

Resilience and Well-being for School Leaders

Overview

1. Navigating the changes
2. School climate
3. Relationships and social connections
4. Raising the resilience and well-being of staff



Resilience is not simply an individual trait but something that arises through interactions between people within a particular context.

Day et al. (2011)

Resilience can be fostered, when the right opportunities and support are in place.

Introduction

The following information is intended to be used by school leaders to support their reflections during this period of tremendous change and uncertainty.

It is anticipated that the information provided will help to normalise the thoughts, feelings and emotions school leaders are experiencing at this time.

This information is not intended to be directive. However it is hoped that the psychological theory and research evidence encompassed will provide reassurance and can support school leaders when considering their school's practical and emotional responses to COVID-19.

Well-being is a subjective experience of happiness and life satisfaction, where individuals experience positive psychological functioning, good relationships with others and fulfil their potential.

Stewart-Brown and Janmohamed (2008)

1. Navigating the Changes and Challenges

Reflecting on the Changes and Challenges

Some of the changes and challenges which have emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, could have a detrimental impact on our resiliency and well-being.

Isolation

- Our professional *and* personal support networks may be impacted
- Working remotely (reliance on technology, absence of non-verbal communication/feedback)

Sudden and continuous changes

- On-going decisions to be made and require a prompt response
- Setting a clear direction for staff, parents, carers and pupils
- Change outside of your control vs accountability

Compromises

- Responding and adapting to the 'new norm' without compromising on our own values (potentially the current role does not align as smoothly with the values which we held when transitioning into teaching or school leadership)

Responsibilities

- Our responsibilities may have changed.
- It may have become more challenging to make a distinction between our professional and personal responsibilities

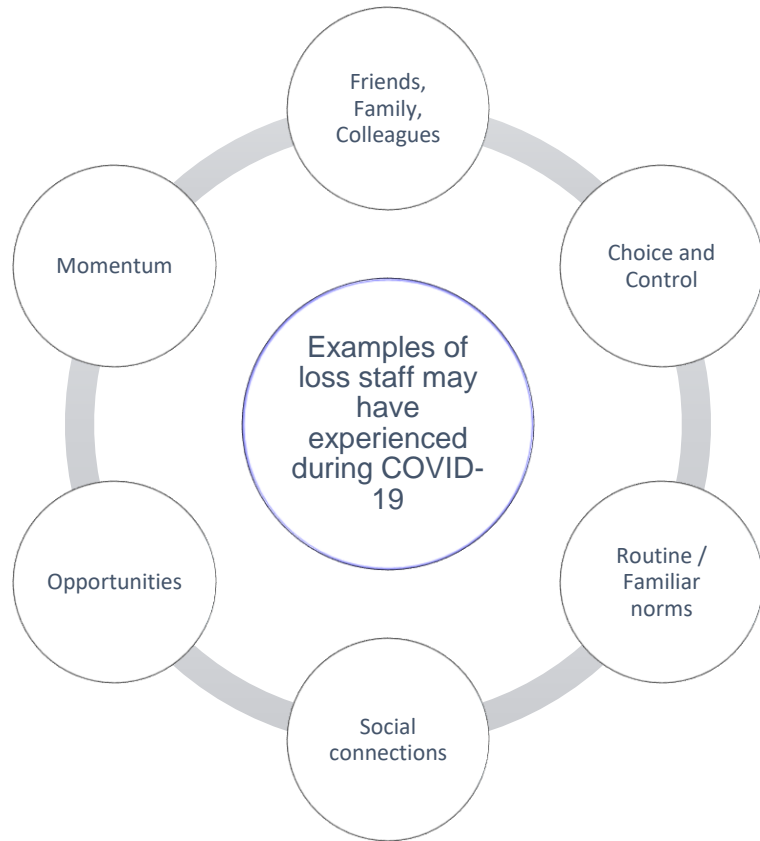
Loss

- Loss is likely to have been experienced in different ways and to varying extents by staff.



