

YOUTH WORK IRELAND

Be Well Workbook

Irish Second-Level Students' Union



Youth Work Ireland



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Introduction and Acknowledgements

By providing a Be Well Workbook The Irish Second-Level Students' Union and Youth Work Ireland are working to support the wellbeing of young people. This initiative is supported by the RTE Toy Show Appeal.

About the Be Well Workbook

The workbook is a simple guide to managing your stress, worry and anxiety. It is based on the Be Well Programme that has been successfully delivered to thousands of second level students across Ireland. The workbook can be a big help in optimising your performance and feeling well every day, but is hoped to be particularly helpful during exam periods or other busy times.

The workbook provides tips and guidance on optimising performance through

healthy eating, rest and time management, as well as techniques to effectively manage stress.

We have included a practical resource to address vital elements of wellbeing for high pressure situations young people encounter in their lives called the "NEST" which reminds us to address our Nutrition, Exercise, Sleep & Time Management needs during this period to facilitate a steady state of wellness for optimal performance."

How to Use the Workbook

You can print the workbook, or go through the workbook online. As you go through it, you can take notes on your phone providing yourself with reminders of the tips that you find most helpful. When you complete the workbook, take the quiz to check your learning and be in for a prize of Beats Solo 4 Headphones:

www.surveymonkey.com/r/BeWellQuizPrizeDraw

We'd like to acknowledge the following for their contributions to this project:

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www.amellacoaching.com



What is Wellbeing?



In short wellbeing simply means feeling well in your everyday life. Feeling a strong sense of wellbeing includes so many positive things such as feeling happy, healthy, connected, supported, engaged, motivated and purposeful. Wellbeing does not mean that you never experience feelings or situations that you find difficult, but it does mean that you feel you can cope with tough times and the stresses of daily life. It is for this reason Wellbeing is the foundation of our Mental health. Having a strong sense of wellbeing equips us with the ability cope with whatever life throws at us, be the person we want to be, do the things that we love and are passionate about, surrounded by people who we care about and who cares about us.

Looking after my Wellbeing

There is no magic about looking after your wellbeing – it is simply something you do. It is an action that takes time and effort throughout our entire life not just when we are young. That doesn't mean it has to consume of lives everyday. In fact, it is the opposite - focusing on small actions daily result in experiencing a strong sense of wellbeing. Small daily actions are worth the effort because the longer you work at looking after your wellbeing, the easier it is to be manage challenges in life, bounce back quicker when faced with difficulties, and keep heading in the direction you want to go. Research tells us that once you start focusing on looking after your wellbeing you will begin feel better pretty quickly. But the trick is to stick to it even if you are feeling on top of the world.

