

Supporting pupil mental health

April 2019



Tips from the Education community

Your tips for supporting pupil mental health

Each month, we share a question chosen and answered by you: the Education community! This month, we asked: **How do you support pupil mental health?**

According to a recent NHS report, 12.8 percent of 5 to 19-year-olds had at least one mental health disorder when assessed in 2017 – of these, 8.1 percent were affected by emotional disorders.

Young people's emotional wellbeing is just as important as their physical health, and schools play a vital role in supporting pupils' mental health, as good mental health allows pupils to develop resilience and grow into healthy adults.

If you're struggling to support pupil mental health in your school, or are just interested in learning more about how other schools have successfully promoted positive mental health, you'll find plenty of advice in our collection of good practice recommendations we received from schools across the country.

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Mindfulness and meditation

Mindfulness and meditation help to train pupils' attention to be more aware of what is currently happening, rather than worrying about what has happened or might happen. This allows pupils to respond more skilfully to what they face in the present moment. Several respondents told us that they encourage pupils to practise mindfulness and meditation in school.

What are the benefits?

- It can help pupils to recognise worry, manage difficulties, cope with exams, and appreciate what is going well.
- It trains pupils to understand and direct their attention with greater awareness and skill, improving their capacity to concentrate.
- It can help pupils to develop a greater awareness of relationships and how to manage them, and offers a better understanding of self-esteem and optimism.
- It allows pupils to manage impulsivity and reduces conflict and oppositional behaviour.



Teaching mindfulness and meditation to pupils can also benefit teachers in various ways, including stress regulation and reduction, increased self-compassion, and improved teaching methods.

TSB tip:

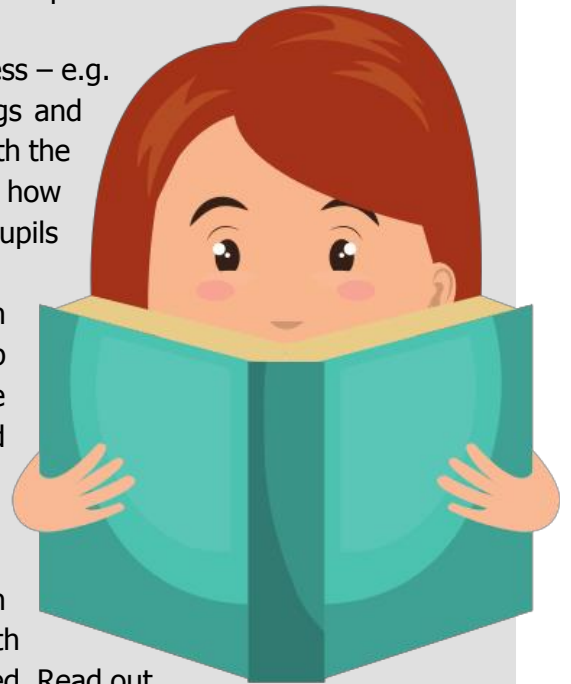
Integrating mental health into PSHE is a great way to get pupils talking and to reduce stigma!

The way you choose to implement mindfulness and meditation is up to you. Some schools choose to implement it as part of PSHE lessons or, alternatively, one respondent told us how they encourage pupils to practise both for five minutes at the start of each philosophy lesson.

How can I introduce mindfulness?

Get pupils to think about being mindful with some simple activities. We have outlined some examples below.

- Ask them to eat something enjoyable and then something unpleasant (such as raw onion), so they can focus on savouring the now and exploring discomfort.
- Encourage random acts of kindness to help pupils realise how important it is to support others and show appreciation for one another. You could ask them to open the door for someone, to write a thank you note to someone, help someone with their work or give someone a hug.
- Use books to initiate conversations about mindfulness – e.g. pupils can read 'The Snowman' by Raymond Briggs and be encouraged to reflect on the child's friendship with the snowman and how wonderful it was to see, but also how sad it might have felt as it couldn't last forever. Pupils can then be asked to relate this to their own lives.
- Ask pupils to keep a mood diary – this can encourage a higher degree of mindfulness and help them to understand different moods. It can also be an effective way of getting pupils to pinpoint and reflect on what triggers different feelings, helping them to recognise external stressors and find ways to cope with them.
- Use PE lessons – you can set up four cones, one in each corner of the room, and name them with different feelings, e.g. happy, sad, angry and worried. Read out different situations and ask pupils to run to the cone that reflects how they would feel in that situation – this encourages them to talk about emotions, why they feel the way they do and what strategies they can use to help others.
- Set up a wellbeing bingo – at the start of each week, give pupils a bingo sheet with different mindfulness activities on it, e.g. 'Read a book', or 'Spent time with a friend'. Pupils can keep the sheet for the week and the first one to cross them all off wins.



