

# 5 ways to develop **Positive Foundations for Mental Health and Wellbeing** in children and young people in your school.

So, you want to develop **Positive Foundations for MHWB** in the children and young people in your school. I guess you are looking for practice ideas and strategies to make a difference in your class and in your school.

Here at **Circles for Learning** we understand just how important this is especially with children returning after the longest interruption to education this country has ever known.

Through years of developing resources, such as our Mental Health and Wellbeing Teachers Toolkit (<https://circlesforlearning.co.uk/supporting-emotional-health-books.html>)

and our online courses for practitioners which supports the development of knowledge and understanding of MHWB (<https://courses.circlesforlearning.co.uk/>) we have found a range of both whole school and class based strategies that support the development of positive foundations for MHWB that really make a difference. We are lucky enough to have access to a range of professionals who work with CYP in a variety of ways.

The 5 key areas that this article looks at are taken from both our online training and our resources for the classroom. Our online training has been written and developed with practitioners in mind and increases knowledge and understanding in each of the 5 key areas which influence positive MHWB. Our resources include a variety of lesson plans and practical resources for teachers and other staff to use with children and young people either in classrooms or in small intervention groups.

**If you would like to undertake a Mental Health and Wellbeing whole school audit, then you can download this from our website:**

<https://circlesforlearning.co.uk/Mental-Health-Wellbeing-Audit.html>

So, what are the 5 key areas that research has identified that can really make a difference in your classroom for the children and young people you support and teach?



## Emotional Literacy:

Emotional literacy is the ability to recognise and understand emotions in both ourselves and in others and to use this knowledge to manage our behaviour in interactions and responses to others. Emotional literacy is vital skill, which is needed within the school environment to make it a positive place to be.



### Strategy 1:

When we have good emotional literacy, we are able to recognise our own emotions and regulate the intensity of them. We are also able to recognise and manage the emotions of others in a thoughtful way.

### Whole School:

Communication is a key component to emotional literacy. As a school staff team creating a Communication Policy can be a very useful activity to undertake with far reaching benefits to the whole school community.

Meador, Derrick. "School Communication Policy." ThoughtCo, Aug. 26, 2020, [thoughtco.com/school-communication-policy-3194670](https://www.thoughtco.com/school-communication-policy-3194670). <https://www.thoughtco.com/school-communication-policy-3194670>

Developing an emotionally literate school written by Stuart Boon. The Bridge: Journal of Educational Research-Informed Practice Volume 1, Issue 2: December 2014.

<https://journaleducationalresearchinformedpractice.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/4boon2014dec.pdf>

### Classroom:

Ask yourself how as a practitioner do you:

*Help children and young people (CYP) identify and deepen their understanding of the feelings they regularly experience?*

*Help CYP develop their emotional vocabulary*

*Help CYP empathise with others and become aware of how their personal feelings and behaviours can impact on others?*

*Encourage CYP to be reflective and to understand the consequences of their actions and behaviours?*

*Help CYP to develop a range of strategies and encourage them to express emotions in appropriate ways?*

You might like to set up a quiet area in your classroom for children to use if they need some time out. It can have a range of resources for easy access including fiddle toys, books with a focus on emotions, comics, soft toys, lava lamps and colouring sheets. This will enable them to calm and reach a point where they can talk about things if they need discuss. It also allows you the time to introduce the lesson and get children working before you work with the child or young person. Sometimes other children can take the role of Wellbeing Champions and help a child while you are teaching.

### Lesson Plan

Emotional Literacy: What is an Emotion?

<https://www.circlesforlearning.co.uk/lesson-plans.html>

## Creating Positive Relationships

Positive relationships in schools are central to the wellbeing of children, young people, and staff. They create the foundations for an effective learning environment. Research has clearly demonstrated that relationships play a significant role in learning and mental health and wellbeing.



*All children need relationships to thrive. Children who have experienced trauma need relationships to*

### Strategy 2:

When we have experienced thoughtful, attuned and loving relationships ourselves, we have a template from which to use when developing relationships. This enables us to make and maintain positive relationships with others.

### Whole School:

The Highland Council Promoting Positive Relationships Framework and Guidance:

[http://www.highland.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/20086/promoting\\_positive\\_relationships\\_-\\_framework\\_and\\_guidance\\_2018.pdf](http://www.highland.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/20086/promoting_positive_relationships_-_framework_and_guidance_2018.pdf)

### Classroom:

Helping children to develop strong positive social skills is a key aspect of enabling them to experience positive relationships. Having a display in the classroom that visually shows the skills can support this work. There are 6 main social skills areas: Team Building, Resolving Conflict, Respecting yourself and others, Participation and Communication. By exploring these areas with the children and creating a visual reminder of the skills they involve a weekly focus can celebrate the different areas each child has done well in.