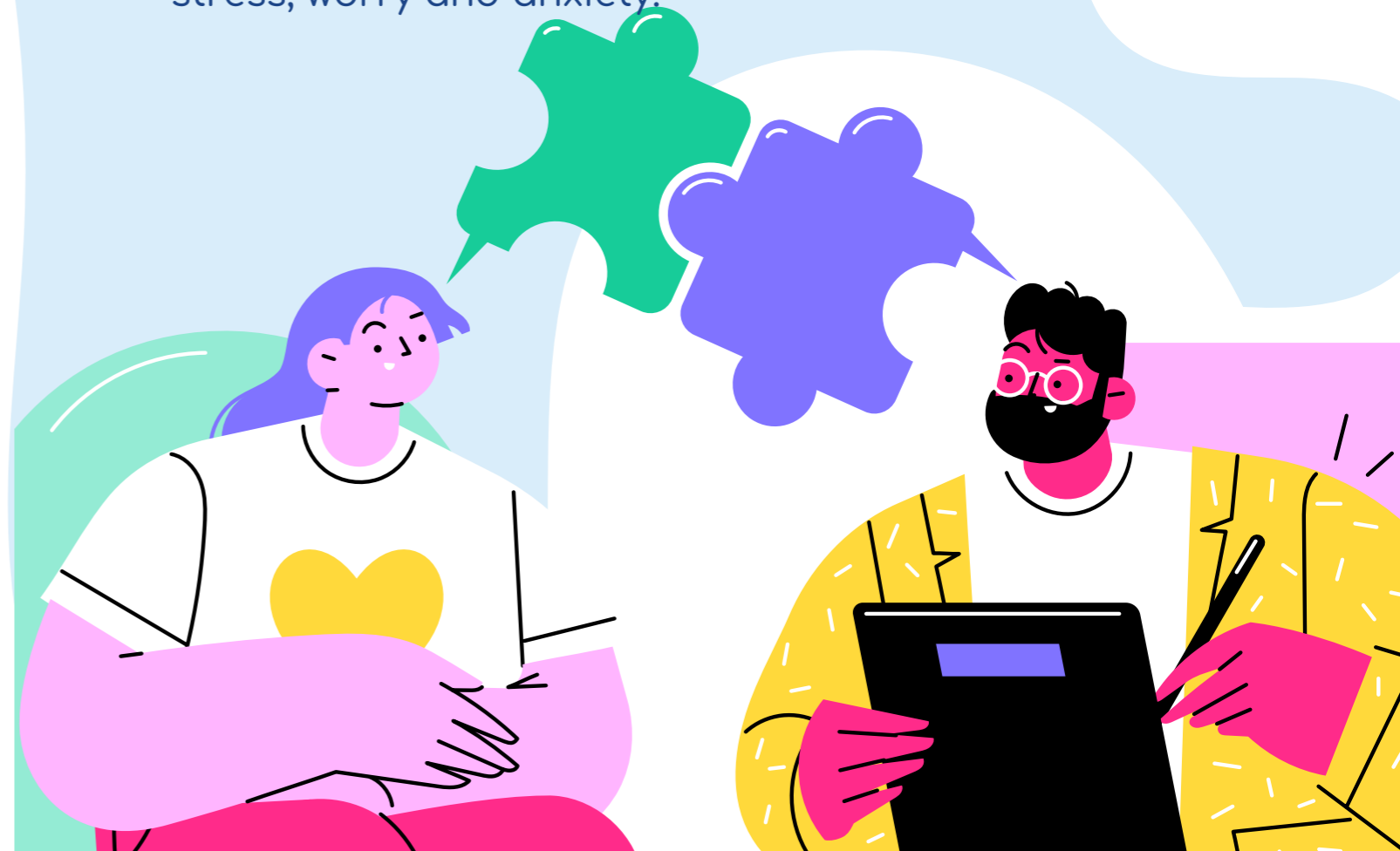


Young people's Wellbeing in Ireland

In 2012, the My World Survey (MWS-1) collated data on over 14,000 young people aged 12-25 years from across Ireland. Findings from that study suggest that while the majority of young people reported having good mental health, over one-third of young people expressed that they were experiencing difficulties with depression (35%) and anxiety (34.5%). The report also highlighted that these difficulties increase among young people over time. Also, it highlighted those mental health difficulties that emerged in early adolescence peaked in the late teens and early 20s. (Headstrong, 2012). In 2019, My World Survey 2 (MWS-2) reported an increase in levels of depression and anxiety in adolescents since MWS-1 (Jigsaw, 2019). Additionally, MSW-2 reported a decrease in levels of protective factors, including self-esteem, optimism, coping with daily stressors of life, life satisfaction, school connectedness and talking about your problems.

How this workbook can support your wellbeing

This workbook is designed to create a space that allows you to reflect and action on ways to support your wellbeing. Experiencing negative emotions such as stress, worry and anxiety is a normal part of everyday life. This workbook includes helpful tips, tools and practices that focus on improving your wellbeing through self-managing and relieving stress, worry and anxiety. It is recommended that you complete the workbook in consecutive order starting with stress and working your way to 5 ways to wellbeing. However, this workbook is designed for you to jump in anywhere where is important and relevant to your needs on any day. A full list of available services and supports are also included in this workbook for the times when you feel that extra help is needed to manage your stress, worry and anxiety.



Stress, what is it?