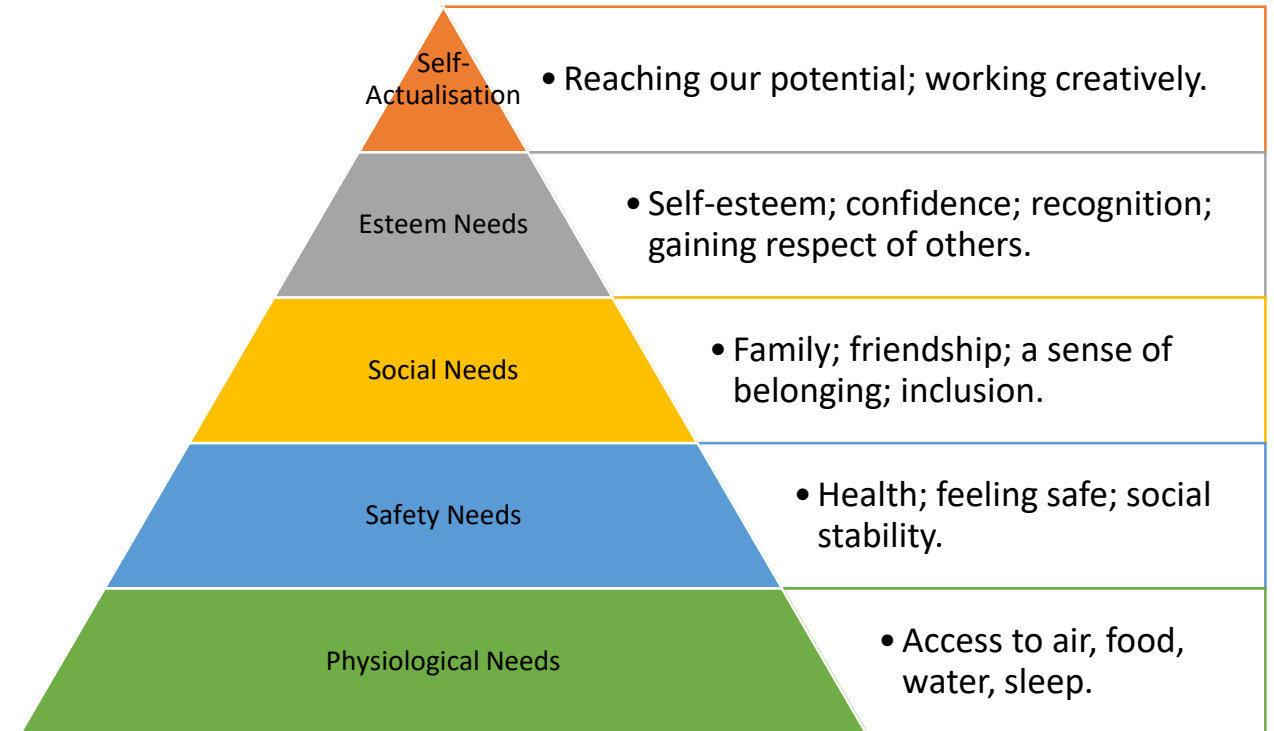
1. Navigating the Changes and Challenges

After reviewing research evidence regarding human responses to bereavement, Aucott and Soni (2016) proposed that human resilience has been underestimated. A one-size-fits-all approach to supporting bereaved individuals was also questioned. Instead, the authors highlighted the need for individuals to make use of their own resources and for leaders to accommodate individual responses. This helps to avoid an unwanted situation, in which individuals believe they should be experiencing the same feelings and emotions as their peers.



Maslow's (1970;1968) *Hierarchy of Needs*, suggested that human needs are hierarchical and our *deficiency* needs must be met, in order for individuals to focus their attention on fulfilling their potential.

Maslow's theory can be applied to support decisions regarding when to increase demands, responsibilities and expectations within school for individual staff and pupils.



1. Navigating the Changes and Challenges

Our increased reliance on **technology** may not currently align with the skills of the school's most experienced and influential members of staff. However this could open-up opportunities for staff skilled in this area.



Motivation

Ford's (1992) Motivational Systems Theory (developed following a thorough review of theories of motivation), highlighted that **self-efficacy** and the **emotions** one experiences before, during and after completing an activity, are key factors which impact our internal motivation.

Enhanced levels of self-efficacy in teaching staff is associated with increased effort and persistence (Woolfolk et al., 2013).

These findings may be helpful when SLT a) identify or adjust objectives b) consider how the emotional needs of staff can be supported.

Motivating remote learners

In addition to self-efficacy and the emotions individuals experience, Ford (1992) also emphasised the need to focus individuals on **mastery goals**, as opposed to performance-related goals.

Mastery goals focus on personal improvement and the development of a thorough understanding.

