



Mental Wellbeing

A practical guide to supporting Primary School pupils' wellbeing

Brought to you by imoves



- Content**
- Emotional wellness
 - Social wellness
 - Physical wellness

Your Helping Hand for a Happy Class

A practical guide to supporting Primary School pupils' wellbeing

As a team, we're proud to have collectively worked within the education sector for over 10 years and to have partnered with over 600 schools supporting amazing and inspirational teachers just like you.

As guardians of our children's education, we know that the pressures you face to not only nurture the academic performance of those in your care, but to help them build emotional resilience, social skills, and self-belief, are immense. And that was before a global pandemic!

In the UK, Barnardo's reports that 81% of the children their frontline personnel are working with are experiencing increasing mental health issues. A study by Young Minds shows that 74% of other teachers and staff feel that schools being closed for a prolonged period has had a negative impact on their young people's mental health.

And a further study by Young Minds reveals that 87% of respondents felt lonely or isolated during lockdown. The true impact the pandemic has had (and continues to have) on our children we may never know.

But what is clear is that together we need to continue to focus on children's holistic health – on their physical, emotional, and social wellbeing. To support them in dealing with all of their feelings – from anxiety, anger, and sadness to frustration, confusion, and disconnect.

These truly are unprecedented times. Times that none of us ever thought we'd experience in our lifetime. Times that mean the already overwhelming demands on you are greater than ever before.

Which is why we've designed this dedicated resource just for you. Divided into three core themes (emotional, social and physical wellness), it shares a few simple tangible tools and takeaways for you to implement within your classrooms to support your children's wellbeing.

A handy, at-your-fingertips guide that you can access anytime, anywhere. A little something to give you the extra support you may need to get you through this crazy, crazy journey.

Imogen Buxton-Pickles | **Founder and Director of imoves**



What do we mean by mental wellbeing?

So, if we are going to feel mentally well, we really need to feel totally well, and this is made up of:

- Emotional wellness – to be happy and motivated despite the stresses and strains of everyday life
- Social wellness – building and maintaining healthy relationships and being respectful of the environment
- Physical wellness – physically fit, healthy, and strong with the energy to live life to the full



Let us explore each of these in more depth and show you some great ideas you can use in your classroom tomorrow, starting with emotional wellness!

Emotional Wellness

Emotional wellness is that feeling when you are happy and motivated despite the stresses and strains of everyday life. This does not mean that you're happy all the time, far from it. It is that you're motivated to tackle the challenges that life may throw at you.

If you are not feeling emotionally well, you may feel symptoms such as anxiety, depression and a lack of focus or motivation. This can affect any of us at any time, but our childhood is an excellent time to be able to learn and understand how we can be emotionally well and how to respond if we're feeling emotionally unwell for any reason.

Many children will be returning to school anxious about what they may face and uncertain about how they will cope with all the changes they will see. Being able to support our children's emotional wellbeing will be a key foundation for their return and providing them with tools and strategies to cope will prove valuable, not only immediately but for the rest of their lives.

In this section we will explore emotional wellness including:

- having a growth mindset
- being mentally strong and resilient
- developing mindfulness

Let us start with how to develop a growth mindset.

Growth Mindset

Learning how to cope in stressful situations and then being mentally strong enough to find a way to solve a problem is a process that should be addressed as soon as a child can understand the concept "I can't do it yet, but if I practice, I CAN".