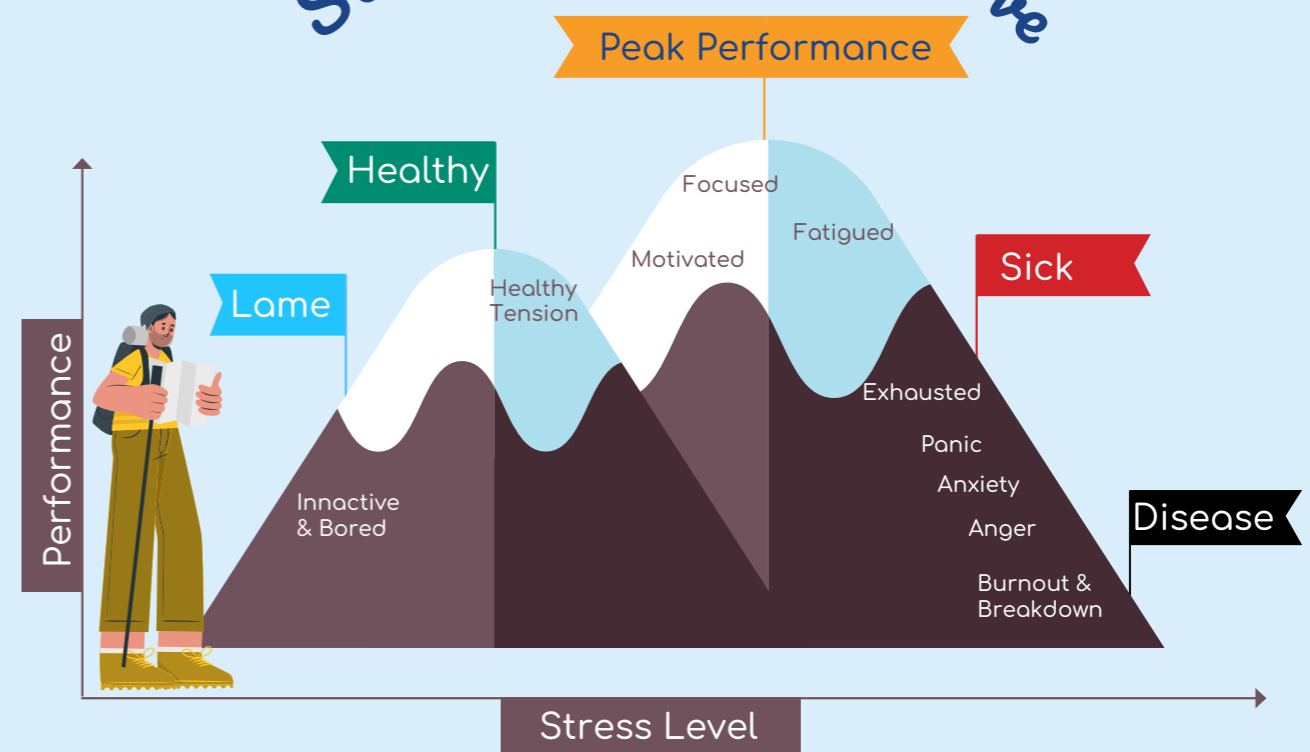


Stress is a physiological response connected to an external event. In order for the cycle of stress to begin, there must be a stressor. This is usually some kind of external circumstance for example pressure from school, sport or relationships. Stress occurs when we perceive that experiences in our lives are more than we can cope with.

Healthy versus Unhealthy Stress?

Although we are used to hearing that experiencing stress is a bad thing, something that is to be completely avoided at all costs – that is not entirely true. Not all stress is harmful but in fact stress can sometimes be a positive and motivating force. Having no stress in our lives can make us inactive and bored whereas a little bit of stress can be good for us. A healthy amount of stress can help us do things in our best interests, such as study for exams, and perform to the best of our ability when playing sport.

Stress Performance Curve



But while some stress is good for us and motivates us, too much of it can be unhealthy for us. Unhealthy stress can feel like that the demands on us are more than we can cope with – making us feel out of control, tired, worried, anxious, angry and completely exhausted – but often we just keep going nonetheless.

Three things that can help you manage stress

① Take time to rest and have fun

It's important to take time for ourselves to enjoy life, to do what we love and have some fun. Especially when we are feeling stressed. Rest and play provide us the opportunity to clear our heads, process emotional experiences, and sort our thoughts. Although we might not be directly focused on the processing and sorting of thoughts, quite often it happens indirectly.

