**Course: Promoting staff wellbeing**

**Unit 1: School ethos and policy**

**Overview**

**Aims and outcomes**

The aim of Unit 1 is for the SLT to understand stress so that they can empathise with and constructively support staff under stress.

By the end of the five units, the SLT will have the cornerstones to establish a wellbeing forum to sustain whole-school wellbeing and engagement.

Participants will:

* investigate and understand stress
* recognise what triggers stress
* consider the working environment in your school
* consider the wellbeing ethos
* evaluate what has recently changed (for better or worse)
* consider what measures there are already in place to anticipate and reduce apparent, potential and genuine stress levels in your staff.

**Participants**

This unit is for the senior leadership team. However, you may choose to include members of middle leadership to participate in discussion depending on the size of your school and the need and desire for improved wellbeing provision. You know your team best and you will know the best people to support this wellbeing initiative in your school.

**How this fits in with whole-school improvement**

* Raising the quality of teaching and learning.
* Increasing emotional literacy within the whole-school community.
* Developing a professional, reflective, mindful and well staff.
* Cultivating a wellbeing school culture which promotes flourishing in all its aspects.

**Resources**

* PowerPoint presentation for Unit 1
* Sticky notes (preferably five different colours)
* Flipchart or portable whiteboard sheets and markers
* Audio equipment with speakers
* Audio 1.1: Creating a whole-school wellbeing vision
* Audio 1.2: Exposing your current reality
* Audio 1.3: Building a bridge to the wellbeing vision
* Colouring pens
* Handout 1.1: Pictures of vision, current reality, bridge
* Handout 1.2: My Stressometer
* Handout 1.3: Text codes for wellbeing buddies
* Handout 1.4: Stressors questionnaire
* Digital camera to record outcomes
* Diaries for date of next meeting
* Video clip 1.1: A Leader’s Perspective

**Timing**

This unit is designed to take 90 minutes. Depending on the size of your staff and their level of interaction, you may need some flexibility and feel you want to add a little extra time, say to two hours. Whatever you decide on the timing, keep to it. Finish at the time you announce to the group.

The start of the academic year or the beginning of a new term is a great time to embark on this topic as staff are in their most receptive state.

**Rationale and background**

*Leadership is not about titles, positions or flowcharts. It is about one life influencing another.*

John C Maxwell

Unit 1 provides the headteacher and SLT with an opportunity to reflect on:

* their personal levels of stress,
* their stressors
* and their management of them.

Leading by example is the best way to encourage ‘buy-in’ from staff. It provides skills to develop personal and professional wellbeing strategies. The SLT must be in the best state to lead; great leaders listen, are compassionate and communicate considerately. They understand how best to support staff to excel in school, perform to high standards and engage effectively. The relationship between the SLT and staff can make or break achievement.

Honesty, humility and sensitive communication are required if genuine wellbeing measures are to be effectively implemented and sustained. The headteacher and SLT play a pivotal role to guarantee a fit and flourishing workforce. Your leadership is crucial to the successful outcomes of the school, the achievement of the pupils and whether your staff excel.

**Step 1: Introduction (5 minutes)**

Thank your team for being part of this training for raising standards. Acknowledge the value of their input and ask them to be as honest as possible so that an authentic understanding of stress in school can be revealed.

Acknowledge that everyone is unique and that each participant will have individual responses to the concepts about to be discussed.

Reassure them that all viewpoints are important and welcome. Emphasise that the programme is about finding ways of leading and developing a whole-school ethos that works specifically for your school. Briefly outline from **slide 3** the five-unit training and its purpose.

**Step 2: Importance of wellbeing (20 minutes)**

This task is designed to measure the SLT’s perception about wellbeing and engagement in school. Healthy attitudes towards this training are fundamental to improving staff wellbeing and increasing excellence in the classroom.

Distribute 25 sticky notes to each group. Ask groups to agree their top reasons (no more than five) for each question. Write each on a sticky note.

Using a flipchart or whiteboard, create the table shown in **slide 4**. Have this prepared. Ask each group to place their sticky notes in priority order (most important at the top) on the appropriate flipchart columns.

Each group must communicate their findings, then open the discussion to the whole group. Debate whether any sticky notes should be moved up or down. Assess any correlations between findings.

**A genuine problem**: give time for participants to read the statistics on **slide 5**. Invite responses. Are they surprised? Ask the group if they now feel more motivated and clearer about embarking on the wellbeing training.

**Step 3: Defining stress (10 minutes)**

Explain the importance for leaders to reflect on their own stress:

* what triggers them,
* how their body reacts,
* what happens to their mental and emotional capacity to cope when stressed
* and how they manage it.

Clarify the importance of self-inquiry to develop self-regulation. Your aim is to develop their social and emotional literacy and help them appreciate the needs of staff.

Invite participants to pair up and discuss each question on **slide 6**. Invite each pair to feed back to the group. Write key findings on the flipchart.

**Step 4: School vision (15 minutes)**

There are three exercises in this section.