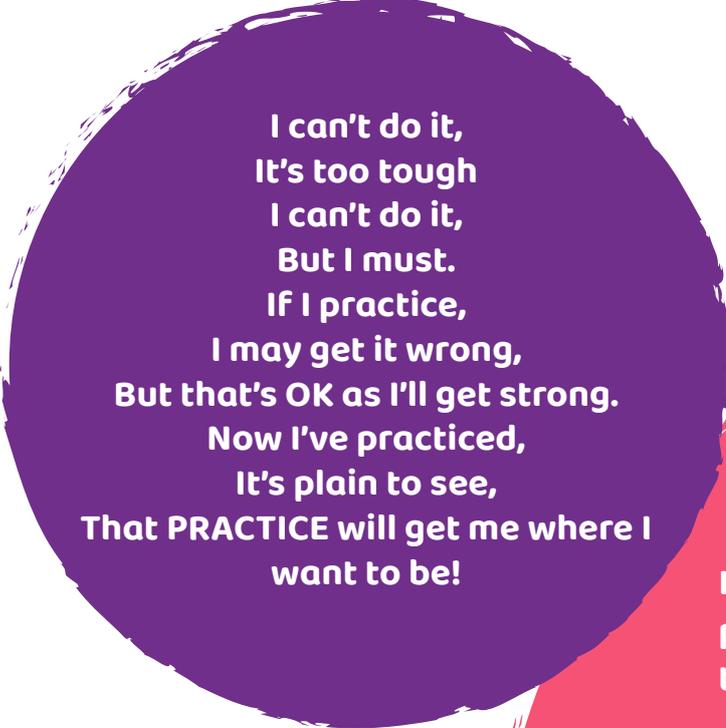
Here's a couple of great activities to try with your children.

1. Creating a simple poem

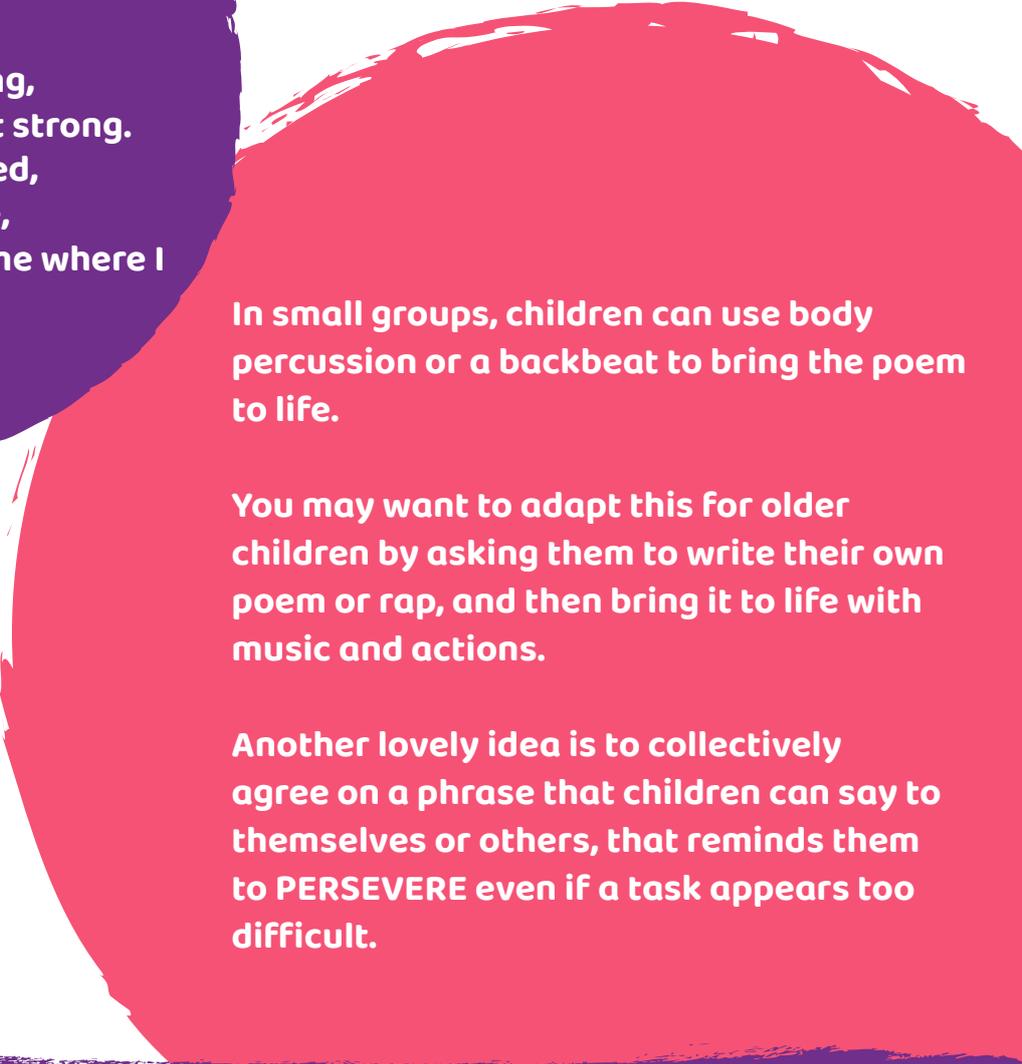
What you may need: Paper | Pen | A touch of bravery