Note 3 things that help you recharge your batteries



Note 3 things you love to do that you and enjoy and is fun



② Self-Care

Self-care is essential when we are feeling, stressed, worried or anxious. Having a good self-care routine has been proven to reduce or reduce stress, eliminate anxiety, improve concentration, minimize frustration and anger, increase happiness, improve energy.



Using the self-care wheel reflect on your self-care and consider possible improvements in your self-care.

- ③ Get clear on what is triggering my stress and identify what I can and can't control



Worry, what is it?



Worry is described as a chain of negative thoughts about bad things that might happen in the future. Worry and anxiety tend to go together. But worry is not an emotion. It is the thinking part of anxiety. In other words, worry happens only in your mind, not in your body.

Healthy versus Unhealthy Worry?

Worry can actually be a helpful function in our lives. When we worry about uncertain situations (e.g. schools exams, competing at sports events, performing in a band) it can lead us to positive problem-solving behaviour. Worry is a way for your brain to handle problems in order to keep us safe. However, worry is helpful only if it leads to change, not if it turns into obsessive thoughts. Worry becomes unhelpful when it is about a number of things, is very frequent, and is difficult to control or dismiss. Prolonged or frequent worry generates more anxiety and more worry, which may actually prevent positive thinking and action.

Three things that can help you manage stress

① Focus on been still and calm

Been still and calm can help us to increase our ability to manage our thoughts and regulate emotions. Creating this space helps us to focus our attention, as well as to observe our thoughts and feelings without judgment. This space also allows us to connect deeply with ourselves which helps us makes decisions that are right for us at that time resulting in decreases in stress, worry and anxiety. Relaxation and stress relief exercises helps slow our mind and calms emotions.

- Lie flat of your back
- Keep legs about a foot apart
- Keep arms by your sides, palms up
- Close your eyes
- Breathe deeply
- Relax



Additions to this exercise

A) Listen to a piece of music you love while in a relaxed position. Try not to move and remain in the relaxed position until the piece of music is finished.

And/or

B) Breath exercise

- Exhale Completely
- Draw your breath in slowly through your nose.
- Slowly let out your breath through your mouth
- Repeat 5 times

And / or

c) Shake it off

- In your safe space put on a piece of music that you love and dance your heart out.
- Just focus on the music and your body.
- The dance can be fast or slow whatever feels right at the time.



② Write your worries away

Spending 8 to 10 minutes writing out your worries can help you worry less, and help us feel less stressed and anxious. Transferring your worries from your head to paper can slow down and quieten your racing mind. Writing your worries down offers you a new perspective on what are genuine concerns and hypothetical worries

- Stop and notice all your worried thoughts running around in your head
- Be conscious of your breathing. Breathe slow and easy
- When you have a lot of worrying thoughts, just accept it
- Don't try and make them go away - What we resist persists -
- Don't try and block out your thoughts - Just be aware
- Very slowly write down all your worried thoughts one at a time on individual pieces of paper.
- Divide your worries into two groups.

Group 1: worries I can do something about

Group 2: Worries I can do nothing about

- Discard all worries in group 2 and move on to exercise 3 with worries in group 1



③ Action plan your worries

When you notice that you're worried about something, push yourself to come up with a next step or to take action. Understanding what we are worrying about and having a plan of action can help us manage our worries in a helpful and proactive way. In a way it helps us get out of our heads and moving towards what we actually want for ourselves in our everyday lives.

- Write down the specific worry you can take action on
- Make a list of all the possible solutions
Try to come up with as many as possible. There are no right or wrong ideas. Just write down any possible solution that you can think of.
- List pros and cons to all your possible solutions
Pick your favourite two solutions and write out the pros and cons of each solution. Doing so will help you decide which solution to try first.
- Pick one solution to action
Picking the one you can get started on right away, if possible.
- Plan your action
Who is involved? What will happen? When will it happen? Why are you doing it? Where will you do it? How will you do it?

