Lesson Plans to Support Emotional Well-Being

Introduction
This booklet contains several lesson plans to introduce the concept of stress, mental health and emotional well-being to young adolescents. The guide has been created for use within 45 minute lessons although teachers are free to adapt this to better suit their teaching style and time-frame.

These lesson plans have been created in conjunction with the online secure web portal What’s-Up. The What’s-Up web portal has been specifically designed to support young people to manage stress and foster emotional well-being.

Further information about the What’s-Up portal is included at the end of this lesson plan and provides guidance on using the web portal.

Quick Start Guide
1. Obtain access code from your school administrator
2. Get all students access to a computer or tablet with sound (ideally headphones).
3. Web address (https://whats-up.meganexus.com)
4. Explain that the portal is entirely confidential
5. Get students to:
   a. Sign in or
   b. Sign-up

If they do not enter an email address, they will not be able to reset their password at a later date if they forget it.
Desired Learning Outcomes

By the end of these sessions young people should:

- Have an understanding of the terms ‘mental health’ and ‘emotional wellbeing’.
- Have an understanding of what stress is and the different ways that people experience stress.
- Understand how thoughts, feelings and actions link together to impact on stress levels.
- Some ideas and strategies for dealing with stress.
- An understanding of how to use the What’s-Up website for further information and support for dealing with stress.
- An understanding of how to access the interactive section of What’s-Up to self-manage stress.

Main Resources

1. What’s-Up website (https://whats-up.meganexus.com)
2. Activity worksheets
3. What’s-Up user guide

Getting Started

- Ask all students to sign up (see 5.2) and log in (see 5.3) to the What’s-Up portal
- Ensure YouTube clips are not blocked within the school network or gain access to these clips in advance (e.g., save the clips on to the school network).
Lesson 1 – Understanding Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

Time: 45 minutes

What you will need: Computer access for each student, A3/A2 sheet of paper and scissors.

Aim(s): To encourage young people to think about the concept of emotional wellbeing, what this means to them and ways of promoting positive emotional wellbeing.

Activity 1

Activity: Split the class into groups of 4/5. Hand each group a large sheet of paper and ask them to create a brainstorm based on their understanding of the term ‘mental health’. Allow 5 minutes for this and then ask each group to feedback to the class.

Many young people may refer to slang words and stereotypes when discussing mental health and may also refer to specific mental illnesses.

Explain: There are many differences between mental health and suffering from a mental illness. Everyone needs to take care of their mental health, in the same way that people need to take care of their physical health. Mental health is about being emotionally ‘healthy’ and does not always refer to someone with a mental ‘illness’.

Discussion: refer back to some of the stereotypes and slang words used to describe mental health. How might these terms affect someone with mental health problems? Are certain people more prone to mental health problems? Why is there such stigma associated with the term ‘mental health’?

Activity 2

Explain: Explain to the class that the school are using a new website which has been created to help young people deal with stress.

Activity: Make sure that each student is seated at their own computer. Referring back to the sign up instructions given on page 1, instruct the class to find the website (https://whats-up.meganexus.com) and sign up.

Give the class a brief overview of the different areas of the portal and how these might be useful (see the guide for introducing What’s-Up). Allow approximately 10-15 minutes for them to explore the different areas, allowing a further 5 minutes for any questions or concerns.
Lesson 2 – Understanding Stress

Time: 45 minutes

What you will need: Worksheet 1, juggling balls.

Aim(s):

- To provide students with an overview of stress, what it means to different people and how different people cope with it.
- To introduce young people to the What’s-Up interactive portal and the content areas dedicated to exploring stress in more detail.

Getting Started

Guide students through the What’s-Up ‘stress’ area (see 6.2 in the full guide for details of how to do this).

Allow them approximately 10-15 minutes to look at all of the information contained within this area and provide them with the opportunity to ask questions about what they have read.

Activity 1

Explain: Stress is a very general word used to describe lots of different feelings and is something that can be experienced by everyone, at any time and for lots of different reasons. Sometimes a little bit of stress can be useful but at other times it can make people feel worse and can also prevent them from doing certain things.

Discussion: Ask the class to form small groups to think about different causes of stress. Allow 2 minutes and then ask them to feedback to the class.

