**Course: Promoting staff wellbeing**

**Unit 4: Solution strategies**

**Overview**

**Aims and outcomes**

This unit creates an opportunity for staff to empower themselves and their colleagues with practical wellbeing strategies that will support them personally and professionally. Whole-staff inclusion provides staff with a chance to air challenges and grievances in a supportive and solution-focused environment.

Participants will:

* unearth the underlying problems that trigger stress in the school
* assess the coping strategies already in place
* explore alternative wellbeing strategies
* investigate ‘Unfreakability’ and what that looks like in a teacher
* discover the secrets of Power breathing.

**Participants**

This unit is for all staff. It serves to improve engagement, develop inclusion and empower all staff to participate in planning healthy and supportive wellbeing structures within the school. It helps raise awareness as to what can be changed to improve staff experiences and what they can do to prevent stress arising or escalating.

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

* Developing whole-school wellbeing.
* Improving teaching and learning.
* Cultivating professional decision making.

**Resources**

* PowerPoint presentation for Unit 4
* A1 paper or whiteboard sheets
* Coloured markers

Or

* Whiteboard sheets and whiteboard markers
* Handout 1.3: Text codes for wellbeing buddies
* Handout 4.1: Making changes
* Handout 4.2: Simple actions steps
* Digital camera to record outcomes
* Diaries for date of next meeting
* Audio 4.1: The Power Breath
* Video clip 4.1: The Teachers’ Perspective

**Timing**

This training unit is designed to take 90 minutes.

**Rationale and background**

Due to the nature of school assessing, teaching evaluation and incessant measuring, teachers often experience strong feelings of powerlessness and feel ignored, not listened to and therefore feel disrespected as a profession. This unit attempts to readdress the balance.

All staff enjoy recognition and like to feel their opinion counts. Everyone likes to be heard and appreciates a pat on the back for hard work and a job well done. This unit offers a rare opportunity for fresh conversations to be shared and for individual voices to contribute to a new paradigm: whole-school wellbeing.

This unit offers staff a constructive space to address the issues that potentially prevent teachers from being well and staying well. It opens important dialogue between the SLT and other staff members by dissolving the perceived (and actual) hierarchy in the school as personal wellbeing issues are explored. It serves as a strong launch pad for setting up a wellbeing forum, creating or reviewing the school wellbeing policy and improving emotional loyalty for the school, which ultimately improves teacher delivery. By clarifying what might be stopping staff from being proactive in their self-care, the SLT can support themselves and their staff by encouraging healthy initiatives to develop flourishing teachers.

It is imperative that teachers are resourced with practical internal skills that can support them before, during and after a lesson. The Power Breath technique is one such skill that can empower the individual to self-regulate even under the most trying of circumstances.

**Step 1: Introduction and review (30 minutes)**

Introduce the action-packed, solution-focused unit. The main objective is to establish some healthy, practical wellbeing strategies that are easy to implement and sustain. Begin by inviting participants to share a one-minute WIFLE (What I Feel Like Expressing…), as on **slide 2**, to release any stress or tension. Encourage them to get everything off their chest so that they are free to enjoy the unit.

Invite participants to divide themselves into small groups of up to six (depending on the group’s size). Invite each group to mind map answers to the four questions on **slide 3**. Have one mind map per question.

Take five minutes to answer each question, and after 20 minutes, invite one member of each group to feed back their thoughts. Amalgamate group feedback into four master maps. This will help the SLT and the wellbeing forum (if your school decides to set one up) to make wellbeing decisions in the future.

Mind map headings:

1. Biggest problems causing stress
2. Coping strategies
3. Healthy strategies to help ourselves as individuals
4. Healthy strategies for excellence in the classroom.

**Step 2: Unfreakability (20 minutes)**

Invite the whole group to close their eyes and imagine what an unfreakable teacher looks like. Ask them to visualise their body language, facial expression, vocal intonation and volume, attire and presence. Invite them to open their eyes and give them each a sticky note to write their key words for the unfreakable teacher.

