



HEALTHIER MINDS



Staff Wellbeing

Understanding the impact of stress, and the importance of taking care of yourself

Staff Wellbeing

Introduction

In April 2021, an on-line Healthier Minds session for staff was delivered to offer some understanding about why we feel the way we do and provide some tips about how to improve our wellbeing. This document outlines some of the key points made during that session that will hopefully help you cope during these uncertain times.

Q. When I'm feeling burned out, how can I become motivated?

First of all, it is important to acknowledge feelings of burnout, with ourselves and others who are close to you. The impact of the pandemic on all our lives has been huge for us as workers as well as in our families. We still had to continue to do our jobs, and do good jobs, and support those who have been distressed, and potentially faced exacerbated distress because of covid.

To acknowledge burnout, we must be able to sit with the feeling of being demotivated, and lacking energy or hope. It is important to understand that these feelings are natural. We are wondering how we can muster motivation till the next holiday, or, how we can welcome children to school when we feel this way.

A second step that may be helpful is to try and create some space together as a staff team to share the experiences and feelings that you're having. It'll feel less like it's only you who is having these experiences. You may be able to help each other with solutions.

Thirdly, we must focus on self-care. How do we turn up, even on days that are difficult? We need to pay attention to the things that we need and the things that we have control over.



Eating, resting, sleeping, connecting, setting boundaries.

Ideas for Self-Care and Taking Control



Remember to take breaks during the day.

- ❖ Workloads are really high at the moment but sometimes you need to say no.
- ❖ Be kind to yourself.
- ❖ Be realistic about expectations of yourselves and others.
- ❖ Have a focus on self-care at team meetings. Share ideas, for example, some people have taken up swimming, others go for a relaxing bath.
- ❖ Make time for yourself – even if it is only five minutes.
- ❖ A connection with nature such as walking, also yoga and mindfulness are known to help. Research shows that this is beneficial for our wellbeing.
- ❖ Make time to have some fun to help you get through.

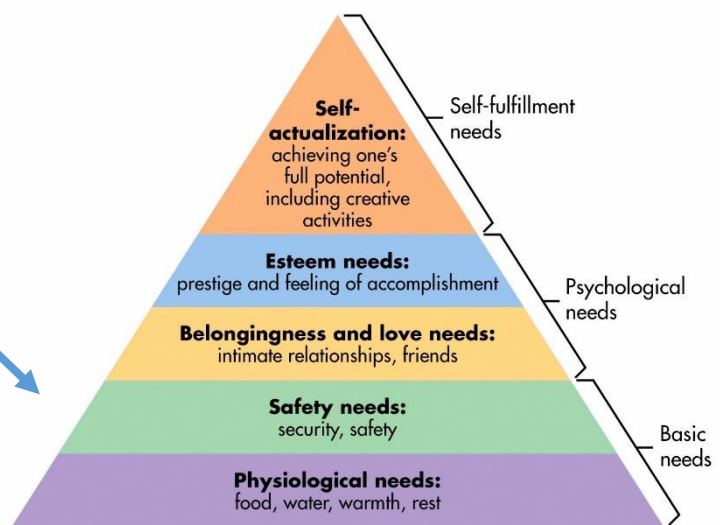
Q. Why are we feeling less resilient and more stressed than usual?

Maslow's hierarchy of needs can help us understand why we are not feeling our usual selves.

At the bottom of the hierarchy, first and foremost, our physiological needs have to be met. The majority of our behaviours are shaped around trying to meet those needs.



Covid has impacted on our need for safety. Therefore, we are frequently feeling hypervigilant.



In addition, our need for love and belonging is continually affected by the pandemic and restrictions, our connections with family and friends has been impacted.

Q. What happens when we are hypervigilant?

Our brains are designed and pre-programmed to behave in a certain way during stressful situations. The front part of our brain shuts down and the old part takes over. For example, when we see a snake we feel a sense of fear, we go into survival mode and are designed like this to help us monitor our environment and keep ourselves safe.

When we are frequently hypervigilant to potential dangers in our environment we can become overwhelmed, or overreact to small things. This is a normal reaction to stressful circumstances. We might go through a whole range of emotions in one day because of the pressures. It may feel like we are on a rollercoaster.