Activity 2 – See Worksheet 1

Explain: Emotional well-being can be a bit like juggling. When we catch the balls life is normal, when we keep them in the air for a longer period of time life is going well and sometimes we drop the balls when life is not going so well (demonstrate if possible). By taking simple steps to look after our emotional health, in the same way we would our physical health, we can help ourselves to feel better and cope with potential stress.

Activity: Cut out the list of positive and negative statements (see worksheet 1) and hand them out to small groups of 4/5 students. Ask each group to consider which statements might have a positive and negative impact on emotional health by dividing them into categories.
Activity 3 – See Worksheet 2

**Explain:** Stress circles can be used to explore underlying causes of stress and anxiety by breaking down someone’s response to stress into thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Negative thoughts often lead to negative feelings and unhelpful behaviours whereas positive thoughts can lead people to feel happy and content and therefore behave in a positive way.

**Teaching Tip:** Before asking them to create their own stress circle, provide the class with an example to illustrate the link between thoughts, feelings and actions.

You might want to create your own example or use the one provided below:

![Stress circle diagram]

**Activity:** Provide the class with worksheet 2 and ask them to make up their own stress circle for the young person discussed.
**Worksheet 1**

**Activity:** Read each statement carefully and think about how each one might have an impact on emotional wellbeing. Divide the statements into categories; one for all statements which have a positive influence and one for statements which have a negative influence.

### Positive Influences on Emotional Wellbeing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Influences on Emotional Wellbeing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Receiving recognition for your effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having hobbies and interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making new friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling understood by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting good exam results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having lots of friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having self-respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing what makes you feel good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a supportive family</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowing when to ask for help</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Negative Influences on Emotional Wellbeing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Influences on Emotional Wellbeing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The death of a family member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam stress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling like you don’t fit in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibling rivalry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling worthless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents arguing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having no one to talk to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having no hobbies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Worksheet 2

Stress

Activity: Read Sarina’s story below. Think about the feelings she might be experiencing and some of the thoughts that might be triggering these feelings. How are these affecting the way she behaves? Imagine you are in Sarina’s position. Think of at least one thought, one feeling and one behaviour and complete the stress circle below. See 6.1 for full details.

Sarina is 13. She has always achieved high grades at school, is the captain of the netball team and learns music in her spare time. She lives with her parents who are very proud of her and encourage her to do well. She also lives with her brother who thinks she is too uptight. In the past few months Sarina has started to dread going to school and is falling behind in her work. Exams are now two months away and Sarina is getting more and more stressed. She has stopped seeing her friends to concentrate on revision.

Discuss: Once the class have created Sarina’s stress circle ask them to feedback some of their ideas for the different stages. Ask them to think about ways that Sarina might work to break down the stress circle they have created by tackling particular thoughts or feelings before these affect her behaviour.

Teaching tip: As this is the first time that you are introducing the concept of a stress circle, it may be difficult for the class to know how to break it down to prevent behaviour from escalating. If they struggle with this you might want to explain that you will be learning more about thoughts, feelings and behaviour in future sessions and will revisit Sarina’s stress circle at the end of the sessions and hopefully by then they will have a better understanding of how each area contributes to stress.
Lesson 3 – Understanding Thoughts

Time: 45 minutes

What you will need: Worksheet 3

Aim(s):

- To encourage young people to think about the importance of thoughts in intensifying stress.
- To explore a range of thinking errors which trigger negative thoughts.
- To explore the benefits of positive thinking styles.

Getting Started

Guide students through the What’s-Up ‘thoughts’ area (see 6.3 in the full guide for details of how to do this).

Allow them approximately 10-15 minutes to look at all of the information contained within this area and provide them with the opportunity to ask questions about what they have read.

Activity 1

Explain: We all have thoughts; some good and some bad but it is when our negative thoughts overtake the positive ones and we begin to have them too often that we may begin to feel stressed or worried.

There are lots of different reasons behind negative thoughts:

Core beliefs – these are common and rigid thoughts that people often hold about themselves, other people and the world around them. These may be positive in nature but they can also be negative and unhelpful.

Teaching tip: Provide the class with some examples of positive core beliefs...