For pupils who continue to learn at home, pupil motivation must be maximised in order to minimise the impact of potential factors such as *competing interests*, reduced support (prompts, guidance and demonstrations), absence of peer modelling and the potential limitations of the learning environment.

1. Navigating the Changes and Challenges

Supporting pupils to learn and adjust to the current changes

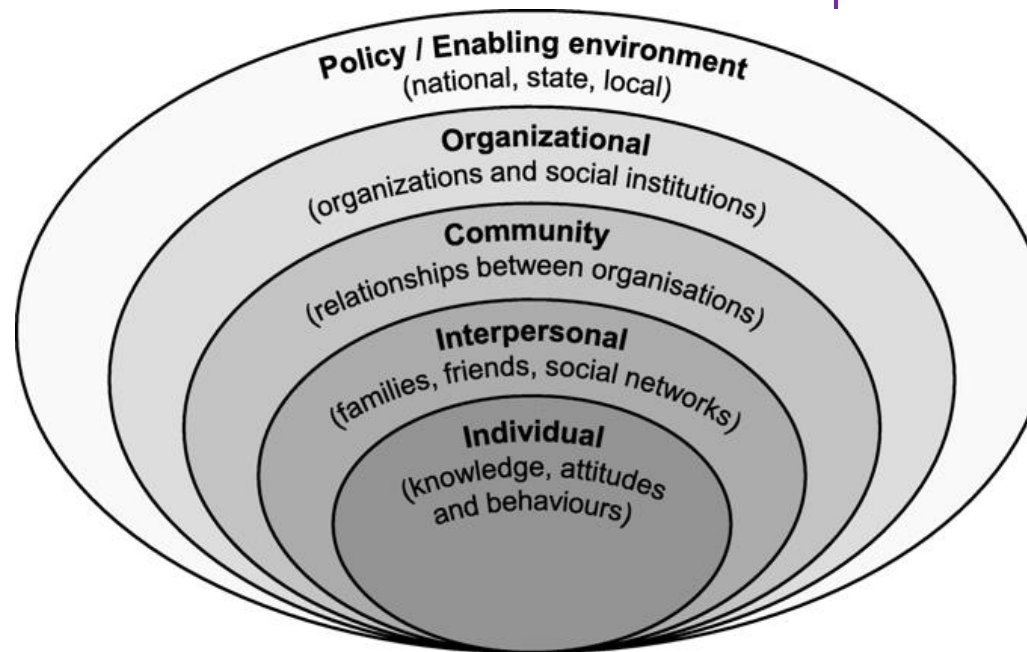
Government guidance to schools regarding social distancing has led to an increase in set rules within schools. This requires the introduction of new expectations for all members of the school community. As a result, any changes must be clear and understandable. However within the context of a school setting, there will be increased pressure on schools to accommodate the needs of individuals within this guidance.

As pupils return to school, their understanding and adjustment to these new rules will vary. There will clearly be certain rules which are non-negotiable.

Can further pre-existing rules or expectations be softened temporarily to accommodate these new non-negotiables? Raised levels of **anxiety** can lead to a reduction in self-regulation and conformity.

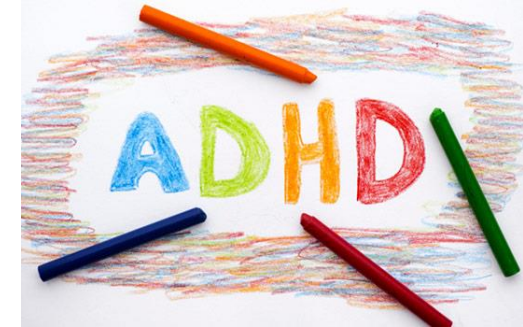
Bronfenbrenner's (1992;1979) *ecological systems theory* has been highlighted within guidance to schools, as a framework for exploring challenges and planning support for pupils.

However the Scottish Division of Educational Psychology (2020) argue that we must also consider how changes and experiences will have impacted on those who surround and support pupils. For example, how has COVID-19 impacted on the finances, employment status, mental- and physical health of parents and carers.



Pupils who present with impulsivity and hyperactivity.

- Is there a way in which *safe movement* can be incorporated for pupils frequently during the day?
- Are there secondary tasks which pupils can engage with during periods of the day, where pupils are required to sit and remain focused?