We should measure our sense of wellbeing and keep things in proportion. For example, are any of the issues in the image below affecting you?



Q. What is the impact of stress on our body?

Our bodies show signs of stress and the impact of trauma in different ways. If you get to know how your body responds to stress this can help you understand what to do to stop feeling so stressed.



For some people, their gut might be tied up, others will have a sore head or their shoulders may become tense. Develop awareness of how your body reacts and learn to alleviate these. For example, drop your shoulders, take a screen break, go for a walk.

Really think about your own needs and how depleted your batteries may be. There has been a great deal of uncertainty and you have responded rapidly all along. Your batteries will be understandably depleted. As adults, we must remember to be kind to ourselves. Like an aeroplane we have to put our own oxygen masks on first before helping others. Often adults say I don't want to do that I'd rather support the children, I feel guilty. You will be able to offer better support to children and young people if you take steps to look after your own physical and mental health.

Go back to basics, look at how you're sleeping, eating, relaxing and exercising. Putting in structures and routines is important. We do this for children. It's the same for adults. Routine helps us. For example, regular mealtimes might help us cope.

As adults we like control and a sense of agency. What is there still that we can control? What boundaries and routines do we have in our day? What is our sleep routine?

Understanding our triggers for stress as well as the physical response can help us to cope with difficult situations.

Think about the thoughts you are having, and your feelings and behaviours. How you feel emotionally and how you feel physically are linked, and this will in turn affect how you act and behave. For example, if you are worried you may feel tense and tired, which in turn may reduce your motivation to take part in meetings at work or activities outside work.



Q. I am experiencing high levels of stress. How can I get a better night's sleep?

We need a balance of both mental and physical health. Within staff teams there have been a lot of serious issues, especially difficulty sleeping. It can help if you support each other as a staff team. Debrief as a team, discussing issues you are dealing with. Remember to ask your colleagues how they are, even if they look like they're getting on well it may be that they are hiding how they feel. Some staff teams have found it helpful to talk about sleep hygiene and a good routine.

Preparing your body for sleep is an important part of a sleep routine. If you're not ready to go to bed then don't. An hour or half an hour before bed, engage in a relaxing activity to help your body and mind prepare for sleep.

Sometimes we cannot sleep because of the thoughts we have. Reframing these unhelpful thoughts will help. We're all feeling guilt and shame about what we have or have not been able to do. We may be wondering why a colleague or young person said something. Have we done something to upset them or don't they like me. Reframe these thoughts and the way you are thinking about challenges. Think about what you have achieved and how you may resolve problems.

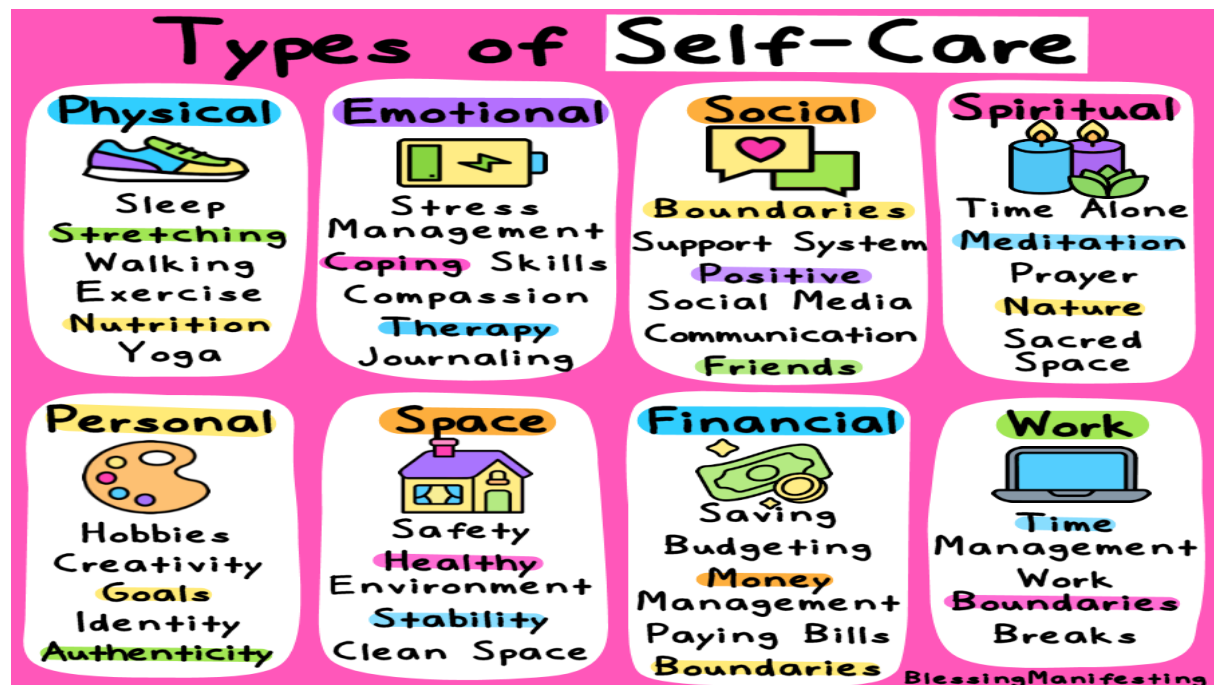
N.B. Please remember that alcohol is a depressant. It does dip your mood as well.