Create a simple poem around a growth mindset theme such as The POWER of PRACTICE.

Here's a short verse to inspire you:



I can't do it,
It's too tough
I can't do it,
But I must.
If I practice,
I may get it wrong,
But that's OK as I'll get strong.
Now I've practiced,
It's plain to see,
That PRACTICE will get me where I
want to be!



In small groups, children can use body percussion or a backbeat to bring the poem to life.

You may want to adapt this for older children by asking them to write their own poem or rap, and then bring it to life with music and actions.

Another lovely idea is to collectively agree on a phrase that children can say to themselves or others, that reminds them to PERSEVERE even if a task appears too difficult.

2. Growth Mindset posters

Growth Mindset posters could be created and stuck on the walls of your classroom. Here's a few that feature in the imoves Mental Health and Wellbeing programme.



Mental Strength and Resilience

Resilience supports children to overcome difficult situations more easily, to cope with change and uncertainty, and to bounce back faster from challenges, stress, and trauma.

To help your children deal effectively with their feelings of anxiety and to support them in developing their mental strength and resilience, here are just a few activities you can introduce into your classroom today (or whenever you need to).

1. The Grumpy Jar

What you may need: [Transparent container](#) | [Tube of glitter](#) | [A little imagination](#)

This is a great way for children to visually understand their feelings, and an effective method to show them useful techniques that they can use (at any age) to manage their emotions in a positive way.

You can either do this together as a class, or you can incorporate it into a lesson and ask each child to create their own personal 'Grumpy Jar'.

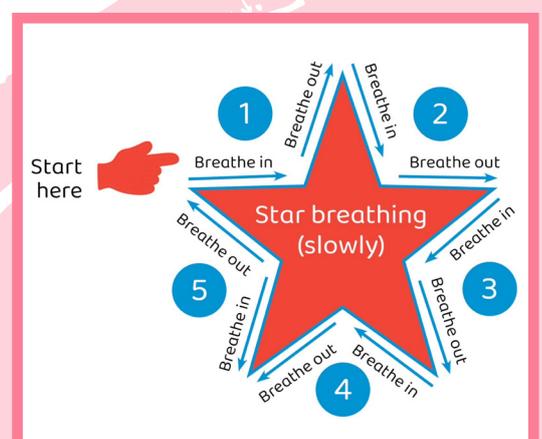
Fill a transparent container with water and glitter, and put the lid back on it. Shake the jar and ask the children to watch the glitter swirling around. The swirling glitter is representative of their brains when they get worried or stressed about something that's happening in their lives. At that moment in time, they feel out of control, chaotic, and unable to deal with the situation.

We can then introduce a breathing activity (such as the one below) which can be incorporated to show your children how they can learn to identify these frenzied and often confusing feelings, and regulate them.

2. Star Breathing Technique

Start by holding up one of your hands with fingers outstretched in a starfish shape. As the glitter continues to whirl around in the container, encourage your class to breathe in and out slowly as you trace round your extended fingers. Continue doing this until the glitter has settled at the bottom of the jar.

Your children will be able to associate the breathing exercise with the settling of the glitter – demonstrating how their emotions can be managed simply and effectively should they become stressed or overwhelmed.



3. Memory Magic

One of the most powerful ways of enhancing this function is developing memory skills. Here's a simple, fun game that can be played as a class that not only boosts memory, but encourages a little imagination too!

