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The Five Ways to Wellbeing

Based on research carried out in the field of Positive Psychology, which focuses on the scientific study of happiness, we've come up with the following "Five Ways to Wellbeing":

1. Growth Mindset:

Young people often fall into the habit of thinking that their basic qualities, like intelligence or talent, are fixed traits: "I'm not a maths person", "I'm bad at sports". This is what's known as a "fixed mindset".

What we want to encourage is a "Growth Mindset" – a term coined by Carol Dweck, professor of Psychology at Stanford University.

Teach students that their current ability does not reflect their future ability and that, through hard work and perseverance, their basic qualities can be improved.

Action: Give examples of people who have suffered from some form of adversity and still become successful (e.g. Richard Branson having dyslexia, Albert Einstein not speaking until he was four years old). Try thinking of examples specific to the people they admire.

2. Social support:

Studies show that people who have one or more close friendships are happier. Feeling connected



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to and valued by others is a fundamental human need. Encouraging students to limit their use of social media and connect with friends in the real world can promote positive mental health.

Action: Text a friend and suggest meeting up for a coffee, or join a club.

3. Being present:

Mindfulness Meditation has been shown to affect not only how the brain works but also its structure. People undertaking mindfulness training have shown increased activity in the prefrontal cortex (the area of the brain associated with positive emotion) which is generally less active in people who are depressed.

Asking a young person to pay attention to what's happening around them can be a great way of interrupting the cycle of rumination by focusing the mind on the present. Some great apps you can download include: [Headspace](#) and [Calm](#).

Action: Encourage students to do 5 minutes of "box breathing" (inhale through the nose for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, exhale through the mouth for 4 seconds and then hold for another 4 seconds) before each lesson.

4. Practising gratitude:

“Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; remember that what you now have was once among the things you only hoped for.”
– Epicurus



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When someone is feeling down, it can be easy for them to focus on what they don't have. By training their brain to consciously focus on what they do have, we can reduce negative thought patterns, such as envy, frustration and regret.

Action: Get them to keep a 'gratitude diary' where they write down 5 things they are grateful for every day.

5. Diet & Exercise:

Diet and exercise are the foundations for optimal mental health, so changing our relationship to these can have a great impact on our overall wellbeing.

- ∞ **Diet:** Nutritional deficiencies can sometimes be the underlying cause of mental health problems. There's a lot of contradictory information about diets, but what generally seems to work is reducing the amount of processed foods we consume and replacing them with healthy, whole foods such as green, leafy vegetables, lean meats and whole grains.

Action: Check out Rachel Kelly's book "[The Happy Kitchen](#)" where she talks about how we can harness the power of food for optimal mental health.

- ∞ **Exercise:** Exercise has been shown to be as effective as antidepressants in treating mild to moderate depression. It doesn't even have to be intense exercise. Walking fast over a period of time can have the same positive effect on mental well-being as going for a jog.

Action: Go for a walk in the park for 5 to 10 minutes, then slowly build up to a light jog. The key is to start small, then build it up slowly over time.