

Staff Wellbeing

A Mini Toolkit - For Leaders in Early
Years Settings





Staff wellbeing

Managing wellbeing in the Early Years is a minefield!

Firstly, whose wellbeing are we talking about here? The children's? The parents? Maybe OFSTED or the owners? Or is it...no it couldn't be.... yours?!

In this mini toolkit we have tried and tested advice and guidance on supporting the wellbeing of your staff team..

As you know, OFSTED are big on this topic at the moment, they want to see how you are meeting the needs of your team, how do you supervise, appraise and develop them successfully?

Wellbeing is so much more than chocolates in the staff room or a night out bowling, staff wellbeing is not a gimmick it is a culture that needs to be lived and breathed by the people at the top. So, here are some fun and informative methods of getting it right.

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The Emotional Contract

When an employee begins to work with you they sign a contract, they agree to terms and conditions set out in writing, however, they also agree to an emotional contract, you both do. The emotional contract is the information you give them that is not in the formal contract, for example; “we encourage staff to go on as much training as possible.” Or “We are committed to supervision and personal development”

If this emotional contract is broken with the employee, then the level of trust, commitment and motivation is impacted negatively.

Think about emotional contracts you may have made in the past with employees? Do you always keep to them? If not what are the barriers that stop you?



The Emotional Bank Account

As we all know, when you work in the Early Years Sector no two days are the same so of course there are numerous barriers, staff are phoning in sick, little Millie needs her antibiotics, a parent is querying the most complicated bill in history and after-all you are only human. This is where the **Emotional Bank Account** comes into play. You know how a bank account works.. you pay money in it grows a little bit and then you take it out. An emotional bank account is the same.. Consider this scenario;

Sandra was due her supervision today but 2 staff called in sick meaning that you needed to cancel it. As a manager you weren't too worried as Sandra is such a reliable member of staff. That afternoon you need someone to stay on an extra hour until numbers decrease, Sandra offers to do this and stays for the extra hour. In this scenario, Sandra has made two deposits into the emotional bank account. Your role is to repay these as and when you can.....forget to do so and Sandra will stop depositing into the account altogether!



Making Emotional Deposits

So how can you repay those emotional deposits?

- Recognition and a thank you
- Cover Sandra so she can have time out of her room for administration
- Release Sandra early if possible one day
- Re-schedule the supervision as a priority...and maybe buy her a coffee to accompany it.

Get these simple things right and you will be on your way to creating a culture of support, appreciation and collaboration. I know what you might be thinking... What about that member of staff that continually takes out, out and out but never deposits in? Well there is always one...or two... but generally if the culture begins to shift this way then those people will be left behind. We will provide more details on this though in our future downloads;

- Managing staff
- Performance and competency
- Difficult conversations
- Conflict resolution



What's on Your Plate?

So, life being life has its up's, down's. sideways thrusts and rear end crashes...and when you're running a business in the early years, not only do you need to manage your own life events but take into account the life events of those in your team. Easier said than done I hear you cry! We like to think of it this way:

Everyone has a plate at a buffet, but, at this buffet, everyone has different sized plates and different sized appetites, but, generally speaking everyone can comfortably manage the food on their plate (Yum!)

One day Rob, your baby room manager, breaks up with his partner and all of a sudden Rob's big plate is replaced with a tiny plate but Rob still has to manage all of the same amount of food! Undoubtedly, Rob is about to drop it all over the floor into a big sausage roll conundrum.

A leader's responsibility here is about identifying that Rob's plate is about to shrink and distributing his responsibilities for a short while whilst he recovers - For more information on this see our downloads on;

- Team work
- Delegation
- Wellbeing



The Role of The Leader

Mental health is very much like Rob's scenario, we all have it, we all have different levels of coping and capacities but when a life event happens to us, all of a sudden, we can't always manage in exactly the same way as we did before. Not all staff will be comfortable telling you in good time that something has happened externally from work, in this case it may be that you only notice when their plate shrinks and they start dropping things...it is at this point you can be there to, not pry, but offer to relinquish responsibilities for a short while.

