

## Welcome!

Welcome to the fourteenth newsletter of the SEAL Community. If you missed our earlier newsletters, you'll find them in the Newsletter archive on the SEAL Community members' pages. The theme of the first (Keeping SEAL alive and growing) may be of interest if you have been using SEAL resources for some years and are looking to refresh your approach. The second focuses on diversity. The third is all about Ofsted/Estyn, the fourth is about SEAL and academic learning, the fifth focuses on SEAL and early years, the sixth on SEAL in secondary schools, the seventh on SEAL developments and the eighth on SEAL in practice. In the ninth is a case study from a brilliant primary school; the tenth is about assessment and in the eleventh there are ideas for using film in SEAL work. The twelfth focused on using fiction to support SEAL themes, and on the Prevent duty. In the thirteenth we had two case studies from schools, with a mental health focus.

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## News Update

### Prince William speaks about the importance of emotional intelligence

In an interview for CALMzine the Duke of Cambridge said 'Catherine and I are clear that we want both George and Charlotte to grow up feeling able to talk about their emotions and feelings. Over



the past year we have visited a number of schools together where we have been amazed listening to children talk about some quite difficult subjects in a really clear and emotionally articulate way – something most adults would struggle with. Seeing this has really given me hope that things are changing and that there is a generation coming up who find it normal to talk openly about their emotions. Emotional intelligence is key for us all to deal with the complexities of life and relationships.

Read more at <https://www.thecalmzone.net/2017/04/exclusive-william-harry-words/interview>

### Nearly a third of secondaries to cut support for children's emotional and mental wellbeing

In a recent poll by the NAHT headteachers' union, 31 per cent of secondary leaders reported that there would be a reduction in the services they provided to protect children's emotional and mental wellbeing over the next year. Two-thirds of the schools changing their level of mental health support attributed this to budget pressures.

At the same time, Prime Minister Teresa May has identified children's mental health as a key priority for her government and has pledged to have at least one teacher trained in "mental health first-aid" in every secondary school by 2019.

The NAHT's findings provide further evidence of the increasing strain on mental health services available to schools. Only 12 per cent of the school leaders polled said they would be increasing their support for pupils' emotional and mental wellbeing.

### New research programme on school preventive mental health programmes

The Department for Education (DfE) has invited bidders for multimillion-pound contracts to offer mental health training in 100 English primary schools and 50 secondaries.

Researchers will undertake randomised controlled trials in schools. In secondaries the programmes to be trialled are:

- **The Mental Health and High School Curriculum Guide** (The Guide). This programme aims to enhance the mental health literacy of students aged 13-15, in order to support their understanding of how to optimise and maintain good mental health, improve knowledge of mental health disorders and their treatments, decrease stigma and enhance help-seeking efficacy. The Guide is designed to be delivered by classroom teachers, and contains six modules with associated lesson plans, classroom activities, and core and supplementary resources. Each module is designed to fit into around 60 minutes of classroom time.

Teachers delivering the Guide are trained through a one-day face-to-face learning session. The Guide has been widely adopted in schools across Canada, where it was developed, and has been piloted in a number of other countries, with a Canadian RCT showing significant improvement in measures of mental health knowledge and attitudes pre- and post-programme.

- **Youth Aware of Mental Health** (Yam, <http://www.y-a-m.org/>), a universal mental health promotion programme aimed at 14-17 year olds. It seeks to promote improved knowledge and discussion of mental health and to develop problem-solving skills and emotional intelligence, focusing on issues such as stress, crisis, depression and suicide. The programme is spread over five sessions lasting 45-60 minutes each, which involve role play, discussions and lectures, with a supporting booklet for pupils and classroom posters. It is delivered by a trained instructor, who is external to the school, and is trained through a 4.5 day course. Instructors are supported in running the sessions by a helper, also external to the school, who receives half a day training. YAM has been delivered in schools across a number of countries, with a cross-European RCT showing significant reductions in suicide attempts and suicide ideation, with indications of positive impact on wider mental health outcomes.

In a mixture of primary and secondary schools three types of preventive intervention will be trialled, aimed at Year 4- 8. All are intended to be delivered in classrooms with 'minimal training and materials'. The DfE describe them as '*exercises, routines or activities which can be led by classroom teachers or school staff within the school day, with the aim of promoting children's wellbeing, resilience and engagement in learning.*' The researchers will have to develop the resources and training for these interventions. If they are successful the materials will be made available to all schools. The three types of intervention will be:

**Mindfulness**- the ability to direct attention to experience as it unfolds. It enables those who have learned it to be more able to be with their present experience, and respond more skilfully to whatever is happening. This is to be a new 'light touch' mindfulness programme involving 10-15 minute classroom sessions repeated weekly or more than once per week.

