 Defining Mental Health

It is increasingly important that children and young people understand mental health and what they can do to stay mentally healthy.

This short classroom activity introduces pupils to mental health and what they can do to support their mental health, and the mental health of those around them.

Please do adapt this task to best suit your pupils and your school.

Time

35 minutes + (but can be adjusted to suit)

Objectives

-To be able to explain what mental health is

-To begin to understand what they can do to support their own mental health

Materials

Drawing and writing materials for part three.

Part 1: Introduction – 5 minutes

All of us have mental health and, like our bodies, our minds can become unwell.

1 in 10 young people will experience a mental health problem. This includes depression, anxiety, eating disorders and bipolar disorder.

It’s important to talk about mental health and get help early if things don’t feel right, just like we would for our physical health.

No-one should feel ashamed about having a mental health problem, they wouldn’t if they had a broken leg!

Part 2: Discussion – 10 minutes

Just like it is important that we eat lots of fruit and vegetables, exercise regularly and drink lots of water to look after our body, it is important that we do things that strengthen our mental health to keep us completely happy and healthy!

Ask the class if they have any ideas of what they can do to make sure they stay mentally healthy.

If they’re struggling give them an example with some context e.g ‘If I have had a bad day then I always make sure I go out for a jog. It helps clear my head, I love being outside in the fresh air and exercise is a great way to boost your brain power.’

Write all of their suggestions on the white board, highlighting how different all of the suggestions are, and how much of a good thing that is!

Remind them that there are no rules to what can be good for their mental health – it is whatever makes them feel happy and safe. For one student positive thinking and mindfulness may work really well, whilst for another exercise might do the trick.

Other examples are:

* Talk about how you feel to trusted friends, family or tootoot!
* Eat well
* Sleep well – at least 8 hours!
* Be organised – get yourself ready for school the night before
* Think about one positive memory every day
* Spending time with friends and family

Part 3: Activity – 15 minutes

On a sheet of paper ask pupils to draw an outline of their hand.

On each finger they should write or draw an idea of ways they can look after their mental health (or the mental health of their friends and family!).

Encourage them to make their drawings look as colourful and attractive as possible! Once they are complete add them to a noticeboard around school as a great way to give other students ideas for ways they can look after their mental health.