Good advice about establishing a sleep routine is available on the following website:

[How to get to sleep - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/healthyliving/sleep/)

Q. What can I do to help improve my wellbeing?

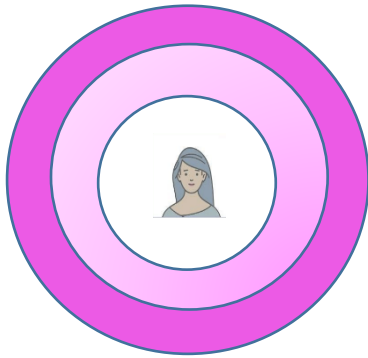
Self-care is key to calming ourselves so we have the resources (brain power!) to care and support others. If self-care is to be effective, it needs to be sustainable and practical. This is not always easy.



As individuals, we all respond to different coping strategies. Our physiology and motivations are different so we benefit from trying out and using different tools and strategies. Here are some suggestions below for you to try.

- **Physical Exercise** works for everyone. Going out for a walk is a release though you might prefer cycling or running.
- **Mindfulness** may help some staff
- Others may prefer **Guided Visualisations** which provide a story for you to listen to rather than clearing the mind (which mindfulness focuses on).
- **Talking** might work for you - some people need to talk a lot but not everybody does.
- **Consider your living and working environments** - it's where you can feel better and it impacts our sense of belonging too. Our sense of belonging has been significantly affected, who we talk to and work with might have changed. Can you make any changes to improve how you feel?

- **Your Inner Circle – who makes you feel good no matter what?**



We all have circles of support around us including family and friends, and wider support such as work colleagues. Who we talk to and who might make us feel better is probably not the same person for each different problem. Think about who will make you feel valid and support you when you don't feel good? Remember that you may have well-meaning friends, family or others who want to help but they may make you feel worse, even if they have good intentions.

- **Be your own Best Friend** - if your best friend came to you upset and struggling what would you say to them? If it helps, write this down and pin it in a place where you regularly look.
- **Change your Thinking** - You might be prone to rumination. If you're always catastrophising, or having a 'glass is half empty' world view, ask yourself, can I change my thinking? Instead of thinking 'I can't do this' what about 'This will be hard but I'll give it a try'. It takes practice to change your thinking in this way. Having more optimistic and positive thoughts can also change the way you feel.

Unhelpful	Helpful
I've left it too late.	I am going to make best use of the time I have left.
I'm never going to be able to get this done.	I'm going to do as much as I possibly can.
I'm freaking out right here.	I feel anxious, but I know what to do to help with that.
I can't do this.	I can try my best.
It's too hard.	Nothing worth having comes easy, it's hard but I have a plan to break it down and get through it.
What is the point?	I am going to come out the other end of this with no regrets.

We all want to do the best for the children and young people we support but sometimes this can put you under lots of pressure. Give yourself a break and be kind - you're doing your best in an incredibly difficult time.



Connection



Regulation



Movement



Relax: [Relaxation Strategies | \(glowscotland.org.uk\)](https://glowscotland.org.uk) / [Self-Compassion \(self-compassion.org\)](https://self-compassion.org)