**Protective behaviours** - a practical approach to personal safety, teaching children and young people to recognise early warning signs of not feeling safe and how to recognise where they can get help. It seeks to provide life skills, develop support structures and instil positive help seeking behaviours which can help keep children safe from a range of risks that may impact wellbeing and increase the risk of mental health problems.

**Relaxation and breathing-based techniques** - particularly in the form of short breathing exercises.

The projects will run between this May and summer 2019. The invitation to tender only came out in mid-March with a March 24 deadline for expressions of interest – so a very quick turnaround!

## Almost two-thirds of children worry 'all the time'



Research among 700 children aged 10 and 11 for the mental-health charity Place2Be suggests almost two-thirds worry "all the time" about at least one thing to do with their school life, home life or themselves. The children's top concerns were their family, friends being okay, and not doing well at school.

Place2Be surveyed children in the top primary year at 20 schools across England, Scotland and Wales. They found that :

- 40% felt their worries got in the way of school work
- Almost 30% said that once they started worrying they could not stop
- 21% said they did not know what to do when worried

There was a gender divide, with 36% of girls worrying about being bullied, compared with 22% of boys. More girls (28%) worried about their looks than boys (18%). But boys (24%) were more likely to worry about being angry than girls (16%).

The most common coping strategies were talking to family members (72%) or to friends (65%), while 65% of boys calmed themselves by playing computer games compared with 39% of girls.

More than 80% of the children surveyed said the best way for adults to help was to listen sympathetically and pupils said it was important to be kind to anxious classmates.

## Schools struggle to access help for mental health problems

More evidence has emerged of schools struggling to provide mental health support for students, with more than half of school leaders saying they finding it hard to locate services.

According to a survey by the NAHT heads' union and the children's mental health charity Place2Be, 56 per cent of school leaders say it is "difficult to find" mental health services for their pupils.

The survey of 1,115 individuals across England and Wales found that more than one in five school leaders who attempt to find support are unsuccessful.

However, demand for the services appears to be increasing – 93 per cent of school leaders say that pupils bring more worries into school than they did five years ago.

The most common barriers to finding support are lack of capacity in services (36 per cent), lack of local services (31 per cent) and budget constraints (28 per cent).

However, access varies by region, with two-thirds of respondents in the South West (67 per cent) and West Midlands (66 per cent) saying it is “difficult or very difficult” to find services, compared to only 37 per cent in London.

In primary schools, 97 per cent of school leaders feel that people underestimate the level of mental health problems amongst pupils.

While 95 per cent of primary school leaders feel that their teachers go “above and beyond” to support their pupils’ wellbeing, only 39 per cent feel confident that their staff would know how to respond to a mental health crisis.

### **Sex and Relationship education to become compulsory for all schools in England**

Sex and relationships education is to be made compulsory in all schools in England, the government has announced.

All children from the age of four will be taught about safe and healthy relationships, Education Secretary Justine Greening said. Children will also be taught, at an appropriate age, about sex. But parents will still have the right to withdraw their children from these classes.

Until now, sex education has been compulsory only in council-run schools. Since academies and free schools are not under local authority control, they do not have to follow the national curriculum and have not been obliged to teach sex and relationships education (SRE). In practice, the vast majority do teach the subject - the government's announcement will mean all schools across the system will be bound by the same obligation.

Age-appropriate lessons will have particular emphasis on what constitutes healthy relationships, as well as the dangers of sexting, online pornography and sexual harassment.

In primary schools, the focus would be on building healthy relationships and staying safe, the Department for Education (DfE) said, while in secondary school it would focus on sex as well as relationships.

The government will hold discussions on what should be taught to children, and at what age, and there will be a public consultation later this year.

The new curriculum could be taught from September 2019.

### **New report finds PSHE rarely looked at in Ofsted inspections**



A new report from the British Humanist Association details the results of an analysis of school inspections conducted during the 2015/2016 academic year, since the new common inspection framework (and its greater focus on personal development and welfare of pupils) was introduced. It found that ' these positive statements of intent have yet to filter through to inspection.' PSHE was mentioned in just 14% of all, and only 8% of primary school

reports. Both were mentioned in fewer reports than almost every other established subject, including history (36%), geography (26%), art (31%), music (31%) and sport (59%). Fewer than 1% of reports criticised a school's coverage of PSHE and SRE in any way. The report says that 'this flies in the face of Ofsted's 2013 report into PSHE – which found that the subject's provision is 'not yet good enough' in 40% of schools. Unfortunately, therefore, it seems that Ofsted is routinely failing to pick schools up on their shortcomings.' Read the report at <https://humanism.org.uk/2017/01/27/major-new-bha-report-school-inspections-almost-totally-neglect-pshe-and-sre/>

**Children in independent schools are “mentally tougher” because their schools are almost as focused on character as results**



A leading psychometric test publisher has published a study - An Analysis Of Mental Toughness - in which it compares 9,000 children of all ages from 58 independent schools in England and Scotland with 32,000 state school pupils. Defining mental toughness as “the mind-set that every person adopts in everything they do”, the study examined four categories: control, commitment, challenge, confidence.