Discussion: Ask the class to come up with some other core beliefs. Encourage a mixture of positive and negative core beliefs.
**Activity 2**

**Thinking errors** – these occur when people only think in a negative way, use all or nothing thinking, magnify negative events and predict failure. Thinking errors can be common in people with low self-esteem and little confidence as they may be prone to blaming themselves for all negative events that occur in their life, regardless of whether or not they were actually to blame.

**Teaching tip:** Provide the class with some examples of thinking errors...

![Example of thinking errors]

**Discussion:** Ask the class to provide some more examples of thinking errors.

**Activity 3 – See Worksheet 3**

**Activity:** Provide the class with an activity sheet (see worksheet 3). Ask them to look at the people in each picture and write a list of three thoughts they think they may have about themselves in each situation.

**Discussion:** Have a brief discussion about this and make any corrections where students provide examples of feelings rather than thoughts.

**Activity 4**

**Explain:** Balanced thinking occurs when we actively challenge negative thoughts. It is a way of exploring the evidence for and against a particular thought, allowing us to confirm or disprove it. This encourages us to take a more balanced view on the world around us and eventually leads us to change persistent negative thoughts into more positive and helpful thoughts.

**Activity:** Encourage the class to take part in balanced thinking exercises every time they experience negative thoughts. Ask them to write down the evidence for and against the negative thought. Were they really to blame for the negative thought? Perhaps run the thought past a friend to see if they would feel the same in that situation.

![Example of balanced thinking]
Worksheet 3

Thoughts

Activity: Look at the people in the pictures below. Write a list of 3 thoughts that you think these people might have about themselves in these situations.
Lesson 4 – Understanding Feelings

**Time:** 45 minutes

**What you will need:** Worksheet 4

**Aims:**
- To explore different feelings associated with stress
- To understand how feelings can be triggered by negative thoughts
- To understand how feelings can have an impact on behaviour and further intensify stress.

**Getting Started**

Guide students through the What’s-Up ‘feelings’ area (see 6.5 in the full guide for details of how to do this).

Allow them approximately 10-15 minutes to look at all of the information contained within this area and provide them with the opportunity to ask questions about what they have read.

**Activity 1**

**Explain:** Learning to identify different feelings is really important in understanding how to control them. Three of the most common and unpleasant feelings are stress, unhappiness and anger. Unpleasant feelings don’t normally occur alone; they are often the result of negative thoughts.

**Teaching Tip:** Provide the class with some examples of negative thoughts which shape negative feelings...

- I’ve got no friends ➔ Sad
- I can never find anything that looks good on me ➔ Angry
- I just can’t keep up with my work ➔ Stressed

**Discussion:** Can they think of any of their own Thought ➔ Feeling combinations?

**Activity 2 – See Worksheet 4**

**Explain:** An important focus of the feelings part of the stress circle is ‘triggers’. Triggers might relate to a certain person, place, activity or thought.

**Activity:** Ask the class to look back at the feeling/s they created for Sarina’s stress circle on worksheet 2. Provide them with worksheet 4. They should imagine that they are in her position and are feeling this way. Think of some of the thoughts that Sarina might have to make her feel like this. After they have done this, ask them to compare their thoughts and feelings with a partner. Did they think of similar thoughts and feelings or were they very different?
Worksheet 4

Feelings

Activity: Look back at the feeling you created for Sarina’s stress circle. Imagine you are in her position and are feeling this way. Think of some of the thoughts that Sarina might have to make her feel like this. After you have done this, compare the thoughts and feelings you created with a partner. Did you think of similar thoughts and feelings or were they very different?

Because I think...

I feel........................................................................................................................................

Worksheet 4

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Lesson 5 – Understanding Actions

Time: 45 minutes

What you will need: Access to the YouTube videos within the ‘de-stress’ page on the What’s-Up portal.

Aims:
- To explore different negative behaviours associated with stress.
- To explore different coping strategies for dealing with stressful situations.
- To encourage young people to develop their own personal coping styles to deal with stress.

Getting Started

Guide students through the What’s-Up ‘feelings’ area (see 6.5 in the full guide for details of how to do this).

Allow them approximately 10-15 minutes to look at all of the information contained within this area and provide them with the opportunity to ask questions about what they have read.

Activity 1

Explain: Often when people are feeling stressed or down, they may carry out certain behaviours in an attempt to reduce stress and to make themselves feel better. We might avoid situations, withdraw to a place of safety or comfort, or stop doing certain things altogether.