### Lesson Plan

Creating Positive Relationships: Lesson Plan

<https://www.circlesforlearning.co.uk/lesson-plans.html>

### Understanding Ourselves:

Understanding ourselves includes the concept of self and the areas that influence self-development. A positive sense of self can act as a protective buffer supporting positive mental health and wellbeing.



*Talk to yourself as though you were talking to someone you respected and loved*

### Strategy 3:

When we are able to think about ourselves in a kind and thoughtful way, we are able to reflect on how we feel, what we do and say, in a compassionate way. This enables us to thrive and grow.

#### Whole School:

How we think of ourselves often comes from the way people respond to us. For children this is no different. Every interaction we have with a child communicates something to them. Using a couple of hours of the staff-training day at the beginning of the Summer term to help staff re-connect with children can be a very valuable use of time. Put a photograph of each child up on the wall and ask staff to write anything they know about the child on a post it note and place it next to the photo. This can really help teachers find out about children and young people and allow them to make stronger connections.

#### Classroom:

A great way to ensure that children know we are thinking of them is to use a post it note on their desk when they are absent. Teachers can write a short message on this and then transfer it to a child's book. 'Sorry you were off today we missed you. I will look out for you next lesson and share what you missed.' Best wishes Mrs Smith

#### Lesson Plan

Self-Discovery: Lesson Plan

<https://www.circlesforlearning.co.uk/lesson-plans.html>

### The brain, learning and behaviour:

Understanding how our brain affects our learning and behaviour can be extremely powerful for many children and young people. The knowledge allows them to understand how their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours have developed. It shows how these attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours are neural networks that have been created by experiences, interactions, and reflections, and how they can be challenged and altered by new experiences and positive attuned relationships with others.



### Strategy 4:

When we understand that our brain develops as we grow and that our experiences, relationships and thinking has created our internal map of how the world works it enables us to make choices about our future and the way we wish to respond, interact and be.

#### Whole School:

Developing an Attachment Aware Behaviour Regulation Policy Guidance for Schools.

<https://www.scribd.com/document/391601571/Developing-an-Attachment-Aware-Behaviour-Regulation-Policy-Guidance-for-Schools>

## Classroom:

By introducing work on the brain and how it develops and learns, we can support the children and young people we work with understand how and why thinking, actions and feelings are all linked and affect each other.

## Lesson Plan:

<https://www.circlesforlearning.co.uk/lesson-plans.html>

## Skills for Learning:

The ability to learn helps us thrive, grow, and flourish and is vital for positive mental health and wellbeing. By enabling children and young people to develop effective skills for learning, they also develop the personal resources to manage the challenges and stresses that they will encounter throughout their life.



## Strategy 5:

The skills that enable us to learn new things are the key to our future. By being aware of how we learn best, our strengths and our differences it enables us to take on the challenges that we will face in our futures with confidence.

## Whole School:

Building a language around skills for learning is a core concept of every school. One of the best ways I have found to do this is using the ELLI (Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory) Developed by Ruth Deakin Crick and the team at Bristol University. They offer an online questionnaire that allows children and young people to create their own learning profile. This then enables a spider diagram to be created which gives a focus of learning conversations about skills for learning. You can have some amazing conversations with children with this.

<https://elli.global/elli-for-schools/>

## Classroom:

Put a picture of the Learning Zone up in the classroom and share how you divide up the lesson. This might include an introduction, which is a recap – therefore it should help children relax and tune in as they have done it before so it is in the safe part of the learning zone. The next part may be teaching a new concept so this new piece of learning may make them feel a bit uncomfortable – so it is in the amber part of the learning zone. The last part is the young people working on the focus area on their own. This may take them into the amber zone but for some it may push them into the red zone. Discuss how they feel in the different zones and give them strategies to cope.

## Lesson Plan:

<https://www.circlesforlearning.co.uk/lesson-plans.html>

**Always remember Small changes can make a big difference**

**Circles for Learning** Using evidenced based strategies and interventions in schools to build positive foundations for Mental Health and Wellbeing in children and young people.

### **Contact us**

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