Independent school pupils scored 4.26 overall, higher than state schools' 3.94. Read more about resilience at <https://www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-views/children-independent-schools-are-mentally-tougher-because-their>

### Resource round-up

#### New resource compendiums



For the SEAL Community website we have uploaded some fantastic secondary tutor group resources from charities BOND and Young Minds, which build students' resilience. The resource pack was created by staff and students at Hove Park School. Find them at <http://www.sealcommunity.org/member-resource/resilient-classroom>

Also newish on the site are a 'Good to be Me' primary resource compendium at <http://www.sealcommunity.org/member-resource/be-yourself-dont-be-lemming-and-other-good-be-me-resources>, plus some great mindfulness resources <http://www.sealcommunity.org/member-resource/try-these-great-mindfulness-ideas>.

For this term we have new uploads for work on the 'Relationships' theme, on stereotyping, understanding loss and death, and a useful compendium of resources for thinking about changes and transitions- including a brilliant scheme of work and accompanying resources for primary - secondary transition days. Follow these links <http://sealcommunity.org/member->

[resource/relationships-theme-year-6-powerpoints](http://sealcommunity.org/member-resource/relationships-theme-year-6-powerpoints), <http://sealcommunity.org/member-resource/understanding-stereotyping>, <http://sealcommunity.org/member-resource/understanding-loss-and-death>, <http://sealcommunity.org/member-resource/changes-primary-resources>, <http://sealcommunity.org/member-resource/new-transitions-compendium>.

## Quick questionnaire to measure primary children’s wellbeing at school

| Name      | Happy   | OK  | Sad   |
|-----------|---|---|---|
| Icon      |  |  |  |
| Sentiment | Positive  | Neutral   | Negative  |
| Value     | 2   | 1   | 0   |

The **How I Feel About My School** ([HIFAMS questionnaire](#)) has been designed to measure the happiness and subjective well-being of children in school. The free standardised questionnaire for 4-11 year olds has seven questions which ask children how they feel about school life, scored using a three-point “face” scale.

Download the questionnaire and guidance on how to score it at <http://medicine.exeter.ac.uk/hifams/>

## Free downloadable guide to using school reports to report on social and emotional learning

We all know that whatever gets measured usually gets attention and focus. Right now, there is no widespread, practical way for all schools to assess children's social-emotional skills and character development. Or is there? If one looks at school reports, one often finds as well as academic grades a set of comments about behaviour, character, preparation, motivation, and so on.

US SEL expert Maurice Elias has provided a free downloadable guide for you to analyse your own report card's comment section and build on it to integrate SEL/SEAL assessment into existing practice.

## Peer-to-peer coaching for exam stress

BBC Learning and Young Minds have launched The Mind Set, the UK’s first national peer-to-peer coaching network for GCSE students.

The Mind Set provides information and support on how to manage exam stress. Advice comes from 12 trusted student coaches who have been through it before. They have made videos about their experiences, including about looking after their mental health, and they have also shared their stories with listeners on Radio 1’s Live Surgery.

Find The Mindset information, support and advice at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/z3hpgdm#zy6t3k7>

## New counselling service on smartphones

Childline has launched an app that provides counselling to young people in need of help directly through their mobile devices. 'For Me' was created by teenagers who realised there was an urgent

need for young people to have easy access to confidential advice and support. The app is available as a [free download](#) so young people can easily access Childline's online services, which include

- 1-2-1 chat with a counsellor
- 'Ask Sam' problem pages
- Private locker - a personal area where young people can track their mood and write down their thoughts.

Read more at <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-we-do/news-opinion/childline-launches-new-app/>

## Emoji cards

Checkout *Chateez*, a deck of 25 emoji cards together with two blank cards and a dry wipe pens which children can use to add their own expressions. Young people played a big part in developing



them, so the images are contemporary and use vocabulary that takes into account children's language today, rather than adult language or adult representations of what they think young people are feeling. There's a really good range of emotions, too- for example, cards for 'cool', 'cheeky', 'relieved' and 'silenced', which shows a zipped mouth.

A pack of Chateez cards is £19.95. They also come on a keyring at £11.95 per set. [www.chateez.co.uk](http://www.chateez.co.uk)

## The mental health of children and young people in England

Public Health England have published a really useful report that describes the importance of mental health in children and young people, makes the case for investing in this area, and summarises the evidence of what works for different types of need. It's all done in graphics and is very easy to read and share with others. Find it at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-the-mental-health-of-children-and-young-people>

## Disrespect NoBody resources



The Home Office's *Disrespect NoBody* PSHE education teaching materials have been updated. They help pupils understand and maintain healthy relationships while learning about consent and challenging controlling behaviour, violence and abuse. The resource also focuses on developing key skills and attributes intrinsic to healthy relationships - such as empathy, respect, communication and negotiation.

