

How to look after your child's mental health and wellbeing

Parent Guide



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Introduction

We are currently living in a society where mental health issues are becoming more and more apparent, as children and adults attempt to manage a range of feelings and experiences in a rapidly changing and overwhelming world. At Galley Hill, we understand and prioritise the importance of looking after our pupils' mental health and wellbeing. We also know how vital it is that we work together with our parents and community to ensure that we are giving our children the best possible support. This guide will tell you all about what we are currently doing within school. It will also give you advice, information and strategies you can use at home for a range of mental health topics. We hope you find it useful.

What is mental health and why is it important?

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. It affects how we think and feel about the world around us, and therefore how we act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.

- ◀ Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood.

What is mental health and why is it important?

- ▶ 1 in 4 adults will experience a mental health illness at some point each year.
- ▶ 75% of mental health illnesses will start before the age of 18
- ▶ More than half of young people feel embarrassed about having a mental health issue
- ▶ 10% of school children (so in a class of 30 that's 3 children) have a diagnosable mental health illness.
- ▶ Pupils in the UK are amongst the least happy in the world

What is mental health and why is it important?

Looking after your mental health means you can:

- ▶ Have healthy relationships with others
- ▶ Cope with the daily stress of life
- ▶ Stay motivated
- ▶ Be more productive at work and school
- ▶ Think more clearly
- ▶ Have a positive sense of self and purpose

What are we currently doing at Galley Hill?

Feelings Journals

Each child at Galley Hill has their own feelings journal, which they have access to throughout the school day. Children are encouraged to write or draw how they are feeling, as well as complete other activities such as 'Draw 3 things that make you happy' or 'What are you thankful for today?'

Zones of Regulation

- ▶ Every classroom has a display showing different zones, which have their own colours, which children use to identify how they are feeling. Children are encouraged to share which zone they are in and why.

The ZONES of Regulation™

			
BLUE ZONE Sad Sick Tired Bored Moving Slowly	GREEN ZONE Happy Calm Feeling Okay Focused Relaxed	YELLOW ZONE Frustrated Worried Silly/Wiggly Excited Loss of Some Control	RED ZONE Mad/Angry Terrified Elated/Ecstatic Devastated Out of Control

What are we currently doing at Galley Hill?

Circle Time

Circle Time is an activity that develops positive relationships between the children and gives them the tools to engage with each other. The whole class takes part in Circle Time, and the activity is used to solve problems that are affecting the class, to give children an opportunity to share how they're feeling or anything that is worrying them, or to discuss other aspects of wellbeing such as gratitude and self-love.

Wellbeing interventions

When children need a bit of extra support with their wellbeing, we have resources and strategies in place at Galley Hill to help them. Sometimes this is completing tasks 1:1 with an adult on a weekly or daily basis, or sometimes this is simply a quick check-in at various points of the day. Every class has a wellbeing intervention pack, and we have a designated Mental Health Lead who can give advice and support when needed.

What are we currently doing at Galley Hill?

Special events

Each year Galley Hill participates in World Mental Health Day, Feeling Good Week and Health & Wellbeing Week. We use these events to raise awareness of mental health and explore various aspects of mental health and wellbeing.



Anxiety

Anxiety is a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease about something with an uncertain outcome. It's normal to feel anxious sometimes. It's how we respond to feeling threatened, under pressure or stressed: for example if we have a test, a doctor's appointment or we're starting a new school.

Anxiety isn't necessarily a bad thing. It can spur us on, help us stay alert, make us aware of risks and motivate us to solve problems. However, anxiety can be a problem if it's affecting your ability to live your life.

Symptoms to watch out for:

- finding it hard to concentrate
- not sleeping, or waking in the night with bad dreams
- not eating properly
- quickly getting angry or irritable, and being out of control during outbursts
- constantly worrying or having negative thoughts
- feeling tense and fidgety, or using the toilet often
- always crying
- being clingy
- regularly complaining of tummy aches and feeling unwell

Separation anxiety is very common in young children, whereas older children tend to worry more about school or have social anxiety.