Ask a volunteer to stand at the front of the room as the unfreakable teacher ‘model’. Ask participants to mould the model into the unfreakable teacher using body language gestures, such as

* standing upright,
* centred,
* equally weighted,
* smile on face,
* arms open,
* palm facing up,
* happy eyes,
* frown-free.

Ask participants to call out the qualities of the teacher. Write these on a flipchart.

Discuss present moment awareness (**slide 4**). Open comments from the floor.

**Step 3: Breathing control (25 minutes)**

Invite participants to exchange ideas on what they can do differently to support themselves personally and professionally (mind, body and heart, as on **slide 5**).

Explain to participants that breathing affects all 11 systems of the body including

* respiratory,
* cardiovascular,
* urinary,
* muscular,
* digestive
* and nervous systems.

It is one of the few mechanisms in the body that is both unconsciously and consciously controlled (see **slide 6**). Describe to participants how their breathing changes unconsciously when they are under stress. They will either breathe in the upper thorax (chest) with short, fast shallow breathing or they will hold their breath. Ask them if they are aware which category they fall into.

The following exercise is to help increase oxygen to the whole body, including the brain, by moving the diaphragm to increase lower lung capacity. Many will have done this before, either in a yoga or singing class. Remind them that they can lower their heart rate when under pressure and regulate blood pressure and thus feel calmer simply by taking charge of their breathing.

Ask them to get comfortable (they can lie down if they want to, space permitting). If sitting, invite them to sit up in their seats, so their back is supported.

Play **Audio 4.1: The Power Breath**. As trainer you can participate in this. If there is resistance to this exercise, acknowledge that it is an unusual request and if they would rather not participate, invite them to simply listen and sit quietly until the exercise is finished.

When complete, ask how participants are now feeling. Ask for one word answers only, such as calm, quiet, relaxed, happy, still, peaceful, etc. Record the benefits of mindful breathing.

Invite the group to note the three breathing secrets on **slide 7** and spend time practising them at home and at school. These can also be incorporated into lessons, especially for primary and secondary drama, dance and music pupils and stressed sixth formers!

**Step 4: Meaningful change and plenary (15 minutes)**

Invite staff to consider ONE thing they would like to do to improve their wellbeing in each category: mind, body and heart as on **Handout 4.1: Making changes**. Ask them to take this away and reflect on what they can do to help themselves. Introduce the wellbeing buddy system and encourage staff to buddy up, support each other and hold their buddy accountable.

Share **Handout 1.3: Text codes for wellbeing buddies** as one idea to raise awareness and support that is easy and quick.

**Plenary**

The purpose of this plenary is for the whole staff to reflect on the unit, what they have learned about themselves, wellbeing strategies and their ability to address stress through the Power Breath. Give them a few moments to share with a partner and then group-share the benefits of participating in the unit. Remember to take photographs of all flipcharts from this unit for future planning.

Play **Video clip 4.1: The Teachers’ Perspective**. Ask participants to watch the video and consider the strategies described by staff at Eagle House School. In particular ask them to listen for the benefits that staff have experienced as a result of their work on wellbeing.

**What’s next?**

Buddy up with a wellbeing buddy. 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 teachers feel supported and cared for without the need for formal intervention.

Take away **Handout 4.1: Making changes**, and contemplate their next steps and what might stop

them.

You can follow up this unit by…

* implementing **Handout 4.2: Simple actions steps**
* distributing **Audio 4.1: The Power Breath** for staff to practise.

**Alternative/additional development activity**

Explore the possibility of setting up a wellbeing forum. One member of the SLT to lead this if the SLT

wish to build on the foundations laid in this training.

**What’s changed?**

Evaluate the impact of the training unit. Ask participants to complete the evaluation form if

appropriate or simply discuss the progress they are making.

Before closing:

* Set date and time for next training. Suggest a two-week interval.
* Thank your team for their full participation.

**Further reading**

Glenville M, Fat Around the Middle, Kyle Cathie, 2006

Zinn JK, Full Catastrophe Living, Piatkus, 2001

Thich Naht Hahn, Peace is Every Step, Rider, 1991