You can download the free resources at <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/curriculum-and-resources/resources/disrespect-nobody-teaching-resources-preventing>

### **New online safety resource**

The 'Crossing the Line' PSHE education toolkit, created by Childnet, encourages young people to reflect on their online behaviour, whilst also equipping them with the knowledge of how to respond to online safety issues, report any concerns and make positive choices

The toolkit is aimed at 11-14 year olds and consists of four films and accompanying lesson plans which explore the idea of 'Crossing the line' - pushing boundaries and engaging in risky behaviour online. Using the short films as a spring board, the toolkit covers relevant topics such as cyberbullying, sexting, peer pressure and self-esteem. The toolkit challenges young people to not only reflect on their own behaviour online and discover what 'crosses the line' for them, and helps them know who and how to report when/if aspects of their online lives go wrong.

Find the resources at <http://www.childnet.com/resources/pshetoolkit>

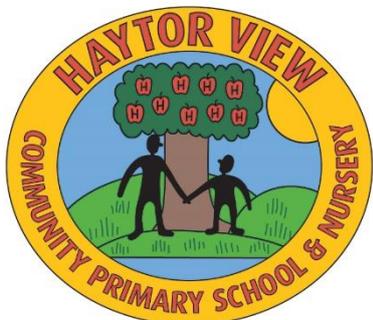
### **Lovely film about how differences don't matter, and handling loss**

We loved these moving films about Bella the dog and Tara the elephant, who become best friends and look out for each other. The first part of the film is about the friendship, the second about how Tara copes with her loss when Bella dies. Find the films at <https://youtu.be/lkS8ZCsyCI4> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qlajUJ1ygdI>



## Sharing practice

### Twelve years on and still thriving with SEAL



Every Monday morning at Haytor View Community Primary School in Devon starts with an assembly on one of the SEAL themes. Children then go to their classrooms to work on their social and emotional learning until morning break. Yes – that’s not English or maths, but SEAL-related work.

And this is in a school where 55% of the children are eligible for free school meals, and where academic standards used to be low. Now, they are pretty amazing: last year 61% of children reached the expected standard in reading, writing and maths, compared to the England average of 53%.

What is particularly interesting about Haytor View is that the decision to go with SEAL in 2005 and make it a key part of the school’s strategy was taken when things were not so good, at a time when many schools would have hesitated to take any time ‘away’ from the academic basics. And that since then staff have stuck with a regular annual rhythm of the SEAL themes. ‘Why would we not?’ says Scott Hampton, Deputy Head and Leader of Learning and Development. ‘It saddens me to know that so many schools picked it up and thought it was great then let it go – they don’t stick with what they believe in but follow the latest new thing.’

The leadership style at Haytor View is different. Scott, Kate Galling (Head of Learning and Development- headteacher by another name) and other leaders share a leadership style that has the courage to ignore or reject initiatives unless they fit with the school’s ethos and beliefs. Back in 2005, SEAL straight away seemed a very good fit; it encapsulated and systematised what the school was doing and wanted to do. So later on did THRIVE <https://www.thriveapproach.com/> and R-Time <http://rtime.info/uk/index.php>, which also form part of the overall approach. Then, what the school does decide to take on board they then implement thoroughly, with resilience and persistence.

And with autonomy. Staff are trusted at Haytor View and in charge of their own classrooms, their own development, their own learning. No one tells them what to do. Kate says ‘the big shift for us was based on the belief that everyone in the school was capable of doing the job they wanted to do, and that each of our practitioners have the solutions to the specific challenges they face in relation to individual children, parents and practice.’ Every teacher (plus some other members of staff) has 50 minutes of one-to-one time with Scott every fortnight; his role is to support them in thinking about what the staff see as key priorities for the development of their provision, using solution-focused questions:

‘What are your best hopes?’

‘What are you doing well already?’

‘Tell me about a time when ‘it’ works really well’

'What difference does it make?'

'What skills do you use? What thinking supports you?'

'How would you know if you were feeling better about ....x?'

'What would you notice? See? Hear? '

'How come that would be happening? What would you be doing? '

'So what next, then- what will move things on?'

How staff manage their Monday morning SEAL-related work is up to them. The only 'given' is fifteen minutes of R time, in which children follow five steps:

- Step 1. R time rule and instruction - "Show respect and good manners at all times".
- Step 2. Random pairing - the children work each time with a different partner enabling them, over time, to work with all of the children in the class
- Step 3. Introduction (greeting)- once the children are in pairs they greet one another, using given names, with a positive statement e.g. "Hello my name is Simon. I'm glad you're my partner today Lia ".
- Step 4. The activity - one of 30 short, easily achievable, age appropriate activities for each year group; the children take part in these activities with their partner
- Step 5. Plenary - the children feed back their experiences to the whole group and the teacher helps them reflect on their learning.