This recognition of a person's individual needs and valuing of their wellbeing will create a level of trust and commitment within your team. You will actively pay into their **'emotional bank account'**

If you would like to access documents to support you with this we will be releasing the following downloads in our full subscription bundle...

- Health and Wellbeing Policy
- Wellbeing Check in Document
- Health and wellbeing video training
- Health and wellbeing Live chat



Staff Meeting Activity

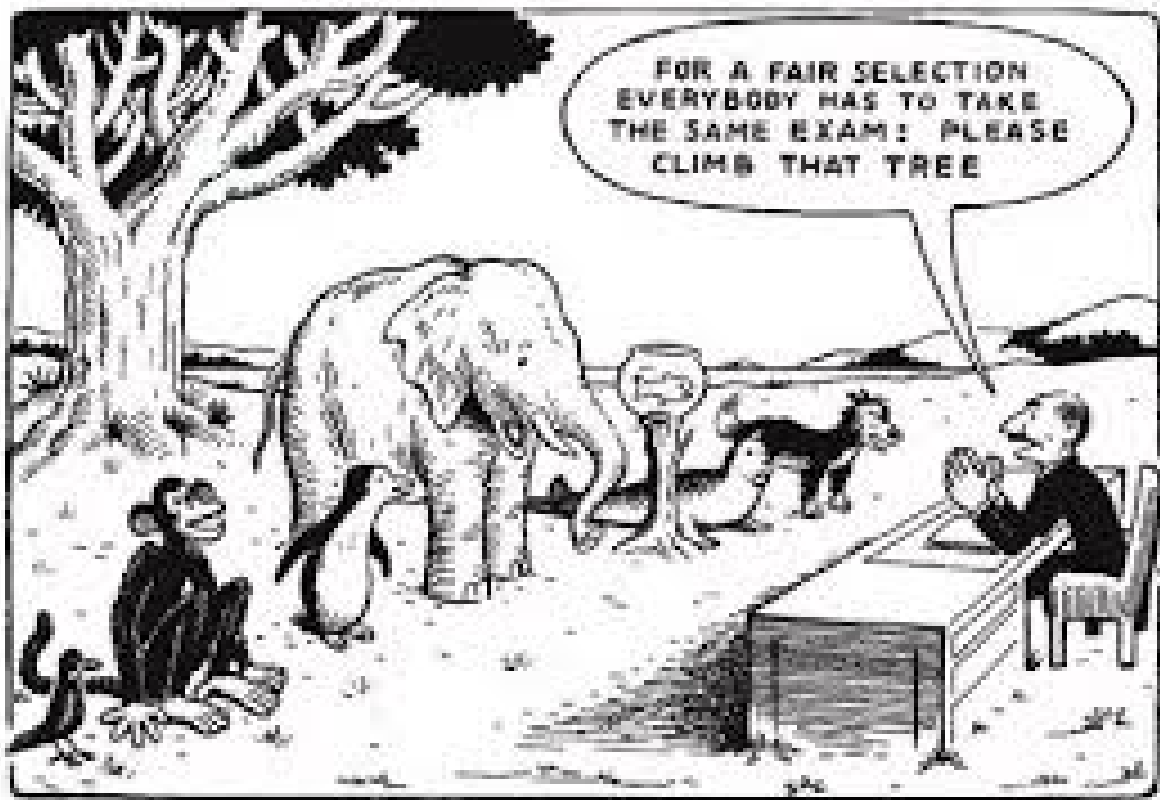
Resources

- Plates of all sizes (enough for 2 each)
- Pretend food

Don't give your team staff any idea about the activity but lay out the 'Buffet' and give them all a plate, some will have enormous plates and some tiny plates. Invite them to help themselves to the food. You will always get one or two with a big plate that will fill it up to bursting. At this point, tell them that something has happened and they can't keep their plate, ask them to distribute their food to a different plate (smaller if possible)

Tell them they have to keep all their food and watch as they drop it all over the floor. This opens the conversation for talking about our mental health and wellbeing, about how working as a team means picking up food from someone else's plate for a while.