Begin at the back (or front) of the classroom and ask one of your children to start a shopping list starting at the beginning of the alphabet, by saying out loud "I went shopping and I bought an 'apple'". The next child says "I went shopping and I bought an 'apple' and a 'banana'". Carry on around the class – with the winner the last one to say the whole list without forgetting anything...

For older children, you may want to make it a little more challenging by not listing items in alphabetical order.

More mood management activities can be found on the imoves platform, including breathing and calming techniques for 4 – 11 years.



Developing Mindfulness

Being mindful is essentially the ability to be fully present, to be aware of where we are and what we're doing in one single moment.

Mindfulness doesn't remove difficulties or challenges from children's lives, but it helps them to deal with these situations and the negative emotions that come with them – whether that be anger, fear, or disappointment.

For children of all ages – and particularly in these current times – being mindful helps them to acknowledge that they're OK, that they're safe and that they're surrounded by people who care about them.

The following activities will help your children become calm and relaxed in minutes.

1. Chair Pilates

What you may need: [Chair](#) | [A Quiet Place](#)

Pilates is perfect for not only helping children to breathe healthily (from the diaphragm), maintain good posture, and improve core strength, but it also helps children become more mindful and more relaxed – supporting their learning capabilities. This simple exercise can be done with all your children no matter what age or activity level:

To start, ask your children to sit comfortably – back stretched, shoulders down, and hands on their knees. Then, guide them through this simple exercise...

Step 1 | Take slow breaths in and out (counting to five each time). Raise both of your arms as you breathe in, and lower them as you breathe out. Repeat four times

Step 2 | Curl your spine forwards until your chest is on your knees, then slowly curl back up to a sitting position. Repeat three times

Step 3 | Roll your shoulders backwards three times and then stretch up as tall as you can go, with your arms above your head. Again, repeat three times

Step 4 | Twist your body from the waist up right to left three times

Step 5 | Clench your fists into a ball and hold for five seconds, then stretch your fingers out as wide as they'll go. Repeat three times

2. Guided Meditations

What you may need: [Meditation Scripts](#) | [A Quiet Place](#)

Meditation is designed to encourage a heightened state of awareness and concentration, and can be an amazing way for children to learn to be present in the moment, fully engaged, calm and restful. Just a few minutes of meditation can have powerful results.

Firstly, ask every child to sit down with their feet on the floor, one hand on their stomach and their eyes closed. Encourage them to focus on their stomach rising and falling as they breathe in and out. This will help get them into a relaxed state.

Then, choose one of the short meditation scripts on the next page (these have been chosen specifically with different age groups in mind) and read out loud to your class (you can do this at any time of the day whenever you feel your children need a bit of 'calm').

For younger children:

Floating on a Cloud

Imagine a big fluffy cloud floating above you. See it come down gently beside you.

Imagine what your cloud looks like. What colour is it? Does it have a shape?

This is your own special cloud. You are completely safe and happy when you're on your cloud. Climb up onto your cloud and it will take you anywhere you want to go.

What things do you see as you float on your cloud? Where will it take you?

Let your cloud fly you to a special place where you can rest quietly and feel peaceful.

Peace and Happiness

Once upon a time there were two children called peace and happiness who lived in a beautiful cottage in the forest.

One day they went for a walk in the forest. It was such a beautiful day and they were enjoying their walk so much they forgot about the time.

The forest became quieter and quieter... As night fell the two children found a beautiful hollow oak tree. As they crept inside, they felt warm and safe as they snuggled down into the soft bed of leaves that lay on the floor.

Even though they were with each other and felt safe and tired, somehow, they just couldn't stop thinking about the day they had had.

All of a sudden, they saw a small golden light just above their heads.

"Hello" a tiny friendly voice said "my name is Stillness the oak fairy and I was wondering if you need any help to quieten your thoughts and to relax into your soft bed of leaves."

"Yes please" said Peace and Happiness "That would be lovely, what would you like us to do?" (Narrator instructs children to follow Stillness's instructions)

"Well" said Stillness "Close your eyes and feel your breath moving in and out of your noses and inside your bodies, in and out and in and out."

Peace and Happiness could see their breath in the cool night air as it turned into drifting mist.