Anxiety

What can cause anxiety?

Some children are simply born more anxious and less able to cope with stress than others.

Children can also pick up anxious behaviour from being around anxious people.

Some children develop anxiety after stressful events, such as:

- frequently moving house or school
- fighting or arguing in the home
- bereavement
- becoming seriously ill or getting injured in an accident
- school-related issues like tests, change or bullying

Anxiety

Ways to help your child:

- Talking with your child is the most important thing you can do. Give your child the time and space to talk about their worries and assure them you will listen and not judge. They may not want to talk straightaway but keep telling them you are there to listen whenever they are ready.

10 strategies to try when you are feeling anxious:

- **Slow breathing.** When you're anxious, your breathing becomes faster and shallower. Try deliberately slowing down your breathing. Count to three as you breathe in slowly – then count to three as you breathe out slowly.
- **Progressive muscle relaxation.** Find a quiet location. Close your eyes and slowly tense and then relax each of your muscle groups from your toes to your head. Hold the tension for three seconds and then release quickly. This can help reduce the feelings of muscle tension that often comes with anxiety.
- **Stay in the present moment.** Anxiety can make your thoughts live in a terrible future that hasn't happened yet. Try to bring yourself back to where you are.
- **Healthy lifestyle.** Keeping active, eating well, going out into nature, spending time with family and friends, reducing stress and doing the activities you enjoy are all effective in reducing anxiety and improving your wellbeing.
- **Take small acts of bravery.** Avoiding what makes you anxious provides some relief in the short term, but can make you more anxious in the long term. Try approaching something that makes you anxious – even in a small way. The way through anxiety is by learning that what you fear isn't likely to happen – and if it does, you'll be able to cope with it.

Anxiety

- **Challenge your self-talk.** How you think affects how you feel. Anxiety can make you overestimate the danger in a situation and underestimate your ability to handle it. Try to think of different interpretations to a situation that's making you anxious, rather than jumping to the worst-case scenario. Look at the facts for and against your thought being true.
- **Plan worry time.** It's hard to stop worrying entirely so set aside some time to indulge your worries. Even 10 minutes each evening to write them down or go over them in your head can help stop your worries from taking over at other times.
- **Get to know your anxiety.** Keep a diary of when it's at it's best - and worst. Find the patterns and plan your week - or day - to proactively manage your anxiety.
- **Learn from others.** Talking with others who also experience anxiety - or are going through something similar - can help you feel less alone.
- **Be kind to yourself.**

Low self-esteem

Self-esteem is the way we think about ourselves and the value we place on ourselves. Most children will have dips in self-esteem as they go through different stages or challenges in life, however sometimes it can become so low that it becomes a struggle. Low self-esteem is when someone lacks confidence about who they are and what they can do. They often feel incompetent, unloved, or inadequate. People who struggle with low self-esteem are consistently afraid about making mistakes or letting other people down.

Symptoms to watch out for:

- saying negative things and being critical about themselves
- joking about themselves in a negative way
- focusing on their negatives and ignoring their achievements
- blaming themselves when things go wrong
- thinking other people are better than them
- thinking they don't deserve to have fun
- not accepting compliments
- avoiding challenges for fear of failing
- being overly upset by disapproval or criticism

Low self-esteem

What can cause low self-esteem?

Low self-esteem can begin from early childhood, and can stem from negative experiences such as not fitting in, being bullied or not meeting expectations. Young girls especially may be subject to unhelpful messages and ideals on social media and in the media generally, that lead them to believe that their worth is based on how they look or behave. This may lead to low self-esteem and negative thoughts about their self-worth.

Stressful life events can also cause low self-esteem.

Remember, if your child does struggle with low self-esteem, it is not your fault. Some children just find certain experiences and events more manageable than others.

