

Make Good Things Happen

Well-being Programme: The Science

Can stress be good for us?

Yes. There is a form of stress that is actually beneficial and keeps us growing at any age.

It's the kind of stress we feel when we rise to a challenge. And it's essential for developing resilience. We need these short bursts of 'challenge stress' - especially at a younger age as our nervous system is developing - it helps prime us for emotional stability. It's called 'stress inoculation'.

But for this to work well, we need to learn, as early as possible, how to have mastery over stress. This gives us the confidence to deal with scary or difficult situations, without getting overwhelmed.

Stress only becomes damaging when it stays switched on for long periods - leading to 'distress' - a feeling that everything is just too much. This usually happens when we ruminate on things that have made us feel bad in the past, or horrible things we fear might happen in the future. As we go over and over these thoughts in our mind, we keep the stress response switched on for long periods. We become marinated in a toxic cocktail of cortisol and adrenaline, which destroys our well-being, depresses our immune system and is a major trigger for long term health conditions.

The problem is that this kind of distress has become normal for many of us. Our worries follow us to bed and keep us awake at night. They follow us to the weekend and spoil our time for fun and relaxation. Even in normal times 75% of us in the UK will go through a period of feeling overwhelmed by stress in any given year. But because of Covid many more people are feeling overwhelmed - and this seems to be the case for all ages.

To avoid a mental health crisis, we all need new skills to help us all deal with this major new challenge.

There are a range of proven methods that can help undue this distress, and prime us for even greater resilience for what may lie ahead. In this programme we have taken proven principles and made them fun for both children and adults. They are free to download and easy for staff to deliver.

Movement & exercise

The Daily Mile: A running programme for primary children. With stickers and certificates through the Daily Mile charity.

Folk dancing for kids gives the added therapeutic benefit of music.

Stretching exercises release the build up of tension, especially in the neck and shoulders. Exercise expels stress hormones from our body and replaces them with natural feel good chemicals.

Cloud meditation

Most of us crave a break from our habitual thoughts and feelings, because they can be unpleasant and draining. So knowing how to rising above the buzz our mind at the start of each day is essential for our wellbeing.

Knowing how to 'clear our mind' allows us to be more open to learning in the classroom and better at dealing with the challenges that life throws at us.

Compassion practice

A compassion practise can literally switch off our stress response.

It helps us to learn better, widen our mind and become more creative.

It also helps us to feel more relaxed about ourself and comfortable being who we are.

Gratitude mindset

In a way, Covid is teaching us to appreciate the hidden heroes, people who keep things running and keep us safe and well. For all of us, improving the life skill of appreciation helps us to feel good and deal better with adversity.

Kindness and connection

Kindness makes us smarter and more mentally agile.

It also helps us to feel more relaxed around others and feel comfortable being open about our feelings, helping us to listen better, improve our relationships and feel that we belong.

Nature therapy

Research over many decades has proven that enjoying nature and natural materials dissipates stress and restores well-being.

The more we learn to tune into the natural world and natural materials the more pronounced this effect is.

Learning to observe and appreciate nature calms our mind and relaxes the body.

Many of these benefits come from the release of the hormone oxytocin, which creates the warm glow of well-being from kind acts and compassionate feelings. Researchers are discovering the remarkable benefits of oxytocin on our health and well-being. It boosts our immune system, and effects the way the heart and lungs work in deep synchronicity which lowers our risk of chronic illness.