As you follow your breathing you notice how your thoughts slow down and become still. As your thoughts become still you notice how your heads become all loose and floppy, you notice your arms becoming loose and floppy, and your tummies becoming all loose and floppy, and then your legs becoming loose and floppy.

Soon Peace and Happiness were feeling very calm and relaxed, so calm and relaxed that they weren't even sleepy. They just remained beautifully calm and relaxed.

Then the morning sun shone through the branches of their tree. Slowly they opened their eyes and stretched their arms & legs with a big wakeful yawn. As they looked outside, they could see that they had been in the oak tree at the bottom of their garden all night.

The smell of breakfast drifted into their noses and with great excitement they ran indoors to tell everyone about their great adventure.

For older children:

Rainbows

Imagine a big, beautiful rainbow in front of you. See all of its colours. Feel the colours. Imagine the colour red is glowing brighter than the rest, and there is red all around you. Breathe in the colour red. Think to yourself: I am safe. Say to yourself: "I feel safe."

Now, imagine the colour orange is glowing brighter, and orange is all around you. Breathe in orange. Think to yourself: I feel my feelings stirring in my body. Say to yourself: "I feel peaceful."

Next, imagine the colour yellow is glowing all around you. Breathe in yellow. Think to yourself: I am powerful. Say to yourself: "I am confident."

Now, imagine the colour green is glowing brighter, and there is green all around you. Breathe in the colour green. Think to yourself: My friends and family love me. Say to yourself: "I feel loved."

Imagine the colour light blue is getting brighter, and light blue is all around you. Breathe in the glowing light blue. Think to yourself: People listen when I talk, and I am a good listener. Say to yourself: "I feel heard."

Now imagine the colour indigo is getting brighter, and indigo is all around you. Breathe in indigo. Think to yourself: I have a great imagination. Say to yourself: "I see great things happening for me."

Now imagine the colour purple is getting brighter, and the colour purple is all around you. Breathe in purple. Think to yourself: I am wise. Say to yourself: "I am smart."

Take one last look at your big, bright, beautiful rainbow, and notice if you see anything, feel anything or hear anything. Now take a deep breath and wiggle your toes. Take another deep breath and wiggle your fingers. Take one last deep breath, and open your eyes when you're ready.

As you and your children become more familiar with guided meditation, you may want to write your own scripts, or have each child create their own.

Social wellness

In the next section, we look at social wellness and how we can help your pupils build and maintain healthy relationships with friends and be respectful of the environment.

Let us start with how to develop healthy relationships and friendships.

Healthy relationships and friendships

The restrictions during the pandemic have limited the opportunity to socialise with friends for an extended period and may naturally create feelings of nervousness and apprehension when the time does come to start to rebuild those relationships.

Now that our children are back within the school environment there are a whole host of ways in which we can facilitate and encourage that re-connection. Here's a few of our favourites.

1. Trust Balance

This exercise comes from our own imoves gymnastics programme, and is a brilliant and fun way to re-establish trust, connection and communication between children and their classmates. It also encourages a little healthy competition between friends!

In small groups (of say three or four) or in pairs, task your children with coming up with three individual counterbalance positions – where each child essentially supports the other to balance.

For example, each child could stand on one leg with one arm raised above their heads and could then reach out with the other arm to hold hands.

Or, two children could stand facing each other with their feet touching. They hold hands and lean backwards – using each other's support to stop them falling backwards
(this one is great for instilling trust!)

Depending on the year group you're teaching, you could encourage lots of creativity with the positions.



2. Thankfulness Paperchain

A great way to support children to strengthen their connections with others and help them to identify, and concentrate on, everything they're thankful for is by using the thankfulness paperchain.

This group activity can be integrated into an art or PHSE lesson, and sees children create a colourful paperchain that can be displayed in the classroom as a reminder of all the positive things that your children collectively have in their lives.

Ask the children to:

1. Cut out strips of paper.
2. Think of something they are thankful for
3. Write, draw or stick pictures on their strip of paper to show this
4. Ask the children to share with their classmates
5. Loop the strips of paper together and hang in a prominent place in the classroom



You could repeat this exercise throughout the school term to focus on other areas such as what the children are most proud of, what makes them happiest, their favourite place to be, etc.