Try to get parents involved in your approach to mindfulness – consider running workshops for parents to help them realise how their own wellbeing affects that of their children.

Remember that, before you can expect pupils to be mindful, it is important that staff themselves are mindful. As with parents, you can run workshops or incorporate mindfulness activities into staff meetings, to help staff develop their own mindfulness and understand how this can impact on pupils.

Cognitive behaviour therapy

Lisa Whitworth, senior project lead at Sidmouth College, said that her school has evaluated the use of cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT). In her [report](#), Lisa concludes that CBT has a significant positive effect on wellbeing and attendance for pupils who have been identified as having poor behaviour, attendance, attitude to learning, and progress.

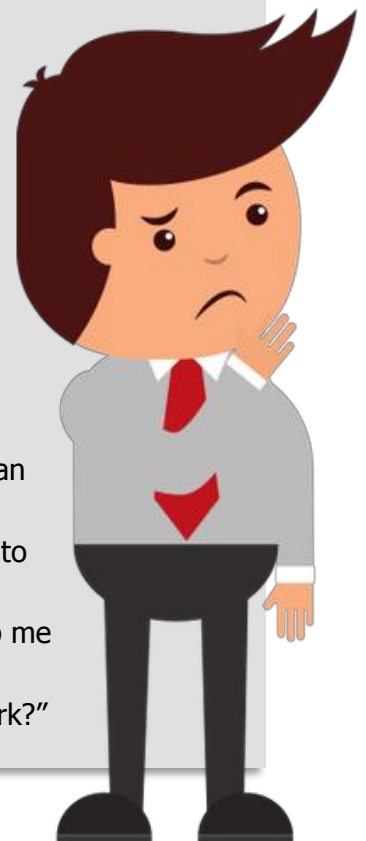
CBT is a talking therapy that can help pupils to manage their problems by changing the way they think and behave. It is based on the concept that an individual's thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and actions are interconnected, and that negative thoughts and feelings can leave a person trapped in a vicious cycle.

CBT aims to help people deal with overwhelming problems in positive ways, by breaking them down into smaller parts. It deals with current problems, rather than focussing on issues from the past. When CBT is delivered to pupils, it can reduce the symptoms of depression and anxiety. Consider implementing it as part of PSHE lessons, or if your school offers counselling to pupils, it can be used during these sessions too.

A CBT session with pupils should last around 30 minutes. Pupils should work with the session lead to break down problems into separate parts, such as thoughts, feelings and actions. They should be encouraged to work with the session lead to analyse the areas to determine the effect they have on each other and the pupil themselves. Once this has been considered, the session lead should help the pupil to work out how they can change negative thoughts and behaviours – the pupil should be encouraged to practise these changes as often as possible.

Use the examples below to get pupils to think about what they can say to themselves, to help with growth mindset and positive thinking.

- Instead of thinking: "I'm not good at this." Try thinking: "What am I missing?"
- Instead of thinking: "I'm amazing at this." Try thinking: "I'm on the right track."
- Instead of thinking: "I give up." Try thinking: "I'll use some of the strategies we have learned."
- Instead of thinking: "This is too hard." Try thinking: "This may take some time and effort."
- Instead of thinking: "I can't make this any better." Try thinking: "I can always improve, so I'll keep trying."
- Instead of thinking: "I just can't do maths." Try thinking: "I'm going to keep practising maths."
- Instead of thinking: "I made a mistake." Try thinking: "Mistakes help me to learn better."
- Instead of: "It's good enough." Try thinking: "Is it really my best work?"



Thrive programmes

Sharon Cashen, deputy headteacher at St Margaret's Church of England primary school, said that her school has implemented the Thrive programme to help support pupil mental health.

The Thrive programme supports pupils with their emotional health, wellbeing and social skills. It helps staff to adapt their approach to individual pupils to build self-esteem, wellbeing and behaviour. The programme offers practical strategies and techniques and is underpinned by online assessments which identify pupils' emotional development and provide action plans that match their individual needs.

