doing to engage them in something they like, if they want to.
- Try and pair them up with another child they know and like.
- Try and avoid isolating the child from the group as it can make the child feel like a problem. Instead support social connection, when they are ready.

## SAFEGUARDING

Please refer to Drawing Room's Safeguarding Policy for further information or ask if you are unsure of anything.

When should I be concerned?

- If a child shows signs of abuse: emotional, physical, sexual, bullying or neglect.
- If a child becomes withdrawn, uncharacteristically aggressive, more anxious or has unexplained behaviour or personality changes.

What should I do?

- If a child discloses (tells you) something or displays behaviour that is concerning, you need to notify the safeguarding lead straight away.
- Relay your concerns to Drawing Room's safeguarding lead: Betsy Dadd (Learning Curator). If unavailable, please check in with Drawing Room's safeguarding officer: Genevieve Miller (Learning Coordinator).
- You do not have to have 'the answer' but may have witnessed or heard something that doesn't feel right. In this case, it is your responsibility to pass on any concerns to the correct person, in confidence.

Every child deserves to be safe and secure.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

## REFERENCES

- Understanding Bullying and Discrimination in Children and Young People, Skills Network, CPD
- TQUK Level 2 Certificate in Behaviour that Challenges in Children (RQF)
- Improving Children's Learning Through Play, Educare, CPD
- Children's Perspectives on Play, Open University, CPD
- The Gentle Discipline Book: How to raise co-operative, polite and helpful children, Sarah Ockwell-Smith, Piatkus
- Reflections on Children's Mental Health - A ROCK PAPER SCISSORS Artist Forum with Matilde Rahtz, NHS Mental Health Nurse and Kate Tidman, Occupational Therapist, October 2021
- Play/Work! - A ROCK PAPER SCISSORS Artist Forum with Playworker Penny Wilson, December 2022

### Footnotes

1. The Mental Health Benefit of Art and Crafts for Children, Cara Sherrat, Camp Beaumont
2. The Mental Health Benefit of Art and Crafts for Children, Cara Sherrat, Camp Beaumont
3. Helping children express emotions through art, McGraw Hill, Innovate Resources
4. Children Don't Misbehave, Kristen RB Peterson, Instagram

Drawing in its simplest form — leaving a mark on a surface — is direct and instinctive. ROCK PAPER SCISSORS puts children at the centre and explores with them, their teachers, schools and families, what drawing can be and uncovers ideas through the act of drawing. This extensive programme spans afterschool clubs, in-school projects, teachers' assemblies, family studios and holiday clubs — working holistically across different structures within children's lives.

This toolkit has been put together in response to our experience of ROCK PAPER SCISSORS, to better equip ourselves and the team with approaches to support children. It has arrived out of conversation, research and training however training is an ongoing learning curve alongside all those we work with. We thank all children, teachers, teaching assistants, artists, workshop assistants and parents who we have met through ROCK PAPER SCISSORS for coming together and sharing knowledge.

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**DRAWING ROOM**

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