3. Create a poem

Use a short poem about bullying and empathy, and create a group discussion to uncover the meaning behind the poem.

Split your class into small groups and ask them to create a short performance to express what the poem means to them, this could be a rap, a dance or a theatre style performance – anything goes!

This approach helps individuals to discuss and explore both sides of bullying - what it is like to be bullied and why someone feels the need to bully someone else. It helps children to look at their own relationships and behaviour, and how they can affect others in a negative or positive way.

In short, this activity enables you to make a very dry subject way more interesting and fun.

Healthy Environment

When children feel proud of their learning space and environment, it will improve their mood, behaviour and even reduce stress. Declutter your classroom where possible and give children the responsibility for their own space and communal space.

Here's a few of our favourite activities:

1. Recycling

What you may need: [Paper](#) | [Coloured Pens](#) | [Initiative](#)

Create your own recycling worksheet (using some or all of the recycling types on our illustration below). Set your children off on a hunt around their classroom and school grounds, looking for anything they can find that could be recycled.

They should write each item next to the correct recycling bin on their worksheet.

As a group, they can discuss their findings and agree on ways to keep their environment clean, tidy, and sustainable.



2. Brain breaks

A great way to get over memorable messages to children is through the use of videos the children can follow.

imoves has hundreds of brain-breaks which help to capture children's imaginations to embed learning. Our wellness warrior range is a great way to support learning around the environment.



Head over to YouTube and search for "imoves".

Subscribe to our channel and get tonnes of free active brain breaks.

Physical wellness

You'll have seen numerous times in your classrooms the impact that being physically active has on a child. Not only does it have the obvious benefits from a physical health perspective (strengthens muscles and bones, prevents excessive weight gain, and helps reduce the risk of conditions such as cancer and diabetes), but the mental effects of physical movement are huge. With exercise comes an increase in confidence, better concentration, and generally happier children.

A recent study within primary schools by the BBC and Premier League initiative, Super Movers, found exercise to increase brain speed, the ability to process information, and to apply it to tasks by almost 20%. The study also found that all the children who undertook some form of exercise showed a significantly improved mood straight afterwards.

In physical wellness, we will explore:

- using activity to improve focus
- the role of food in improving wellness
- the role of sleep to improve wellness

Using activity to improve focus

So, what can you introduce into your day if your children need a little more focus? There are lots of activities you can do together to get your children moving and motivated, and which can be incorporated into every lesson – no matter what the subject.

We've selected a handful of our own favourites which we hope you, and your children, get a lot of joy from.

1. The 'Choose Between' Game

This can be introduced in absolutely any lesson, and involves your children giving an answer to a question through movement rather than speech. Firstly, think of two physical actions – for example 'A Dab' and 'A Star Jump' (these actions can be changed every time you play the game – perhaps ask each of your children to nominate their own favourite action and compile a collaborative list).

Then, ask the class a question that has two possible answers (such as higher or lower, true or false, hotter or colder) – and they have to answer by either 'dabbing' or 'star jumping'. For older children, you can increase the number of potential responses to a question and add in more movements.

2. Shake it Out

A short blast (even just two minutes) of physical exertion at any time of the day can do wonders for a child's energy levels, focus and motivation. Why not start the day with a quick workout to get everyone in the mood for a morning of learning? Ask your children to choose their favourite piece of music (make sure it's high energy!), and get them doing a couple of minutes of simple exercises they can do in front of their desks – star jumps, hops, or burpees.



Perhaps do the same pre-afternoon lessons to get everyone invigorated and ready to go after the post-lunch slump!

Lead the activity yourself or try some of the video-based resources that are available with a free imoves account - these are super easy to facilitate without fuss, prep or cost.

The role of food

Good fuel is essential for growth, energy, and development; so inspiring good food choices as early as possible in a child's life can only be a good thing.