Low self-esteem

Ways to help your child

- Show your child lots of love and be positive about them as a person – tell them what makes them special to you.
- Let them know you value effort rather than outcome and perfection
- Encourage them to try new challenges, in small steps, and praise them for it
- Encourage them to voice their ideas and opinions, and let them know it's OK to think differently to other people
- Set an example – model being kind to yourself, especially when things go wrong
- Ask about the things they enjoy and find rewarding
- Listen to and acknowledge their feelings
- When they criticise themselves or their abilities, gently challenge them by letting them know how you see them
- Help them discover themselves and their talents – look for new hobbies
- Spend quality time together doing things they enjoy

Anger

Anger is a strong feeling of annoyance, displeasure or hostility. It usually develops in response to the unwanted actions of another person, or something going wrong. Everyone has their own triggers for what makes them angry; what angers one person may not anger another.

Unhelpful ways to deal with anger:

- Anger explosions – some people have very little control over their anger and tend to explode in rages. Raging anger may lead to physical violence. A person who doesn't control their temper can isolate themselves from family and friends. Some people who fly into rages also have low self-esteem.
- Anger repression – some people consider that anger is an inappropriate or 'bad' emotion and choose to suppress it. However, bottled anger can lead to anxiety and eventually it will become too much to manage.

Anger

Healthy ways to manage anger

- If your child feels out of control, encourage them to walk away from the situation temporarily, until they cool down.
- Use mindfulness or breathing exercises to help calm themselves down
- Encourage them to recognise and accept the emotion as normal and part of life.
- Try to pinpoint the exact reasons why they feel angry.
- Once they have identified the problem, consider coming up with different strategies for how to remedy the situation.
- Encourage doing something physical, such as going for a run or playing sport.
- Encourage them to talk about how they are feeling, including any physical symptoms such as a rushing heartbeat or feeling hot.

Anger

Breathing techniques:

- Slow breathing: breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds, then out through your mouth for 4 seconds.
- Square breathing: Look for a square shape around you or use the palm of your hand, draw a line with your eyes along each of the four sides whilst breathing for 4 seconds each time.
- Bee breaths: Breathe in through your nose, then as you breathe out make a gentle humming or buzzing noise.
- Bunny breaths: Take 3 quick breaths in through your nose, then one long breath out through your mouth.
- Hot chocolate breathing: pretend you are holding a warm mug of hot chocolate, as you breathe in through your nose bring your mug up to your face and imagine the sweet smell, then as you breathe out through your mouth pretend you are gently blowing on the hot chocolate to cool it down.

Gratitude

Gratitude is a positive emotion that involves being thankful and appreciative and is associated with several mental and physical health benefits. When you experience gratitude, you feel grateful for something or someone in your life and respond with feelings of kindness, warmth, and other forms of generosity.

- Expressing gratitude can improve your mood. People who regularly express gratitude for the positive things in their life are shown to be happier overall, leading to lower rates of stress and depression.
- Showing gratitude can make you more optimistic. Studies show that those who express gratitude regularly appear to have a more positive outlook on life.
- Sharing gratitude can improve social bonds. People have reported feeling more loved and more connected to others in their lives when they routinely practice gratitude or those around them practice gratitude.
- Practicing gratitude can improve your physical health. People who actively express gratitude tend to be more engaged in activities to take care of their physical health, like eating well and exercising. This leads to higher energy levels, better sleep and a stronger immune system, or the ability to fight off illness or infection.

Gratitude

Ways to practise gratitude with your child at home:

- At the end of each day, think of one thing you are grateful for
- Notice the beauty in nature
- Try to carry out small acts of kindness
- Avoid negative media
- When you have a negative thought, try to see the positive side
- Thank people in your community e.g. shopkeepers, bus drivers
- See the growth opportunities in your mistakes
- Compliment others
- Practise good manners; say “please” and “thank you”, and smile at others

5 Ways to Wellbeing

Evidence suggests there are 5 steps you can take to improve your mental health and wellbeing. Trying these things could help you feel more positive and able to get the most out of life. We regularly talk about the 5 Ways to Wellbeing at Galley Hill, and you can also explore them at home.