There are many benefits associated with the programme:

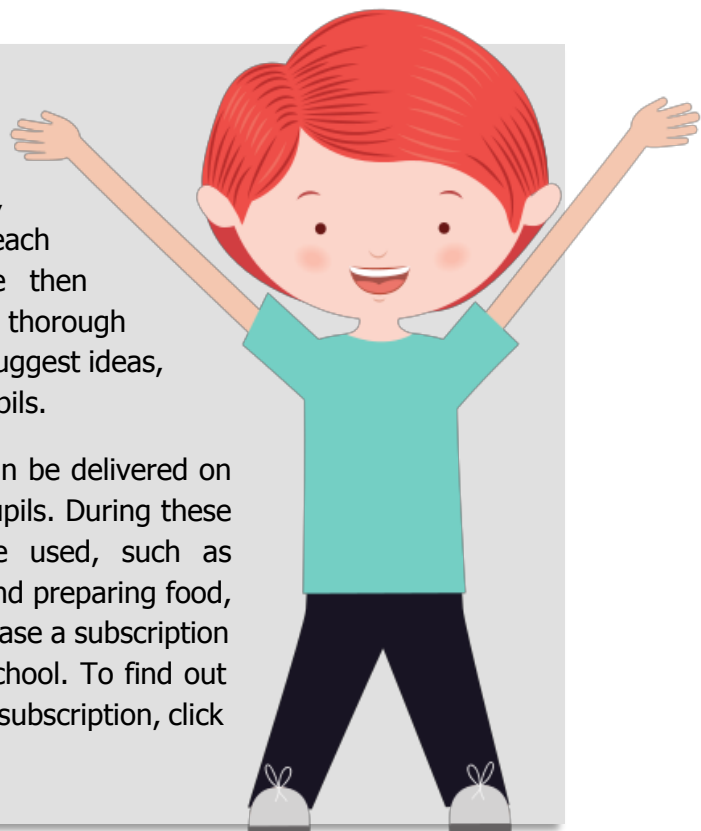
- For primary schools, it can help to improve pupils' engagement and behaviour, and help staff understand how to care for more vulnerable or challenging pupils.
- In secondary schools, it can help to improve pupils' attitudes to learning and attendance, and even reduce staff stress.
- If being used in alternative provision, the programme can help pupils who otherwise might not have the chance to thrive and succeed.

Pupils are likely to experience difficulties at least once during their time at school, e.g. difficulty making friends, getting into trouble at playtime, finding it hard to settle during lessons, or finding it difficult to manage strong feelings. These situations can lead to overwhelming feelings, including anger or sadness, which is where Thrive sessions are designed to help. Pupils are taught to manage their feelings and about strategies to support their learning at school.

How does it work?

The programme begins with computerised screening, where teachers answer a series of questions about each pupil in their class. The computer programme then identifies any pupils who would benefit from a more thorough assessment – the results from this assessment will suggest ideas, activities and strategies to support the individual pupils.

In primary schools, for example, Thrive sessions can be delivered on an individual basis or as part of a small group of pupils. During these sessions, a range of different activities can be used, such as storytelling, circle games, arts and crafts, cooking and preparing food, or role play and puppet work. You will need to purchase a subscription if you wish to implement the programme in your school. To find out more about the Thrive programme, or to purchase a subscription, click [here](#).



Mental health and wellbeing link governor

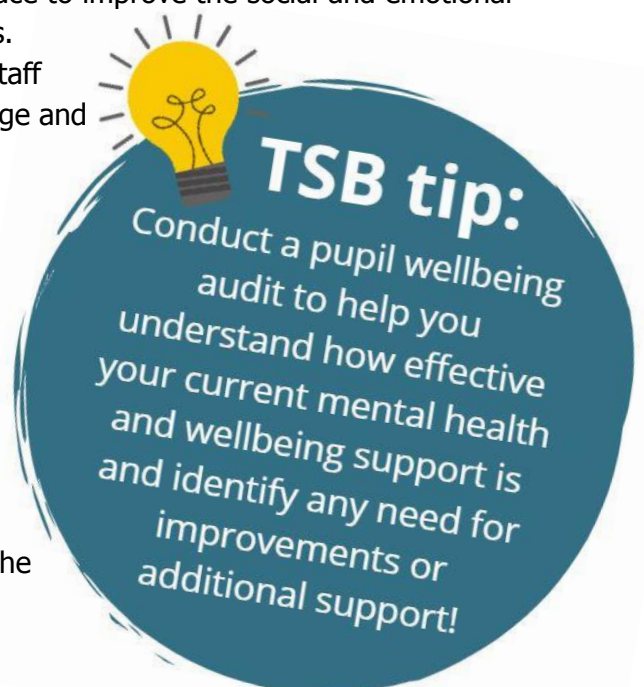
One school told us that, to effectively support pupil mental health, they have appointed a mental health and wellbeing link governor. This is a good way to demonstrate your commitment to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of pupils.

This commitment emphasises the importance of establishing robust mental health provision for pupils, providing equal opportunities, building resilience, and developing tools and support strategies.

It is the link governor's responsibility to ensure their school has a strategic plan to improve, support and respond to the mental health needs of pupils, and monitor any appropriate policies in place that support this. They should also work with parents and external services to ensure all the support provided is appropriate.