1. Navigating the Changes and Challenges

Helpful questions

- Sudden and continuous changes taking place may lead to a reduced sense of control. How can staff's sense of control be enhanced?
- Have your own values and beliefs been impacted by COVID-19?
- Have you explored how staff feel about their adjusted roles and responsibilities as Key Workers? How does this situation align with their personal values and beliefs?
- How have staff's experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic varied? Does this impact on the response of school leaders?
- Has the school reviewed the success of remote learning and pupils' return to school, in order to inform future support and approaches?
- What has worked well during lockdown? Can this be applied to the school's long-term approach to teaching, collaboration or relationship building (virtual meetings, informal interactions, communication with parents/carers).

2. School Climate

School climate can be explored through 3 dimensions:

Physical Dimension

- Supporting pupils, staff, parents and carers to feel safe and secure.
- The organisation of classes.
- How the school is presented.

Social Dimension

- The extent to which staff contribute.
- The quality of the interpersonal relationships (staff-staff; staff-parents/carers; staff-pupils)

Academic Dimension

- Quality of teaching.
- Teachers' expectations and student attainment.
- How progress is measured.

Within an open and desirable school climate, school leaders are supportive but do not restrict staff with direct orders. However during the current pandemic, staff may welcome further direction, as this provides clarity and reassurance at a time of heightened uncertainty.

Communication between staff has been impacted by an absence of non-verbal feedback when communicating remotely (e.g. staff's non-verbal responses to ideas).

Factors which contribute towards a positive school climate include:

- Free from disruptive outside forces
- Resources required are accessible
- A careful balance is maintained between the goals, tasks and the well-being of staff, when decisions are made.
- Where staff feel....

Valued

Comfortable and secure

Accepted (including their own apprehension at this time)

Able to interact with people they trust

2. School Climate

Collective efficacy can be defined as.....

a group's shared belief in its collective capabilities to organise and execute actions, which are required in order to achieve set goals.

Bandura (1997)

Collective efficacy is associated with an increase in staff's commitment to pupil behaviour and attainment (Gibbs and Powell, 2012).

Additionally, Klassen (2018) identified that collective efficacy helped to mediate work-related stress.



Strahan née Brown et al. (2019) explored how collective efficacy could be enhanced amongst school staff. The following factors were identified

Communication

- Perceived credibility of SLT's ideas, knowledge and trustworthiness
- Achievable expectations

Learning

- Learning leads to improved professional practice
- Learning is collaborative; enables helpful discussions between staff to follow.

Supporting roles

- How approachable and visible SLT are
- Peer support

Stress management

- Unrelieved stress was found to be detrimental to staff resilience and efficacy
- Knowledge of stress management techniques was found to be inconsistent

2. School Climate

Helpful questions

- Have the school's goals and values been discussed with staff during the lockdown and recovery periods?
- Have the goals and values of school been re-defined during the current context? Are the staff accepting of these goals and values?
- Are there traditions within school which have or can be maintained and bring the school community together? (e.g. virtual assembly)
- How can pupils, parents and carers be prepared for the physical changes to the school environment? For example, photographs, video tours.
- How can staff's and pupil's sense of safety be maximised?
- How can individuals connect across the wider school, whilst operating within *social bubbles*?
- How will the effectiveness of the school, the staff and progress of pupils be measured? (progress beyond attainment)
- What are the school's achievements which can be sensitively communicated to staff?

3. Relationships and Social Connections

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, research has indicated that school leaders report increased levels of happiness, in comparison to graduates from varying fields. However reported levels of anxiety in school leaders were also found to be markedly high in comparison to other graduates and teaching staff (Annual Population Survey, ONS, 2014-15). Reported anxiety levels have steadily increased over time and it is hypothesised that this increase has occurred due to higher levels of accountability and further budget restrictions (Education Policy Institute, 2020). There is evidence to suggest that these demands will increase further as a result of COVID-19.

- Social isolation is a key risk factor for diminishing levels of resilience and well-being. For staff working remotely, this is an amplified concern.
- Establishing and drawing-on social support, will enable school leaders to maximise their own well-being and emotional availability for school staff.
- Glasser's (1998) Choice Theory identified that our key needs can be moderated through our relationships with others:
 - ✓ providing help when we are struggling to cope (survival)
 - ✓ providing a sense of belonging and an emotional connection (love & belonging)
 - ✓ to listen to our views and ideas; and mould our own ideas (power and freedom)
 - ✓ to engage in discussions and activities which enable us to decompress (have fun)



Platforms for communication

Barriers to communication have potentially emerged/intensified during this pandemic. This includes physical barriers, interpersonal barriers and psychological barriers (e.g. emotional, ego defence mechanisms, perceptions).