For the rest of the Monday morning time staff draw on the SEAL resources but personalise the learning to the particular current needs of their class. So does Scott, in relation to the needs of the school community. Every time he plans a half term of assemblies he pulls out the SEAL box for ideas on what to focus on, but what will jump out at him will be specific to what people are noticing happening for the children. So in the last half term, for example, what jumped out at him was how critical it was for children to notice what was good about themselves, and how difficult this could often be. Then his highly interactive assembly got children, parents and adults talking

about how easy it is to recognise others' gifts and talents, and why it might be harder to do the same for your own.

Scott also draws on his own experiences in his assemblies. For the 'Changes' theme, for example, he will tell stories about his own life – how it felt to go to university as a mature student, how it felt later for him and his family to move area and house, how difficult and uncomfortable that was. Again, he does not offer solutions or tell children what they should do in order to cope, but recognise that these experiences are common to all and gather children's thoughts and perspectives upon these. They will be helped to find the solutions within themselves.



SEAL at Haytor has of course changed over the years. An example is introducing work on internet safety, from a SEAL perspective, and with a big focus on how to work together in groups to tackle an issue or task. This year, the whole school got together as one big team in an assembly to share thoughts feelings and ideas around staying safe on line.

Then children worked in teams to undertake a challenge. One team created a board game to show people the consequences of good and bad internet choices. Another team produced a puppet show.



On one table, a team created a poster while next to them another team created a story. One team acted out a role play but another team created a cartoon strip. One team simply created a set of rules to follow to stay safe.

Another example of innovation is how is how the school has incorporated the new requirement to teach British Values. 'We take the new have-tos and turn them into 'want-tos', says Scott. So at Haytor you will not see displays with Union Jacks on them, but you will see children learning about the similarities and differences between people, and that these are to be celebrated. Many of the

school's children are exposed to a wide range of views outside of school which can cause them challenge over stereotypes. When these are reflected as behaviours in school, the school's approach is not to simply attack this as wrong, but to help the children feel for others, explore different perspectives, and think for themselves.

Parental engagement is a strength of the school. Staff 'properly listen' to parents, and with respect. They are treated as equals and everyone makes clear that Haytor is 'their' school. They are always welcome in the building, which is very open and transparent – there are (by design) no corridors so getting to one class means going through another, and no offices for Kate and Scott, just bookable meeting rooms. Some parents come to Monday assemblies, and many more to the Friday assemblies where children and parents/carers are celebrated for showing progress towards the four key outcomes defined in the school's core offer:

- Each child sees themselves as a learner
- Children will collaborate with others in all contexts
- Every child has comfort with who they are
- Parents enjoy and share in children's lives

For example, at these assemblies children might be nominated for an award or listening to others' points of view, using others' ideas and being happy if others use yours, reaching agreement where opinions differ, recognising and valuing differences or understanding how to be a friend (collaboration), or being happy not being perfect, knowing they are doing their best and that this is okay, talking about feelings, having and showing empathy or being comfortable with problems (having comfort with who they are).

As a school that constantly reflects and learns, next steps in social and emotional learning are always emerging at Haytor. For example, some teachers are to trial mindfulness as an approach. What is certain, though, is that any developments will not be taken on because they are glossy and new, but because they fit the ever-changing needs of the children – and because teachers feel empowered to make their own decisions about what will work in their own classrooms.

### **The school that replaced detention with meditation**

Robert W. Coleman Elementary School has been doing something different when students misbehave. Instead of punishing disruptive students, the Baltimore school has something called the Mindful Moment Room instead.

The room is filled with lamps, decorations, and purple cushions. Misbehaving students are encouraged to sit in the room and go through practices like breathing or meditation, helping them calm down and re-centre. They are also asked to talk through what happened.



The meditation room was created as a partnership with a local charity, the [Holistic Life Foundation](#). For more than 10 years the foundation has been offering the after-school program Holistic Me, where children from nursery to the end of primary school practise mindfulness exercises and yoga.



"It's amazing," said Kirk Philips, the Holistic Me coordinator at Robert W. Coleman. "You wouldn't think that little kids would meditate in silence. And they do."



There was a Christmas party, for example, where the children knew they were going to get presents but were still expected to do meditation first.

"As a little kid, that's got to be hard to sit down and meditate when you know you're about to get a bag of gifts, and they did it! It was beautiful, we were all smiling at each other watching them," said Philips.

The children may even be bringing that mindfulness back home with them. One parent told the school 'I came home the other day stressed out, and my daughter said, "Hey, Mom, you need to sit down. I need to teach you how to breathe."

The program also helps mentor and tutor the children, as well as teach them about the environment. They help clean up local parks, build gardens, and visit nearby farms. Philips said they even teach kids to be co-teachers, letting them run the yoga sessions.

The school is seeing tangible benefits from the program. For the last two years there have been no exclusions at Robert W. Coleman Elementary.