Template to develop action



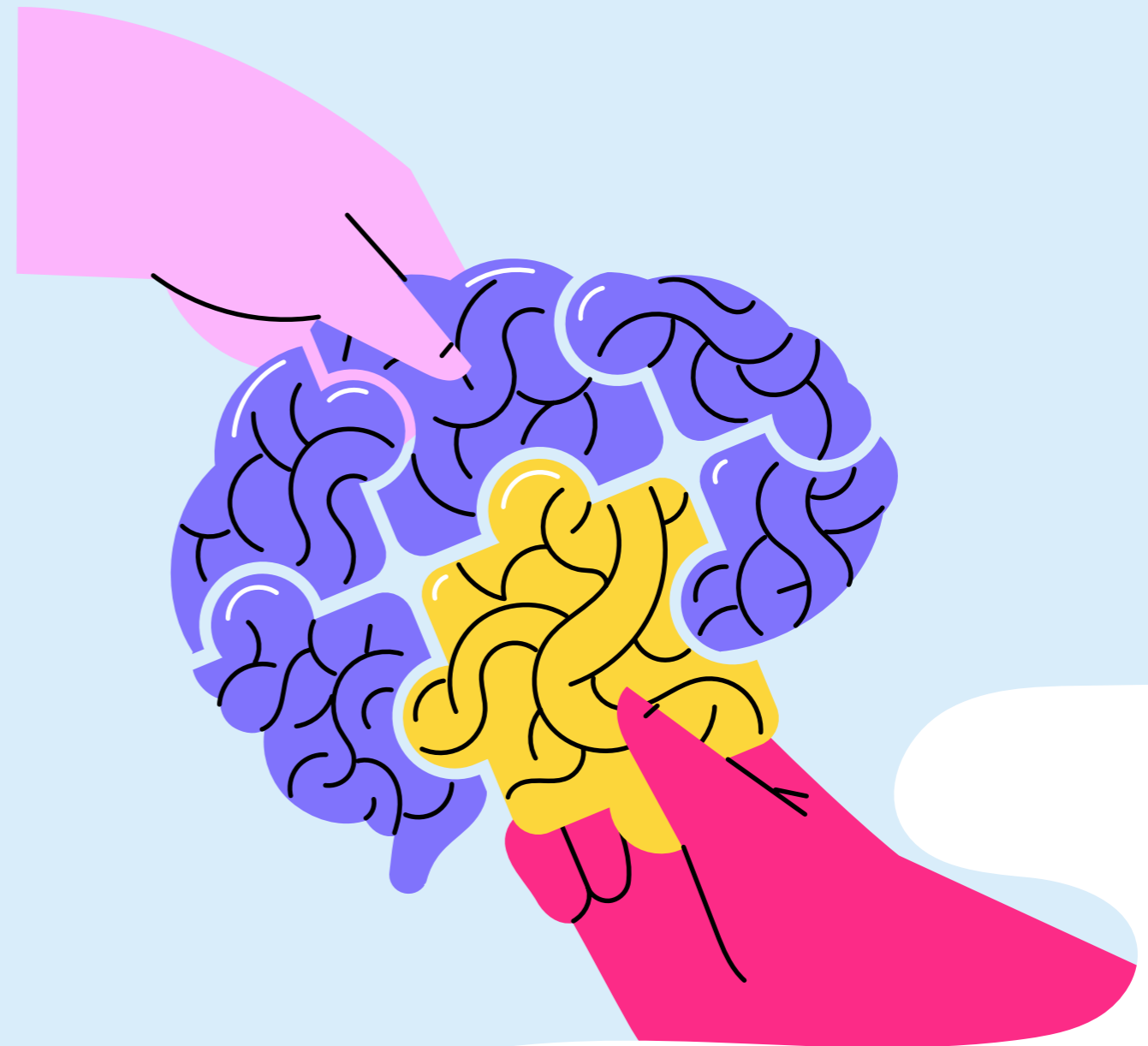
Anxiety, what is it?



Anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes. Anxiety has a cognitive element (worry) and a physiological response (stress), which means that we experience anxiety in both our mind and our body. Anxiety is what happens when you are dealing with a lot of worry and a lot of stress.

Healthy versus Unhealthy Anxiety?