When communicating with staff, social restrictions have likely impacted on the opportunities for staff to ask questions and communicate ideas or concerns.

- Online surveys may support school leaders to gain greater and broader insight from staff.
- Identify an approach which helps to replace direct one to one discussions (*my office is always open*).
- Develop and share a clear agenda for staff prior to meetings; this enables staff to formalise thoughts and ideas, prior to the meeting. This takes into account that on-going challenges may impact on cognitive processing.

Duffield (2019) found that resilience and well-being can be positively impacted by individuals seeking *and* providing help to colleagues

3. Relationships and Social Connections

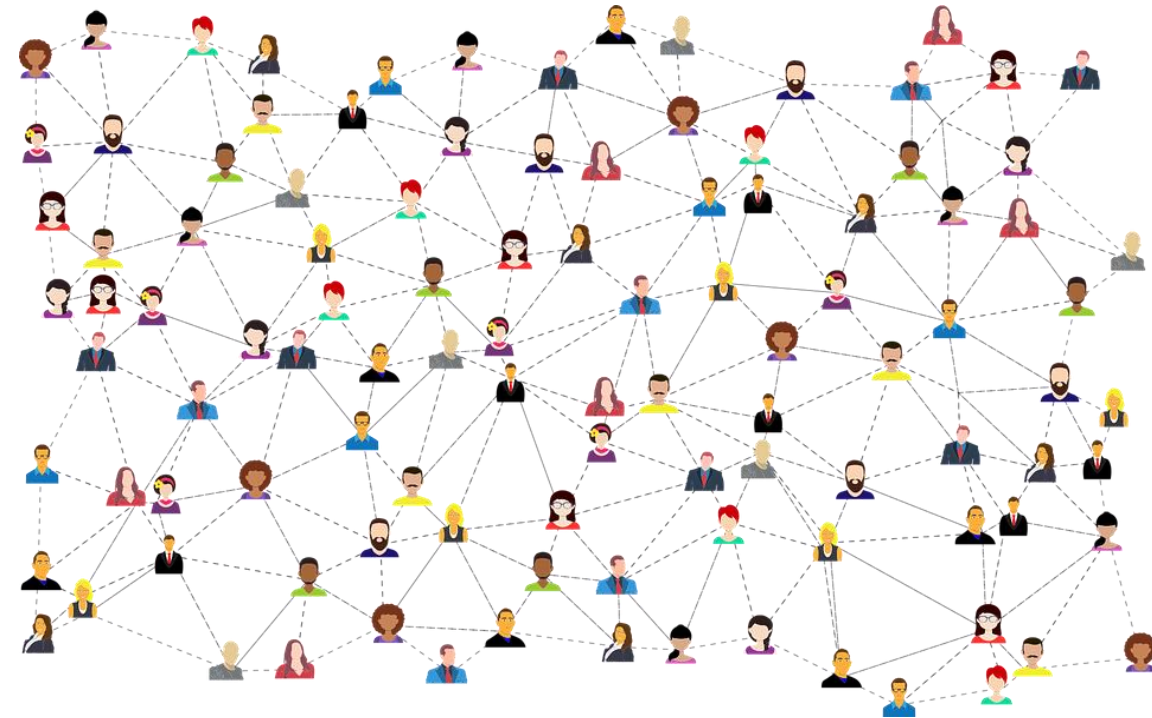
Helpful questions

- How connected do you and the school staff feel to the school, school's partners and wider community?
- Have you had the opportunity to communicate with school leaders from neighbouring or MAT schools?
- How has the quality of social interactions been impacted by remote working? Can adjustments be made to minimise the impact of these challenges? (e.g. minimise misunderstandings, how is information shared? Can the information shared be made even clearer?)
- How can staff contribute to decisions, volunteer ideas and share concerns? Does this correlate with how individual members of staff previously contributed? (e.g. contributing during whole-school or department meetings). Are further platforms for communication required?
- Has the schools connections with outside professionals changed as a result of COVID-19?