See the UK [Mindfulness in Schools Project](https://mindfulnessinschools.org/about/about-us/) <https://mindfulnessinschools.org/about/about-us/> which teaches adults how to set up similar programs.

## Practical tools and tips

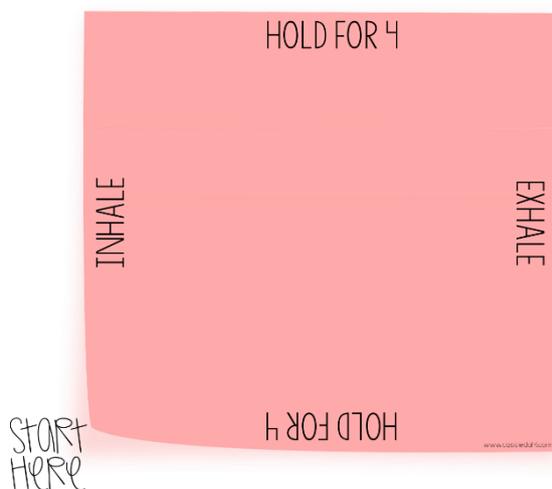
### Calm-down breathing



Here are some nice ways of teaching relaxation that we came across. First, get younger children to practise '**hot chocolate breathing**'. Pretend to hold your cup of hot chocolate in both hands in front of you. Breathe in deeply the smell of the chocolate. And then blow out to cool it down so you can drink it. Do this to the count of five. Then have the children copy you. It's good to tell them that if they do this kind of slow, deep breathing from their stomachs when they feel tense or anxious,

it tricks their mind into thinking there's no danger and everything is Ok. Then they will automatically feel calmer. Showing them this You Tube clip can help-

<https://youtu.be/RVA2N6tX2cg>



For older children you can use **hand signals**. The hand signals are as follows: palms up to breathe in, palms out to hold the breath, palms down to breathe out slowly. Try doing about five total breaths on a regular basis. Another good one is **square breathing**. You will need small squares of paper (post-its work well too). Start with the bottom left corner and trace your finger along the side going up. While doing this take in a deep breath. Then move your finger (from top left corner) to the top right corner. This represents holding the breath for four seconds. Bring your finger down (from the top right corner) to the bottom right corner. As you do this, slowly exhale. Finally bring your finger along the bottom edge of the square to your

starting corner. This represents holding in between breaths for four seconds. Repeat 3-5 times.

## Interesting new research

### Bereaved children less likely to talk about their worries

Penny, A. (2016) *Parentally bereaved children communicating their feelings: preliminary analysis of data from the Millennium Cohort Study*. London: National Children's Bureau



1 in 29 school age children in the UK have lost a parent or sibling – that's around one in every classroom.

Using data on over 13,000 11-year-old children in the Millennium Cohort Study, this preliminary analysis found that children whose mum or dad had died were more likely to keep their worries to themselves (28% compared to 21% of children whose parents were both still alive). They were less likely to talk to someone at home about their anxieties (60%

compared to 72%) or to share their problems with a friend (28% compared to 40% of those not bereaved). 20% said they definitely didn't show their emotions to others, compared to 11% of those who hadn't been bereaved.

Some of these findings were linked to gender: there were more boys than girls in the bereaved sample. However, even after controlling for gender, the odds of a bereaved child saying they definitely don't show their emotions to others were 1.94 times the odds of a non-bereaved child. Differences in the likelihood of not telling a friend and not telling someone at home also remained significant after controlling for gender.

Other factors such as social disadvantage were not, however, included in the analysis, so it remains possible that factors other than the experience of bereavement itself may explain the findings.

### Close relationship with one adult in early childhood education reduces stress

Hatfield, B.E. & Williford, A.P (2017) Cortisol Patterns for Young Children Displaying Disruptive Behavior: Links to a Teacher-Child, Relationship-Focused Intervention *Prevention Science* (2017) 18: 40.

A school-based intervention that promotes warm and caring interactions between a skilled and child can reduce the child's stress in the classroom, a new study has found.

The intervention was designed for teachers of preschool-aged children and focused on fostering close teacher-child relationships through one-on-one play. Children who participated in the intervention showed reduced levels of the hormone cortisol, an indicator of stress.



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In all, 70 teachers and 113 children participated in the study. They were divided into three groups: one group was designated as "business as usual" and the children did not participate in any special activities; one group participated in a "child time" intervention; and one group participated in an intervention called "Banking Time."

In the child time intervention, the child and teacher spent time playing one-on-one but the teacher was not given any specific guidance or instructions from a consultant for the play period.

Banking Time is a much more formal intervention, designed to foster sensitive, responsive interactions between a teacher and a child, creating a relationship the child and teacher can use as a resource during times of challenge in the classroom.

To build that relationship, the teachers and children participating in the study had one-on-one play sessions. Consultants directed the teachers in key elements of the program: allowing the child to lead the play sessions, carefully observing and narrating the child's behaviour, describing the child's positive and negative emotions, and being available as an emotional resource.