Discussion: Ask the class to discuss this topic in pairs. Can they think of a time when they coped with a stressful event using a negative coping strategy? If not, can they think of an example of when and how someone might act in a negative way to stress? Do they think this is helpful or unhelpful? Why?

Activity 2

Explain: Different people often use different coping strategies to manage stress, depending on the activities they like to do to relax.

Ask the class to watch the ‘healthy stress relief for teens’ YouTube video which can be found within the ‘de-stress’ area of the stress page on the What’s-Up website.

Activity: Encourage the class to make a list of some activities that they like to do or would like to try. Ask them to pick one from the list and try to do that activity next time they feel stressed.

Teaching Tip: You might want to suggest that they create their own stress circle by recording their thoughts, feelings and actions as well as the technique they used to manage their issue and whether or not they found this to be successful. Recording their experiences with different techniques can help them to explore which techniques work best for managing stressful times.
Lesson 6

Accessing the Interactive Section and Plenary Session

Time: 45 minutes

What you will need: Access to the interactive areas of the portal (all young people will need their username and password to facilitate this).

Aims:
- To explore the different activities within the interactive section of What’s-Up.
- To develop an understanding of the different functions of these activities and the potential benefits.
- To encourage young people to take part in self-management of stress.
- To gain feedback on what young people have learnt about emotional wellbeing, stress and using What’s-Up to self-manage any emotional or behavioural issues.

Getting Started

Guide students through the interactive areas (see 4.2 in the full guide for details on how to do this).

Explain: As they will have already learnt in previous lessons, stress forms a normal part of life for many people and different people experience different levels of stress at different times. If young people are feeling stressed or worried it always helps to reflect on their feelings, either privately or with someone they trust, in order to help them to uncover the root of their difficulties and ways of dealing with them.

The What’s-Up interactive section can be really useful to young people who are feeling stressed and would like to take some time out to think about their feelings. There are lots of different activities which help to explore their feelings and also activities which encourage young people to de-stress and relax.

Activity: allow 10-15 minutes for them to explore the different areas and encourage them to take part in the activities.

Activity 1

Explain: there is often a stigma associated with people who suffer from mental health problems and an assumption that celebrities are always ‘perfect’, living stress-free lives. Anyone is prone to feeling stressed regardless of age, gender, ethnicity or upbringing.

Activity: Split the class into groups of 4/5 and ask each group to watch a different celebrity story clip, found under the ‘celebrity stories’ heading. Ask each group member to watch the video individually and then encourage each group to come together to discuss their thoughts.

Discussion: What did you think about what each celebrity said? Were you surprised by their story? If yes, what was surprising? Do you think that hearing from celebrities who have suffered from mental health problems could be helpful to young people? Why?
Plenary

At the end of the interactive session you should encourage the class to draw together everything they have learnt about emotional wellbeing, stress and using What’s-Up as a form of self-management.

Discussion:

What have they learnt about the links between thoughts, feelings and actions in creating and managing stress?

- You may want students to explain how the link between thoughts, feelings and action intensifies stress in less than 50 words/in under a minute.

- Ask students to volunteer which strategies or activities they will use to help them relieve stress in the future/make a list of the top three stress-busting strategies.

Activity: At this stage you might want to revisit the stress circles that the class created for Sarina in lesson 2. Ask them to think about how they might now break down her stress cycle now that they know a bit more about how thoughts, feelings and behaviour can be linked.

Have the sessions changed their perspective on emotional wellbeing and mental health problems? If so, how?

Have the sessions made young people more aware of how to deal with stress? Would they feel more confident now in approaching someone to talk about stress? Have the sessions allowed them to think about their own self-management techniques?

Do they feel that What’s-Up will be a useful tool to use in the future?

Summary: Encourage young people to visit the website as many times as they like, both in and outside of school. They may want to do this when they are feeling particularly stressed about something and want to unwind and de-stress or they may simply want some information and guidance on a particular issue. Everything they do on What’s-Up is completely confidential and no one else will know when or for what reason a young person has accessed the portal and they should therefore feel safe in doing so.

Extension Activity:

Create a poster to display around the school to highlight the importance of understanding the link between thoughts, feelings and actions in managing stress, and highlighting different stress-busting strategies.