4. Raising the resilience and well-being of staff

Connecting, supporting and well-being

- Adopt a *little and often* approach to updating staff and checking on their well-being (Duffield and O'Hare, 2020). This approach:
 - a) communicates to staff that they are *held in mind*
 - b) takes into account the continuous changes which are currently occurring and helps reduce unhelpful speculation.
 - c) Accounts for the increased personal and emotional demands staff may be experiencing.
- School leaders to provide opportunities for professional supervision, in addition to line management support. Supervision provides staff with a safe space for support, reflection & restoring (Andrews, 2016). This could be provided directly, or where school leaders introduce time for this to occur (peer supervision groups).
- Encourage staff to connect. For example, virtual staffrooms or a set time for staff to meet. This can have a positive impact on staff's sense of belonging and intellectual stimulation.
- Research evidence suggests that two-thirds of school staff who have experienced mental health difficulties do not seek help, due to the stigma attached to potential discrimination (MIND, 2013; Ratcliffe, 2014).
- The opportunity to form positive, professional relationships with pupils has been identified as a notable factor in the recruitment and retention of teaching staff (Split et al., 2011; Masten, 2014). An *affektive teaching* approach, where teaching staff value pupil's attitudes, feelings and beliefs is increasingly relevant at the current time. This approach has been found to support pupil's mental health, pro-social skills (following isolation) and supports personal growth (Woolfolk et al., 2013).

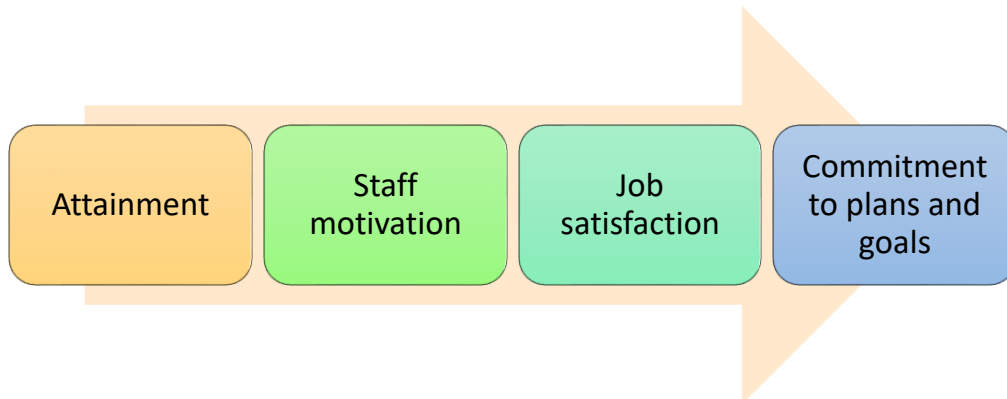


As pupils return to school, peer support (amongst staff) will continue to be essential. It is important that staff are emotionally available to pupils. Therefore there is a requirement that opportunities are created for staff to communicate and support one another.

4. Raising the resilience and well-being of staff

Collaboration

- The importance of sharing. This includes sharing information, equipment and materials; and responsibility and success. This could reduce the burden on individuals when not only generating solutions but sharing the outcome when plans are implemented. This may also lead to an increased commitment to the plans.
- Collaboration has been found to lead to increases in:



- The role of the parent/carer and the degree to which schools communicate with families has adapted during *Lockdown*. Parental values and the needs of families must be considered closely; concerns have been widely reported regarding the increased gap in attainment and wider outcomes for disadvantaged families.

Autonomy and empowerment

Handscomb (2005) identified that increased genuine responsibility had a more positive impact on staff resilience than a reduction in workload.

Handscomb described genuine responsibilities as a process, as opposed to a one-off task. A collaborative culture is developed, where staff enquire and take increased ownership over the development of their own practice.

Staff involved in meaningful and appropriate decision making has been found to: a) increase the likelihood of schools retaining teachers b) increase the motivation of staff to work together and c) help pupils learn and develop (Strahan née Brown et al., 2019).



Raising the resilience and well-being of staff

Self-care

The factors and tasks which aid our well-being have been widely outlined in specific guidance to schools and within wider society. However it could be argued that during the current pandemic that staff require support to make the distinction between work, family and leisure time; and opportunities to recover and recuperate (Weare, 2016).

Staff who are able to genuinely 'switch-off' from work, have been found to experience more positive moods and reduced feelings of fatigue, in comparison to staff who spent increased time 'away from school' (Sonnentag and Bayer, 2005). These findings suggest that a clear distinction between work and leisure activities may be helpful for staff's well-being.