Tried this activity? Share how it went on our [Facebook community page....](#)



The Skills in Your Team

Ever seen that social media cartoon of a monkey and a fish being told that the exam is to see who can climb the tree? We laugh, because we know, that children never have exactly the same skills and abilities as each other. That's why, in the early years we alter our approach depending on the need of the child in question. So, with this in mind, why do we suddenly expect grown up's to all be competent at the same things? If we want our staff to have the best possible motivation, dedication and engagement we need to be offering them something that they are passionate about, something they care about and something that they can do well. We play to their strengths, not become frustrated at their weaknesses.

A good example of this was when a staff member was asked to do the display board in the foyer. The manager felt they were giving responsibility and ownership which, of course, are good things, however, the staff member in question would openly admit that a hamster had more creativity in its little finger than she had in her whole body.... The result? A panicked and nervous staff member who phoned in sick to avoid the responsibility. ***Playing to strengths is a proven wellbeing tool, when someone feels worthwhile and confident their esteem is improved. They feel valued and like an essential member of the team. We all want to feel that way.***



Team Champions

Try allocating a task to a staff member that seems really disengaged. Think hard about what their strengths and interests are before you decide which task to allocate to them. What excites them, what are they really good at?

Watch their engagement in the task closely, do they seem more engaged?

Allocating team champions can be a great way to encourage staff engagement and really utilise the skills of your team. What interests or skills do your individual staff have that they could champion in your setting? Some ideas include:

- Creative play champion
- Outdoor learning champion
- Literacy champion
- Health and safety champion
- Parent engagement champion



Values And Behaviours

There is little more disengaging than working in an organisation who's values and/or behaviours don't align to your own. Some organisations spend thousands of pounds writing the perfect 'Values' but without living, breathing them and transferring them into real behaviours they are useless.

Perhaps you work for an organisation that already has agreed Values and Behaviours, or perhaps you are an independent site and have not yet decided. Either way make a note of what yours are, generally 4 key values is enough. Some examples include; Inspirational, creative, dedicated, caring, professional etc..

Your behaviours should now align directly with these values, you should live and breath them if you want to truly and honestly create a positive shared culture and vision.

It may be that you naturally lose staff along the way who can't align with the Values that you have set, however, the majority of your team will feel safe and nurtured in an environment where they know what to expect and they are secure in what is expected of them

For more support with this see out downloads on;

- Values and Behaviours
- Staff Development
- Staff Management



Staff Meeting Activity

When you have decided about your 4 key values write one each onto large flip chart paper and spread them around the room, each staff member should have a pen and some red and green post it notes. Explain to the team that you need them to be honest, resilient and open. Ask each team member to write a behaviour or an action that they feel represents this value on the green post it notes and a behaviour or action that is contrary to this value on the red post it and stick them onto the relevant values.

Here's an example:

One of your values is 'Creative' so on a green post it note I might write '*sharing new ideas at team meetings*', on a red post it I might write '*being unwilling to try new ideas*'.

Afterwards, share the examples and discuss how you want everyone to make a concerted effort to follow the values as much as we can. This activity will really get them considering their future behaviours.

For more information on embedding values check out our downloads on;

- Staff supervision and appraisal
- Staff motivation and engagement
- Branding your business
- Values, behaviours and competencies



Thirsty For More?

Early Years Leaders are in a unique sector balancing the demands of highly regulation and the needs of a diverse staff team.. It can get overwhelming. This is where The Key Leadership will help. The Key Leadership Premier Club is a community of early years leaders, here to support, guide and encourage each other, celebrating the little wins and finding solutions to the big challenges. We know how lonely it can be managing an early years setting, but you are never alone here.

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