Anxiety is a normal part of life, and all of us will feel it from time to time. Although anxiety doesn't always feel pleasant, a small amount of it can help us stay safe by alerting us to dangerous situations and help us achieve important tasks. Anxiety becomes unhealthy when you begin to feel anxiety too often and when it frequently alerts you of danger, but there is not an actual threat. Unhealthy anxiety can interfere with daily life, cause unhappiness, and sometimes contribute to health issues. Anxiety is also harmful if it is driving you to turn to unhealthy ways to cope.



Three things that can help you manage Anxiety

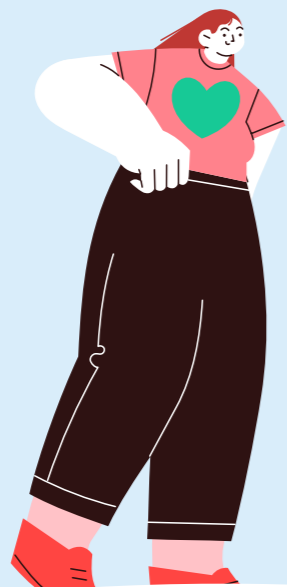
1 Knowing the Signs and Symptoms of my Anxiety

Remember the last time you felt Anxious

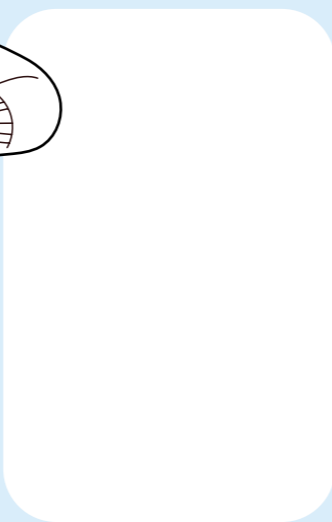
Where do you feel anxiety?



How those make you feel?



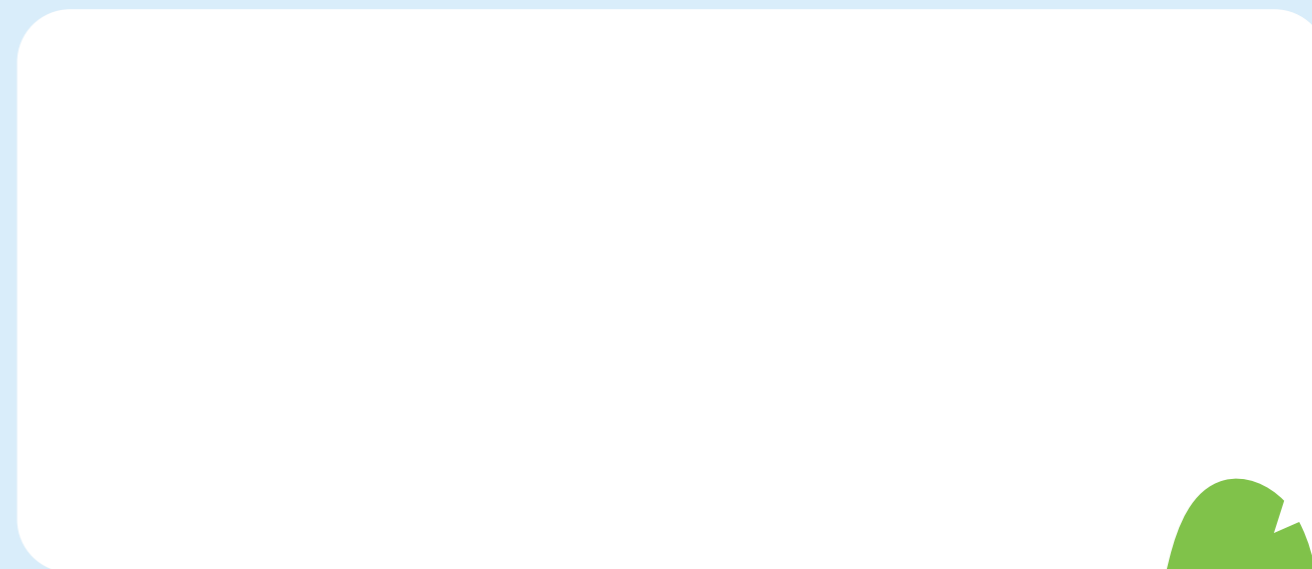
How this it make you behave?