Sharrocks (2014) identified that teachers responded positively when they were explicitly granted *permission to take time out within a conducive space*. This opportunity was found to enable staff to no longer be 'in character' and allowed staff to get to know and trust one another and therefore feel more willing to share their feelings and discuss their well-being.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the emotional demands of teaching have been highlighted within research (Kinman et al., 2011). This includes the impact of supporting children and young people who are experiencing mental health needs (Howard et al., 2017).



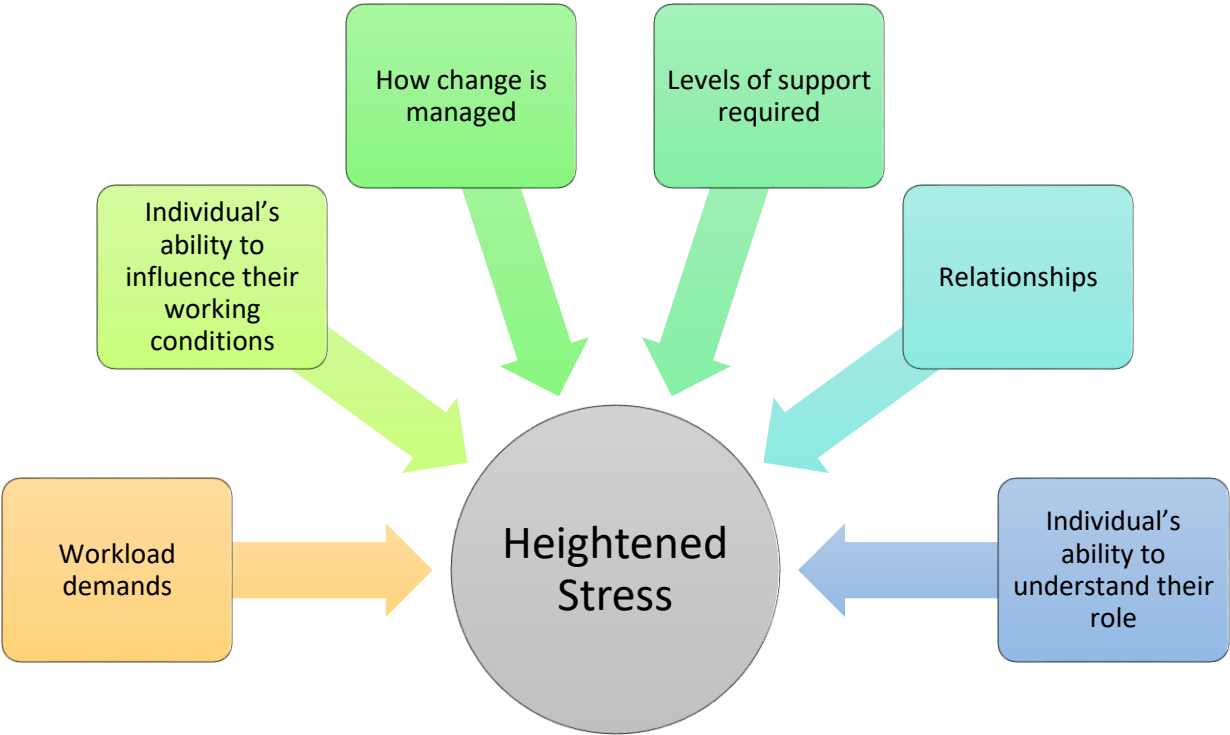
Raising the resilience and well-being of staff

Stress management

School teachers report elevated levels of job satisfaction in comparison to graduates from alternative professions. However reported levels of stress are elevated in comparison (67% of teachers experienced high levels of stress) (Education Support Partnership, 2018).

Elevated levels of stress amongst school staff can negatively impact an individual’s mental and physical health; the effectiveness of individual staff and teams; the commitment of staff to their role; and may lead to staff absence.

When exploring the major components of stress in the workplace (Tyers et al., 2009), there is potentially an increased risk of stress within school staff, as a result of COVID-19:



In addition, staff may have lost access to hobbies, whereas other staff may have developed new interests during this time.

Personal relationships, may have been impacted and these relationships are found to have a key positive impact on teacher’s response to work-related stress (Sharrocks, 2014).