Using saliva samples that were assayed for cortisol, researchers found that children whose teachers participated in the Banking Time intervention showed declines in cortisol levels during the school day compared to those in the business as usual group.

Children in the child time intervention also showed some benefits from the one-on-one time, but they were not as significant.

### How much sleep do teenagers need for mental health and academic performance?

Fuligni, A. et al (2017) Adolescent Sleep Duration, Variability, and Peak Levels of Achievement and Mental Health. *Child Dev.* doi:10.1111/cdev.12729

This study examined whether there is an "optimal" amount of sleep for peak levels of academic achievement and mental health in teenagers.

A total of 421 pupils aged 15-16 from two high schools in the US reported the amount of sleep they had every night for two weeks. Official school records were obtained at the end of the academic year to measure academic achievement. The Youth Self-Report form of the Child Behaviour Checklist was used as a measure of mental health. A year later, 80% repeated the same process and a second wave of data was collected.

Pupils who averaged 8.75 – 9 hours of sleep per school night demonstrated peak levels of mental health, whereas those who averaged 7 – 7.5 hours of sleep per night had the highest levels of academic achievement.

While the results showed that the “optimal” amount of sleep needed is different for the two developmental outcomes, the researchers note that reducing sleep for the sake of academic performance may result in a greater decline in mental health than in the decline in academic performance from increasing sleep for the sake of mental health.



### Teenage brain more influenced by rewards than punishments

Palminteri, S. et al (2016) The Computational Development of Reinforcement Learning during Adolescence <http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.1004953>

This study compared how adolescents and adults learn to make choices based on the available information. Volunteers aged 12 to 17, and 18 to 32, completed tasks in which they had to choose between abstract symbols. Each symbol was consistently associated with a fixed chance of a reward, punishment or no outcome. As the trial progressed, participants learnt which symbols were likely to lead to each outcome and adjusted their choices accordingly.

The results showed that adolescents and adults were equally good at learning to choose symbols associated with reward, but adolescents were less good at avoiding symbols associated with punishment. Adults also performed significantly better when they were told what would have happened if they had chosen the other symbol after each choice, whereas adolescents did not appear to take this information into account.

The authors suggest that ‘a reward-based approach, rather than punishment, is more likely to be effective in adolescent learning’.

From the same research team come studies on risk-taking, which looked at the effect of the presence of peers on driving risks in lab-based driving video games. The researchers found that perception of risk by young adolescents is influenced more by the risk judgements of other teenagers than the judgements of adults. In contrast, children and adults are more influenced by adults than by teenagers. Thus, say the team ‘young adolescents appear to be particularly sensitive to the views of their own age group.’ On the basis of these findings, a [theoretical framework](#) has been developed proposing that the fear of being excluded by peers is a major determinant of adolescent decision making. An adolescent who understands the health risks of smoking, for example, might nevertheless accept a cigarette from friends because of the potential risk of social exclusion.

But it’s not just human teenagers who are affected! Mice apparently go through a period of about 25 days of ‘adolescence’, between puberty and becoming sexually mature adults. During this period, they take more risks, explore their environment more, and are more social. A [paper](#)

published in 2014 showed that adolescent mice drink more alcohol when they are with other adolescent mice, and this is not the case for adult mice.

### Teacher stress lowers attainment

Greenberg, M. et al (2016) *Teacher Stress and Health : Effects on Teachers, Students, and Schools* .Pennsylvania State University and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Yes – it’s official – teacher stress leads to poorer academic outcomes for children. According to one longitudinal study, teachers who have greater stress and show more symptoms of depression create classroom environments that are less conducive to learning, which leads to poor academic performance among students. Students who began the school year with weaker math skills and had a teacher with more depressive symptoms had the lowest rate of achievement. Other research finds that when teachers are highly stressed, children show lower levels of both social adjustment and academic performance. Most strikingly, a survey of over 78,000 students in grades 5-12 in 160 US schools showed that higher teacher engagement in their jobs predicted higher student engagement, which in turn predicted higher student achievement outcomes

This overview report identifies four main sources of teacher stress.

- **School Organizations** that lack strong principal leadership, a healthy school climate and a collegial, supportive environment;
- **Job Demands** that are escalating with high-stakes testing, student behavioural problems, and difficult parents;
- **Work Resources** that limit a teacher’s sense of autonomy and decision-making power; and
- **Teacher Social and Emotional Competence** to manage stress and nurture a healthy classroom.