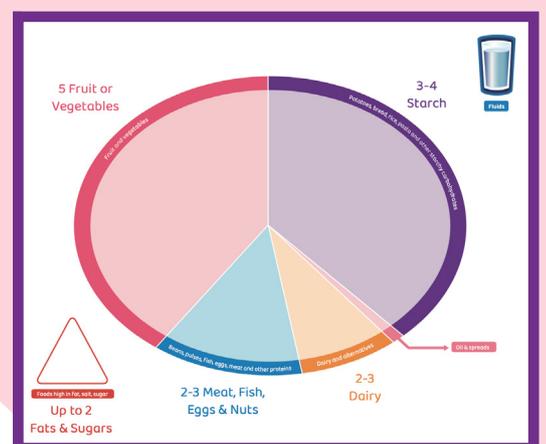
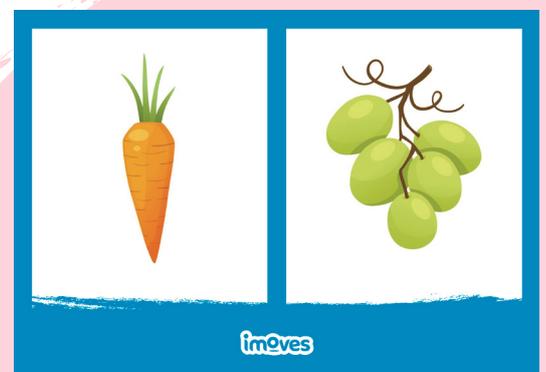
Food group games

What you may need: **Flashcards | sticky tape | Fun!**

This simple activity uses flashcards featuring different foods and a healthy food plate worksheet for each child. For younger children (aged 5 - 7 years) you could use flashcards with hints and clues about the food group they belong to.

Stick the flashcards all over the classroom using various heights and hard to reach places. They should not be hidden, but instead make sure the children do plenty of bending, stretching and crawling to find them.

Make sure the flashcards are placed randomly. Children should work together in small groups searching for pictures of the different food groups and writing them in the correct section of the plate.



The role of good quality sleep

A good sleep routine is key to having a happy, productive, fun day at school. Deeper sleep improves the ability to cope with stress, plus quality sleep can help to boost the immune system too.

- Being more active throughout the day means that children are physically more tired enabling better-quality sleep.
- Being more active also reduces stress enabling better quality sleep.
- Encourage the same routine each night, omitting caffeine and technology devices at least 2 hours before they intend to sleep.
- Embolden children to make better choices by setting up a sleep experiment for one week. Encourage children to make tweaks to their bedtime routine, recording the impact these changes have made in relation to their focus at school, energy levels and mood.

Use our group sleep experiment to help children understand their sleep pattern and how a few small changes could help them get better quality sleep.

Group Sleep Experiment

- 1. Make positive changes to your bedtime routine. Keep it going for a full week!**
- 2. Log these changes and any positive outcomes that you experience, such as:**
 - Finding it easier to get up
 - Feeling more alert throughout the day
 - Having more energy throughout the day
 - Feeling happier and more motivated
 - More tolerant to others

This type of activity helps children to understand the benefits of better sleep first-hand, which in theory should help them to make better choices before bedtime.

A final thought from Imogen...

After reading this report, I hope you are thinking "I can do this!"

You may feel less worried about how to tackle the health and mental wellbeing of your children in a world where we are all having to adapt after Covid-19.

There's lots of high-quality support out there including the free support from imoves which includes tonnes of video-based resources covering active learning, PE, and health & mental wellbeing. You can set up your free account at imoves.com

If you're still reading, I know you'll pull out all the stops to create a brighter, happier, healthier classroom to help your children overcome anxiety, manage their mood and negative feelings and achieve their amazing potential.

YOUR mental health is just as important, so make sure you take some time to think about YOU! And join your children on their healthy journey by getting stuck into some of the activities in the classroom yourself too!

Let me know if this report was useful, or if there are any other activities of your own that you would like me to share with my network of like-minded teachers – it's always great to inspire each other!

You can find me at imogen@imoves.com.

Best wishes,

Imogen

PS. Don't forget to set up your free imoves account for tonnes of free resources to support you and your children. Go to imoves.com