Connect

Social connection can lower anxiety and depression, help us regulate our emotions, lead to higher self-esteem and empathy, and actually improve our immune systems. People who feel more connected to others, including friends, family, pets or colleagues, have lower levels of stress and feel happier.

Ways in which you and your family can connect at home:

- Spend quality time together – without devices!
- Write a letter to a friend or family member who lives far away
- Have a movie night with friends or family
- Create quizzes or games to play together
- Talk to somebody if you are feeling low

CONNECT

Give

Giving, and helping others, is great for our mental health. Studies have shown that giving is beneficial for combating stress, depression and anxiety and also serves to keep you mentally stimulated, improve your self-confidence and provide you with a sense of purpose.

Ways in which you and your family can give at home:

- Pick up litter
- Donate unwanted toys and old clothes
- Bake cakes for somebody you love, or for somebody who helps you
- Make handmade cards or write letters to somebody who lives far away
- Donate to a charity
- Help out with chores around the house
- Ask a friend or loved one if they'd like a chat
- Use your manners, and smile at people who walk past!

GIVE

Learn

Learning can boost self-confidence and self-esteem, help build a sense of purpose, and foster connection with others. People engaged in learning report feeling better about themselves and a greater ability to cope with stress, as well as feeling more self-confidence, hope and purpose.

Ways in which you and your family can learn at home:

- Start learning a new language
- Take up a new arts and craft hobby e.g. sewing, painting, sketching
- Complete wordsearches, crosswords and jigsaw puzzles
- Take up a new sport
- Learn to cook or bake
- Learn the lyrics or dance routine to your favourite song
- Learn more facts about your favourite animal, or country you'd like to visit

LEARN

Be Active

Physical exercise is good for both our physical health and our mental health. It gets our hearts pumping, strengthens our muscles and helps the brain to release endorphins – the happy hormone! Exercise is also proven to help reduce anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and social withdrawal, and boosts our confidence and cognitive function.

Ways in which you and your family can be active at home:

- Go for a walk around your local area
- Get out the scooters, bikes or rollerskates
- Create your own dance routines
- Follow a yoga or pilates workout on YouTube
- Create your own workout routine – include press ups, star jumps, sit ups etc.
- If you have a dog, create a rota for who takes them out for a walk
- Create your own obstacle course in your garden
- Start a family competition – who can do the most press ups? Who can run the fastest? Who can balance on one leg the longest?
- The floor is lava!

Notice

Becoming more aware of the present moment can help us enjoy the world around us more and understand ourselves better. When we become more aware of the present moment, we begin to experience afresh things that we have been taking for granted. Mindfulness is a way of paying attention to the present moment, using techniques like meditation, breathing and yoga. It helps us become more aware of our thoughts and feelings so that, instead of being overwhelmed by them, we're better able to manage them.

Ways in which you and your family can notice at home:

- Breathing exercises
- Imagine putting your negative thoughts in a bubble
- Squeeze then relax your fingers and toes
- Listen to calming music
- Sit outside and see what you can hear
- Pretend you're breathing in hot chocolate

NOTICE

Summary

Mental health is a huge concept to try and navigate, and being mentally healthy can take time and effort. Everybody has good days and bad days, but if our bad days start to become more frequent and more unmanageable it can become overwhelming and start impacting our lives. This doesn't mean we have done anything wrong, and it's perfectly normal to need help. If your child is struggling with their mental health, please remember this is not due to anything you have done, they might just need a bit of support, and that's OK.

IT'S OK
NOT TO BE
OK

Further information & support

We hope this guide has been helpful and given you plenty of advice and ideas, and if you would like to talk to your child's class teacher or our Mental Health Lead please do contact us.

If you feel you need to seek more support from elsewhere, the following websites may be useful to you:

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent>

<https://www.annafreud.org/parents-and-carers/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/supporting-others/childrens-mental-health/>

<https://www.samh.org.uk/get-involved/going-to-be/information-help/parents-or-guardians>

Thank you