1. Vision: ‘where we’d like to be’.
2. Reality: ‘where we are right now’.
3. Bridge: ‘what we need to do to bridge the gap’.

Play **Audio 1.1: Creating a whole-school wellbeing vision** which is a brief guided visualisation to encourage participants to relax and think creatively about their wellbeing ethos.

As a pair, either draw a picture or verbalise the vision. Invite participants to share their vision with the group, describing what it means to them and what wellbeing ethos they’d love to establish. Note findings on a flipchart.

Distribute **Handout 1.1: Pictures of vision, current reality, bridge** as an example if required. See also **slide 7**.

This type of exercise may be new to participants and may trigger resistance. Reassure them that the ‘eyes closed’ exercise aims to draw from the right hemisphere of the brain and encourage creative problem solving. There is no ‘right’ way, so encourage them to have fun!

**Step 5: Reality and vision (30 minutes)**

Play **Audio 1.2: Exposing your current reality**. Repeat the exercise in the same pairs, this time focusing on the reality of your school wellbeing. Invite feedback from each pair after the exercise. Ask what they believe prevents the school from ‘flourishing’ and take notes on the flipchart.

Play **Audio 1.3: Building a bridge to the wellbeing vision**. Repeat the exercise in the same pairs, this time focusing on the bridge. Discuss the possible steps your school can take to move closer to its vision (being informed from the creative visualisation). Invite feedback from each pair after the exercise. Conclude with an overview of SLT vision, current reality and the action steps towards the wellbeing vision.

Play **Video clip 1.1: A Leader’s Perspective**. Ask participants to consider what they have learned from hearing about the work done at Eagle House School. Are there any strategies that they could adopt from Eagle House which would contribute to their vision? In particular did they notice how important it was for the school leaders to be actively involved in looking after their own wellbeing?

**Step 6: Plenary (10 minutes)**

The purpose of this plenary is for the SLT to reflect on the unit, its personal value and value for the senior leaders as a team, their whole-school approach and how best to follow up the unit (**slide 8**).

Take photographs of all flipcharts from this unit and all subsequent units so that the information and ideas can be referred to at a later date and used in further discussion, specifically in future planning and within the wellbeing forum.

**What’s next?**

Invite the participants to spend a quiet moment reflecting on the unit and answer the questions on **slide 8**. Invite each participant to share one area they have found useful.

You can follow up this unit by…

* asking participants to pair up into wellbeing buddies. Explain that this simply involves ‘checking in’ with each other – ensuring they are OK, are taking care of themselves, eating, drinking, resting, etc. They can also be a practical supporter – agreeing to meet for a stroll outside for some fresh air, having a chat to let off steam, offer and receive advice and be accountable to each other regarding their wellbeing. This is not meant to be onerous or seen as one more duty; rather it is an informal support mechanism to help the SLT feel supported and cared for without the need for formal intervention.

Give participants **Handout 1.2: My Stressometer, Handout 1.3: Text codes for wellbeing**

**buddies** and **Handout 1.4: Stressors questionnaire** (for Unit 2).

Invite participants to keep a personal record of stressors, stress levels, when and where these took

place, how they felt, whether they reacted or responded. Rate each situation on the Stressometer

scale (1 not stressful to 10 stressed out!).

Suggest the wellbeing buddy pairs meet up casually, at least once a week to ‘check in’ with each other. A daily text would also be an encouraging wellbeing initiative. To avoid this being time consuming, suggested codes are on **Handout 1.3**. Ask participants to answer the stressors questionnaire prior to Unit 2.

**Alternative/additional development activity**

Invite your team to embark on a visual wellbeing audit around the school. Their task is to raise

their awareness of where healthy and unhealthy responses to stressful situations occur.

Ask them to observe the staff, the times of day where there seems to be heightened stress for staff and where these take place. This can be done in a formal or informal manner.

This task is primarily set to heighten awareness of possible and actual triggers and whether the environment eases or exacerbates this (such as small busy corridors, no thoroughfare, slamming doors, etc). The SLT can use the Stressometer on **Handout 1.2** to keep a record for feedback next unit.

**What’s changed?**

Evaluate the impact of the unit. Participants may prefer to assimilate the learning before evaluating it, so ask if they wish to complete an evaluation sheet only if it’s meaningful to the team. This will be as much for their self-development as for the professional development of the school. This is not essential and will be done in depth at the conclusion of the entire training.

The true significance of Unit 1 will be revealed at the beginning of Unit 2. This will examine the practical changes the SLT have implemented in the time between units and how their attitude and behaviour have changed (albeit in very small ways) as their awareness has grown.

Before closing:

* Ensure everyone has a wellbeing buddy.
* Set date and time for next training.
* Thank your team for their participation, their willingness to address this potentially exposing issue and for the value their support brings to you and the school.

**Further reading**

Lovewell K, Every Teacher Matters, Ecademy Press, 2012

Richards M, Stress Pocketbook, Management Pocketbooks, 2009

Sinek S, Start with Why, Penguin, 2011