2 Managing my stress and worry

Managing my stress checklist	Yes	No	Kind of
I am taken time to rest			
I am taken time to have fun			
I am taken time to take care of myself			
I am taken time to take care of myself			
I am clear on what I can and can't control			

One action would like to work on to manage my stress



One action would like to work on to manage my stress

Managing my worry checklist	Yes	No	Kind of
I have taken time to be still and calm			
I have taken time to write down all my worries			
I have action planned my worries			

One action would like to work on to manage my worry



Reach out and Connect with others and ourselves

Feeling anxious can often result in us feeling very lonely. This is why it is so important to reach out and connect with someone. A sense of connection is a basic human need. Connection with others helps lower anxiety and help us regulate our emotions, lead to higher self-esteem and empathy, and actually improve our immune systems.

We don't all need to be social butterflies to experience connection. One significant person is enough. A significant person in our lives is someone that we know is always there for us when we need them. An example of a significant person might include a family member, peer, youth worker and or teacher.



③ Reach out and Connect with others and ourselves

Everybody experiences anxiety differently, but everybody is the same in that we all feel in our bodies. We generally try and out run or block out these symptoms which seem impossible and always feels like they won't go away!!!! What works is to accept and welcome your anxiety. If you do this, the symptoms could potentially be gone in minutes. If you try to stop them, they may last for hours.

When you feel anxiety in your body follow 3 steps

4. Imagine that you were stuck to the ground
5. Reassure and tell yourself that there is no danger
6. Allow the waves of physical sensations to just wash over you until they ease and them move on.



Taking Responsibility for my own Mental Health



Take 5 a day for Mental Health and Wellbeing

The 5-A-Day for Mental Wellbeing approach is a set of evidence-based actions which have been proven to support our mental health. The 5 simple and practical actions include: Connect, Be Active, Give, Take Notice and Keep Learning. Including these 5 actions into our daily lives improves our mental health and wellbeing.



Connect

Positive relationships are considered vitally important to our mental health and wellbeing. Positive relationships provide the experience of connecting with another person which is vitally important for our health and happiness. Being part of a relationship and experiencing a connection can have many formats, including someone close, an acquaintance, or even a stranger with whom we experience a friendly interaction. Connecting is not only important for emotional support but it also helps to develop a sense of belonging, self-worth and reduces isolation.

Action Ideas:

Take time to talk to people close to you at home, in school, in your friendship group or in your community.

Call a family member or friend that you haven't connected with for a while.

Say hello or smile at someone you don't already know in your school.

Be Active

Regular exercise makes us feel good and has a significant impact on supporting our mental health and wellbeing. Being active relieves stress, improves memory, helps us sleep better, energy boost our overall mood. Exercise is also a powerful tool to help us manage anxiety and feelings of depression. The good news is that you don't have to give hours everyday to reap these rewards, it is recommended that 30 mins a day – 5 days per week can yield these results.

Give

Volunteering can give us the opportunity to contribute something positive to our local community. Regardless of where we are or who we volunteer with, our contribution can make a real difference and have an impact on the people and communities that we work with. As well as helping others, giving back can also have huge personal benefits including, increasing your social and relationship skills, help reduce stress, explore your interests and give you new perspective on your life.

Action Ideas:

Join your local youth club

Volunteer at local events such as fairs or festivals

Volunteer with the elderly in your community.

Take Notice

Reminding yourself to 'take notice' can help us to be fully present, aware of where we are, and what we're doing, and how we are feeling. Taken the time to 'take notice' enhances your self-understanding and allows you to make positive choices based on your own thoughts and feelings.

Action Ideas:

Practice taking mindful moments - like taking time to pause and breathe during your day.

Let your judgments roll by - When we notice judgments arise during our practice, we can make a mental note o them, and let them pass.

Be kind to your wandering mind - Don't judge yourself or whatever thoughts crop up, just practice recognizing when your mind has wandered off, and gently bring it back.

Keep Learning

Learning new things can boost our self-confidence and self-esteem and help us to find meaning and purpose in life. It's a great way to keep your brain active and healthy for a long and busy life. And in a world that is changing faster than ever, there are so many opportunities to learn, and that includes outside of the workplace and school.

