

# Mental Health & Wellbeing



British  
Neuroscience  
Association

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## Background

The aim of this session is to encourage students (aged 5-11) to start thinking about their mental health and how to look after it. They will be introduced to the brain as the source of their feelings, understand that their feelings can be transient or stay with them for a longer time and discover ways in which they can look after their brain/mental health or seek help. This information sheet should be used in conjunction with the 'Primary - Mental Health PPT' PowerPoint presentation.

## Feelings & Emotions

*Mental health is a sensitive topic and so before delivering this session, we advise that you check the content with the teacher. They can identify specific services for help at the school e.g. school councillors, which you can direct students to during the presentation.*

**(Slide 1)** Title slide. Start by asking the students to close their eyes and imagine they are on a beach holiday with their family. It is a sunny day, a bit windy and the sea is calm. Ask the students what they can see, hear, smell, feel (e.g. sand under their feet) and finally what feelings or emotions they have. Next, ask the students to imagine that a storm has come in, the sky is now dark, waves are crashing and the wind is blowing. Again, ask the students what they can see, hear and what feelings or emotions they have.

This activity encourages students to start thinking about their emotions and how they are influenced by an experience such as the imagined beach scenario.

**(2)** Ask the students to suggest where our feelings and emotions come from. Which part of our body? If not already suggested, explain that our feelings are generated by our brain. It takes in all the information from our senses - take this opportunity to ask the students what our main senses are - and a feeling is associated with that experience. For example, if you are scared by a dog barking, you may be scared when you see and hear that dog barking again. Inform the students that we won't just be scared the first time, our brain will remember and we may be scared again. This is because the brain creates memories of the feelings associated with an experience.

## Activity - Draw your experiences and emotions

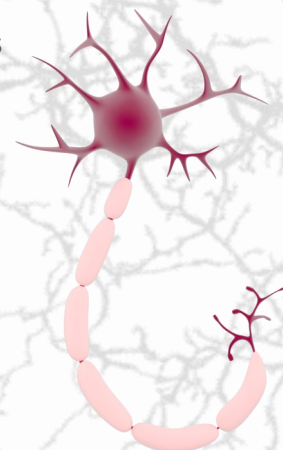
**(3)** In this next activity, ask the students to draw an experience they have had e.g. a birthday party, and the emotions they felt - perhaps in the form of an emoji. After this is complete, ask the students if any of them wish to share their experience with the rest of the class.

**(4)** Inform the students that our feelings usually only last a short time and then can change quite easily, for example, you may not win a game you are playing with your friends, and you may be a little upset about this but you are usually ok again by the next day. Or you may win the game and you are happy, but then you don't think about it the next day.

**(5)** However, inform the students that sometimes our feelings can last longer and make us worried or sad.

**(6)** Inform the students of some of the reasons why we may feel worried or sad. These include:

- Having a lot of work to do (either at school or perhaps homework)
- Having changes at home such as moving house which might mean going to a new school and making new friends
- People being unkind to us or perhaps we are being bullied
- No reason at all. Sometimes we don't know why we feel worried or sad and it can just happen



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## How can we keep our brain healthy?

**(7)** Ask the students if they have any ideas about how we can keep our brain healthy and improve the way we feel. Take suggestions.

**(8)** Exercising - keeping active and exercising is a really good way of making us feel better and keeping our whole body, not just our brain, healthy.

You may wish to ask the students to stand up and do some exercise - running on the spot for 10 seconds, 10 star jumps, touching their toes etc.

Inform the students that when they exercise, the brain releases chemicals that make us feel better.

**(9)** Eating healthy food - our brain needs energy from healthy food to work. Ask the students to suggest some healthy food. Take suggestions and add fruit, vegetables, fresh fish, nuts and seeds. Inform the students that they should also drink plenty of water.

Inform the students that they should avoid eating too much unhealthy food like chips, pizza, burgers, sweets, fizzy drinks etc. Foods with lots of sugar may give us a lot of energy at first, but we can feel tired and grumpy later on.

**(10)** Getting plenty of sleep - sleep is really important in keeping us healthy. Our bodies heal themselves when we sleep. If we don't get enough sleep, we are more likely to feel worried or grumpy, or get ill.

To help with sleep, inform the students that they should get into a good routine i.e. go to bed at the same time, and get up at the same time. They should also avoid playing computer games and looking at their phones or tablets just before bed, as these devices give out a type of light that keeps us awake.

**(11)** Spending time with and talking to family and friends - the relationships we have with our friends and family are really important because humans like spending time with each other and it improves the way we feel.

Inform the students that having close friends and family is also helpful for support if we are feeling worried or sad. They can give us advice and make us feel better.

If your friends or family look sad or worried, it's good to ask them if they are ok or if there is anything you can do to help. It is important that people know they can talk to you about their feelings, and that you feel comfortable to talk to them about your feelings too.

**(12)** Relaxing, taking time for yourself and going out into nature - finding time to relax gives our minds a rest from all the things we have to do. Although it is important to do our homework, it is good to find time to do things we enjoy. This doesn't always have to be with other people and it is good to think about what you are enjoying at that moment.

Going outside into fresh air and being in nature can make us feel better. We shouldn't spend all of our time indoors, playing computer games or being on our phones.

## Activity: Body scan

Inform the students that in this next activity, they will sit quietly and think about different parts of their body in turn, starting with their toes and leading up to the top of their head.

Instruct the students to sit comfortably in a relaxed position with their eyes closed. Ask them to breathe naturally. Other thoughts will come into our heads - instruct the students that this is ok but they should try to bring their attention back to the body, what they can feel e.g. clothes on the skin, whether a part of their body feels heavy or light.

Run through the parts of the body until finishing at the top of the head. Inform students that they may want to use this technique to relax at home.

## Where to get help

**(13)** Ask the students the following question: If you hurt your leg, who would you tell and where would you go? Take suggestions and encourage answers such as friends, family, teachers and the doctor. Inform the students that the same is true for our brain, and our feelings. If we feel worried or sad, we can talk through these problems with our friends, family, teachers and the doctor.

It may be helpful just to talk through how we feel, but sometimes the doctor may give us medicine to help make us feel better.

*N.B. At this point, you may want to point students towards individuals from the school e.g. school councillor*

## Summary

**(14)** End the session by going through the points covered in previous slides which will help the students remember the content. This is also a good opportunity to answer any questions the students may have. You may wish to ask the teacher to help with this part of the session.