4. Raising the resilience and well-being of staff

Whole-school approach

Sharrocks (2014) advocates schools adopting a whole-school approach to supporting staff well-being for the following reasons:

- a) This helps to minimise the potential or perceived stigma for individuals, who wish to discuss their well-being. Two-thirds of teaching staff have been found to never seek help with their mental health, due to the potential stigma attached (Ratcliffe, 2014; MIND, 2013). However prior to COVID-19, there is research evidence to suggest more teachers are experiencing mental health needs (Bloom, 2016).
- b) Activities and actions designed to support staff well-being, has been found to be helpful for all staff and is not exclusive to individuals who are experiencing emotional or mental health issues. For example, developing their own emotional literacy skills and availability for their peers and for pupils within school.
- c) As previously noted, well-being can be described as a subjective experience and therefore is not static. Therefore developing habits and knowledge which further aids well-being, is applicable to all members of a school's community.
- d) Teachers were found to view the maintenance of their own well-being, as an individual's responsibility. Participants in Sharrocks' study, shared that they believed sharing concerns regarding their own well-being, would be viewed as a sign that they 'are not good enough' to be teachers.
- e) Dunlop and Macdonald (2004) identified that teaching staff valued general health checks and workshops designed to enhance stress management skills, over individualised therapeutic support. In addition, Kahn et al. (2006) identified that 'everyday support', was helpful in combatting stress.

Signs of Stress

Emotional and Psychological

- Anxiety
- Low mood
- Indecision
- Forgetfulness
- Reduced focus
- Emotionally overwhelmed

Physical

- Increased fatigue
- Muscle tension
- Headaches
- Stomach pains
- Chest pain and increased heartbeat

Behaviours / Outcomes

- Increased time off work
- Inter-personal conflict
- Reduced productivity / performance
- Sleep difficulties
- Apathy
- Social withdrawal
- Grievances increase
- Irritable
- Avoidance
- Change in eating habits
- Restless

Raising the resilience and well-being of staff

Helpful questions

Connecting, supporting and well-being

- How can staff continue to connect and support one another? (time, space)
- How is well-being defined within school? Is the well-being of staff reviewed within school?
- What opportunities are in place for staff to share their concerns? In meetings? With peers? At the individual level? Is the *virtual* door open to key staff?
- Given the contrasting experiences of staff, how will staff be supported? Will further support be provided for staff who report greater challenges?
- Are staff aware that they can discuss their own well-being? Consider the historical school culture for long-term staff.
- Have school staff been asked how they can be supported further?
- What opportunities are in place for teaching staff to foster relationships with pupils?
- Are there mental health champions within school?

Collaboration

- Are Senior Leaders in a position to ask staff for feedback from staff for proposed decisions and new initiatives? This models to staff the benefit of help-seeking; and may have implications for staff's sense of belonging and commitment to changes.
- When shared decisions are made, have staff with increased personal responsibilities had the opportunity to contribute?
- Is communication individualised to take into account the needs of parents and carers?

Raising the resilience and well-being of staff

Helpful questions

Self-care

- Are there opportunities within school for staff to genuinely switch-off? Do work-based discussions and meetings currently take place within the staff room?
- Are self-care strategies openly discussed within school?
- Are staff aware of the factors and activities which fall under the term of self-care?
- How can staff be supported to achieve work-life balance within the current situation?
- Is there a designated space within school, to recover and recuperate?

Autonomy and empowerment

- What aspects of the role can teaching staff control? Is there opportunities for staff to gain further control or adapt to make their role easier?
- Do staff have an opportunity to share their own ideas? and then take agreed ideas forward?

Stress management

- Do staff have the opportunity to discuss and find solutions to address work-related stressors?
- Do the Senior Leadership Team and wider school staff recognise signs of stress? Are there mechanisms in place to request support or alert SLT when there are concerns regarding a colleague?
- Are the senior leadership team alert to potential stressors for staff?

Further Considerations and Support

Critical incident support to all schools is funded by Leicestershire County Council. Please call 0116 305 5100 and ask to speak to a Senior or Principal Educational Psychologist.

Please refer to the LEPS website for further guidance regarding how to support children and young people with bereavement and loss

<http://www.leicestershiretradedservices.org.uk/Services/4116>

Examples of further input relating to staff resilience and well-being available from the LEPS

The LEPS can provide the following input as part of your school's Service Level Agreement (SLA):

- Staff 'drop ins' to discuss any concerns and to reflect, discuss and jointly problem solve.
- Peer support for staff wellbeing facilitated by an EP.
- Training input on topics such as:
 - Staff Resilience and Well-being
 - Supporting Anxious Children and Young People in School
 - Supporting Children and Young People following Bereavement and Loss

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