The report also reviews the evidence on programs that help relieve teacher stress and concludes that:

**Mindfulness programs** can help teachers manage emotions and find joy in teaching.

**Mentoring programs** can help new teachers reduce stress and raise retention which improves classroom instruction.

**Workplace wellness programs** can improve teacher health, lower medical costs, and reduce absenteeism.

**Social and emotional learning programs for students** can reduce teacher burnout and increase their satisfaction

Read the full report at <http://www.rwjf.org/en/library/collections/social-and-emotional-learning.html>

### **Does funding a school-based link person to liaise with mental health services make a difference?**

Day, L. et al (2017) *An evaluation of the joint DfE and NHS England mental health services and schools link pilot* London: DfE

This report evaluates the Mental Health Services and Schools Link Pilots launched in 2015 by NHS England and the DfE. 22 local areas were funded to establish named lead contacts within NHS children and young people's mental health services and schools. They also participated in joint planning workshops, involving other professionals from their local CYPMHS network. These included, but were not restricted to, school nurses, educational psychologists, counsellors and voluntary and community sector organisations.

The evaluation took place between September 2015 and 2016. Overall, it found that the pilots had considerable success in strengthening communication and joint working arrangements between schools and NHS CYPMHS. This was often the case even where relationships were said to have been weak at the start of the pilot programme, although the extent of change varied between pilot areas.

At a programme level, the evaluation found quantifiable improvements to the following self-reported outcome measures, between a baseline and follow-up at +10 months:

- frequency of contact between pilot schools and NHS CYPMHS
- satisfaction with communication and working relationships between pilot schools and NHS CYPMHS
- understanding of the referral routes to specialist mental health support for children and young people in their local area among school lead contacts
- knowledge and awareness of mental health issues affecting children and young people, among school lead contacts

Read the full report at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health-services-and-schools-link-pilot-evaluation#2017-02-09T15:01:00+00:00>

### **Closing the gap: is early intervention to tackle mothers' mental health difficulties and early child behaviour problems the secret?**

Chowdry, H. and McBride, T. (2017) *Disadvantage, behaviour and cognitive outcomes: Longitudinal analysis from age 5 to 16*. London: Early Intervention Foundation

This analysis of longitudinal data shows that, not unexpectedly, social and emotional difficulties are more prevalent among children from more disadvantaged families. Crucially, however, the researchers found that this difference can be entirely explained by two factors: mothers' psychological wellbeing and parents' education. In other words, this variation in the incidence of behavioural issues seems to be explained by factors which are associated with poverty, rather than poverty itself.

Of course, the researchers say, this does not mean that poverty itself doesn't matter, but it does suggest that work to address the effects of poverty on children should be informed by an awareness of both the direct impacts of economic hardship on parents and the knock-on impacts within a family.

Mothers' psychological wellbeing is an interesting case: it is only associated with poor behaviour in low or medium-income families, and the effect is strongest for children living in poverty. This suggests that higher family incomes (or related factors) help to protect against the effects of poor maternal wellbeing, and/or that lower incomes exacerbate these effects.

The researchers also looked at the relationship between behaviour and attainment. It is perhaps not surprising that children with higher levels of social and emotional problems at age 5 do less well in academic assessments at age 10 or 16. What the researchers' analysis highlights, however, is that this relationship remains even when we account for family characteristics such as maternal wellbeing and parental education. In short, poor behaviour at age 5 really is associated with lower test scores later on. Or, to put it another way, this analysis provides specific grounds to believe that addressing children's social and emotional problems at an early age could have educational benefits down the line.

The researchers conclude that programmes which target maternal mental health and early childhood social and emotional skills could support better outcomes for disadvantaged children.

Read more at <http://www.eif.org.uk/publication/disadvantage-behaviour-and-cognitive-outcomes/>

### **What makes SEL programmes effective?**

O'Conner, R. et al (2017) [A Review of The Literature on Social and Emotional Learning for Students Ages 3-8: Characteristics of Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs](#)

This US research looks at 83 research syntheses from 2008-2015 and found that common characteristics of successful SEL programmes were that learning occurred through teaching specific skills in the classroom, incorporating role-playing and modelling the skills. The research also showed that SEL activities should occur in a sequential order, be used regularly and pupils should be allotted enough time for practice. Teacher training is also essential.

When choosing a programme, authors refer readers to a guide that rates 23 programmes by quality and evidence of effectiveness. They also list several recommendations including considering the school's resources, staff attitudes and time available to implement a given programme.

Read the report at <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?projectID=443>

### **Tackling cyberbullying**

Child Trends has released [a new policy brief](#) on preventing bullying and cyberbullying, based on the latest research. The briefing recommends that schools include cyberbullying as part of a broader approach to bullying prevention. Strategies targeting cyberbullying alone without addressing the broader issue of bullying are unlikely to be effective. Similarly, 'monitoring pupils' social media accounts is likely to be an ineffective use of resources without additional efforts to encourage more civil behaviour online and in person'.



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The research shows that, on their own, anti-bullying assemblies, speakers, and campaigns are not effective at preventing bullying, nor are zero-tolerance policies that remove students from school and do not address the underlying causes of bullying behaviour.

Sounds to us like a good case for SEAL!