

Staff Wellbeing: 4 Ideas for Leaders who Care



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Introduction

I've been contacted by a lot of worried school leaders about how they can best support their teams' wellbeing during these difficult times. Whilst we're not all facing exactly the same issues, there is certainly much in common so I turned my mind to some simple suggestions I could make that would help you to help your staff.

Use what you think will work for you and adapt it to suit your setting and if it works, please share the ideas with other leaders too. Everyone is struggling right now, but we're each a lot stronger when we lean on one another and lift each other up.

Thank you for all you are doing for your staff, but don't forget to look after yourself as well!

Good Luck!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pooky". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a slightly larger "P" at the beginning.

Dr Pooky Knightsmith
Director
Creative Education

Before we consider what you can do to support the staff on your team, it's important that we recognise that you matter too. When we look after ourselves, we give others permission to do the same and we also give ourselves and physical and mental energy required to lead humanly. Martyrdom is over-rated... look after yourself and then you'll be in a far better position to successfully shepherd your students and staff.



Look
after
yourself
first

Who can you talk openly and honestly with? Perhaps someone in a similar role in another school

What role can governors play in supporting leaders? They are keen to help...

Consider



What small self-care step could you commit to? – small sustainable steps often work well

1. Time Block Downtime

We are all having to do more and different things than in normal times and it can feel like there simply isn't enough time. But we must rest.

I have found a very effective way of achieving some degree of balance is to encourage staff to schedule down time. Specific slots when they are focused wholly on activities other than school. This is a next step on from things like a communications protocol which might specify at what times staff can be reached via phone and email. Instead, here, we specifically commit to 'at X time I will be fully focused on family / my hobby / resting' – this 'golden time' is time completely away from work and other stressors and time focused in on the people, places and spaces that help to restore us. It doesn't have to be for long periods to make a significant difference.

Lead by example – maybe choose half an hour a day as your own golden time



You Could



Encourage staff to block their time for work and their time for play

Take an active interest in how colleagues spend their downtime – actively value this time





Enable Mastery?

One of the things that hugely impacts on staff wellbeing, is the level of mastery they feel within their role. At the moment with so much that feels new and far fewer opportunities to easily share and bounce off colleagues and with anxiety and disruption impacting on student behaviour, many colleagues may feel less mastery within their role than usual. Considering how to redress this balance can make a significant difference to colleagues and is also a clear sign that they and their role are valued.

Develop buddying / coaching / mentoring relationships between colleagues

Consider how to share evolving best practice in the current climate

Audit / survey staff skills and concerns and address these through bitesize CPD

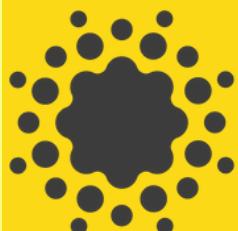


You Could



Consider what the very best use of upcoming INSET days might be...

3. Enable Connection



One of the key things that school staff are telling me right now is that although they are in school, that they feel quite isolated and do not have the usual opportunities for personal or professional exchanges with a range of colleagues. Partly due to bubbling and COVID restrictions, and partly due to time pressures now that many people spend breaktimes cleaning classrooms and equipment etc.

Feeling a sense of belonging and connectedness with our peers is crucial to our wellbeing, so considering how we can support connection between colleagues in spite of COVID and make space of the kindness that is usually so present amongst our staff.

Buddy staff members up and encourage check in phone calls regularly



Walk and talk instead of meeting virtually

You Could



Start online meetings with ice breaker questions

Appoint social reps and give them a little time and budget with the aim of connection & kindness



4. Co-Regulation

There is low level anxiety and worry rumbling through all of our thoughts and interactions all the time at the moment; this is true of both adults and children. It's completely understandable given the circumstances, and it can mean that we're not seeing the behaviour we'd hope for from our children and also that adults are finding it easier to 'be the swan' the cool calm collected adult who is predictable, consistent and in control... the more tired, stressed or anxious we are, the harder it is to glide swanlike and the more evidence our paddling becomes

It's a bit of a toxic mix when both adults and children are close to overwhelm and we tend to each reflect the other and emotionally dysregulate in tandem. However, we can proactively look to address this, by building in moments of co-regulation into our timetable. These are moments when staff and students look to reset and return to the calm, regulated state that is conducive to learning. When staff and students engage in these activities together, everybody feels calmer and more able to cope and all of us are more ready for learning – whether we're the teacher or the student. This is something that our support staff regularly practice with small groups or individuals but now, more than ever, these reset moments can be of great benefit to every student and staff member.



4. Co-Regulation

Have students take it in turn to lead the class in one of these strategies - they could research and share their own ideas too

As a class learn a range of breathing and relaxation strategies and practice them together



You Could



Build in regular reset moments - especially at transition times

Develop a 'reset' script you can go to if the mood in the room is headed in the wrong direction

you're a role model

My final thought is to remind you that as a middle or senior leader, you are a constant role model.

Staff, students and families look to you for guidance and ideas. What you do will inspire others more than what you ask them to do so... consider your own physical wellbeing and your own approach to self-care and the small changes you might be able to make.

Others will follow your example. When you give yourself permission to look after yourself, you give your entire team permission to look after themselves too. This matters because your people are your most precious resource – so if you can't do it for you, do it for them!



Helpful?

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worked well**



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