Action Ideas:

Set aside a specific time for learning – 30 minutes a day.
Find a learning buddy.

Make note taking into your routine.



Be a Clever Owl and NEST



NEST

The NEST concept is a fun tool we use with high performing young athletes and students to remember vital aspects to prioritise for optimal performance & success.

This concept is designed to improve your physical and mental fitness whilst juggling life during stressful exam or competition situations that may cause us to underperform when we become under pressure.

Adapting some of these small habits around nutrition, exercise, sleep and making time along with “Take 5 a day for Mental Health and Wellbeing” as referenced earlier in the workbook will help you to stay in a state of high energy, positivity and productivity contributing to prevention of stress, worry and anxiety

**Optimise Your Health
and Performance for Exams**

Nutrition, **E**xercise, **S**leep and **T**iming

Nutrition

Studying and exam time is not a sprint its a longer race. We need to fuel for long term performance and avoid energy and concentration dips. Nutrition is vital to support our brain to preform for longer under pressure over multiple days and weeks:

- Eat balanced meals containing a mix of carbohydrates, protein and healthy fats to fuel your brain and body.
- Include lots of colour via fruits and vegetables- Eat the rainbow (aim for 20-30 different fruit & veg per week)
- Incorporate brain-boosting foods like salmon, nuts, berries, and leafy greens into your diet.
- Stay hydrated by drinking water throughout the day and limit sugary drinks and snacks that can cause energy crashes (sugar highs, result in sugar lows, results in tiredness and lack of concentration)
- Recommendation: Eat 3 meals a day and a minimum of 2 snacks

Design your own meals with these approximate ratios and examples

¼ plate of carbohydrate	¼ plate of lean protein	½ plate of fruit & veg	Snack Ideas
Whole meal wraps/bread	Meat/fish	Apples	Pop corn
Porridge	Eggs	Oranges	Fruit, veg and protein smoothie
Corn cakes	Cheese	Broccoli	Dark chocolate corn cakes
Weetabix	Milk	Cauliflower	Fruit & nuts
Potatoes	Yogurt	Spinach	Hummus and carrot sticks
Brown pasta/ rice? basmati rice	Lentils	Watermelon	Greek yogurt, apple & cinnamon
Wholemeal bread/ wraps	Beans	Strawberries	Protein yogurts/ pouches
Sourdough bread	Tofu	Tomatoes	Homemade energy balls

Hydration (Aim for 2 litres or 8 glasses)

- Tip draw 8 glasses of water on the top of your notes and tick off each glass as you refill during the day



Exercise

- Take short breaks during study sessions to stretch, walk around or do a quick workout to boost circulation and focus.
- Incorporate physical activity into your daily routine, such as jogging, yoga or dancing to reduce stress and improve mood.
- Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise most days of the week to enhance cognitive function and overall well-being.

Take the 10 day challenge to try some of these fun alternative ways to exercise for 30 mins.

YouTube circuit class 	Walk the dog for 30 mins 	Jog/ walk with a friend 	YouTube yoga class 	Gardening/ mow the lawn 
Cycling 	20 squats, 20 push ups, 20 sit ups & 20 minute walk 	Explore a new forest/ walk in the area 	Jump on a trampoline for 30 mins 	Your own suggestion

Sleep

- Establish a consistent sleep schedule by going to bed and waking up at the same time each day even on weekends.
- Aim to get 7-9 hours sleep
- Create a relaxing bedtime routine to signal to your body that it's time to wind down, such as reading, taking a warm bath or practicing deep breathing exercises.
- Ensure your sleep environment is conducive to restful sleep by keeping your bedroom cool, dark and quiet

Timing

- Plan your study sessions during times when you feel most alert and focused, whether it's in the morning or evening.
- Break up your study sessions into shorter, more manageable chunks to prevent burnout and maintain concentration.
- Make time to prepare and bring your nutrition
- Schedule exercise daily
- Make time for a full night's sleep including sleep routine that works for you
- Start implementing these tips into your daily routine weeks before your exams to establish healthy habits.

Spread your wings
and fly