Below are just some of the responsibilities that a mental health and wellbeing link governor should have:

- Influencing the setting of a school vision which creates a positive wellbeing culture and is underpinned by equality values, a system of accountability and robust policies and procedures.
- Ensuring there is an embedded whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing.
- Meeting with the designated mental health lead on a regular basis to monitor and review the impact of provision and interventions.
- Acting as the link between the governing board and staff members, reporting back to governors on how support for pupil wellbeing is embraced and implemented throughout the school.
- Reporting to governors on the successes and areas of improvement in planned interventions, and the resources that are in place to improve the social and emotional health of pupils who have mental health needs.
- Ensuring pupils are taught and supported by staff and volunteers who have appropriate knowledge and skills in mental health awareness.
- Meeting with pupils to establish the impact of the celebration of their successes and achievements.
- Being familiar with how the school liaises with, and promotes, external care agencies, including CAMHS, which may be able to support families.
- Monitoring the school's quality assurance processes for mental health provision and ensuring this is reported to and evaluated by the governing board.



Utilising and supporting staff

Jenny Westmacott, teacher and member of the mental health support team at Vale of Evesham School, told us about the tiered support framework for mental health concerns that her school has implemented, alongside clear protocols for staff to follow. Jenny explained that these procedures help to prevent any ambiguity from staff who feel less confident in supporting pupils with mental health concerns.

To support pupils effectively, staff need to be provided with training on the different types of mental health problems, spotting the signs of these issues, factors that put certain pupils more at risk of developing problems, and the resources available for them to initiate appropriate responses and interventions.



Karen Lawton, head of learning support at Prior Park School, said that it's important to have staff that listen and want to commit to the school's approach to supporting pupil mental health. Committed members of staff can help ensure the caring ethos of a school is reflected throughout all activities.

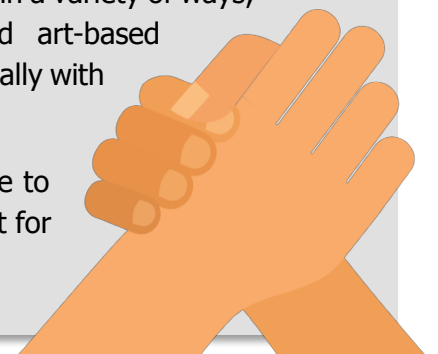
Think about how you can use your TAs effectively, too. Some of our respondents have provided TAs with training to become emotional literacy support assistants (ELSAs) and mental health first aiders, while others have been trained to provide pastoral one-to-one support.

Alternatively, consider other roles that can help to support pupil mental health. Family support workers can provide support, advice and information to families within the school community, assisting with any worries that parents may have regarding their child's education, behaviour or wellbeing. To help support pupils, they can promote good attendance and punctuality, self-esteem and confidence, positive behaviour and attitudes to learning, and provide one-to-one advice.

On-site counsellors

Consider implementing an in-school counselling service to give pupils the opportunity to talk about any difficulties they're having. These services can be delivered in a variety of ways, including drop-in sessions, one-to-one appointments, play and art-based activities, and family and group work, and can be implemented internally with a trained on-site counsellor or through external agencies.

If you decide to implement an in-school counselling service, be sure to familiarise yourself with the DfE's 'Counselling in schools: a blueprint for the future' to ensure you make the appropriate considerations first.

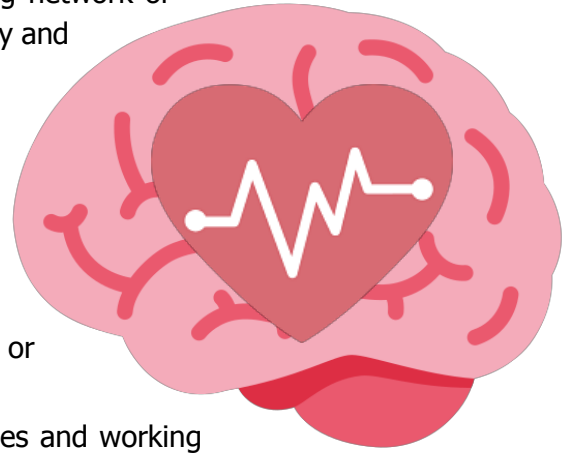


Designated mental health leads

As part of the government's proposals for creating a strong network of support in schools, it pledged to support all schools to identify and train a designated mental health lead by 2025.

In particular, the mental health lead is responsible for:

- Overseeing the whole-school approach towards mental health and wellbeing.
- Supporting the identification of pupils at risk of, or showing signs of, mental ill health.
- Gaining knowledge of the local mental health services and working with them to refer pupils where necessary.
- Coordinating mental health needs and overseeing the delivery of any interventions.
- Supporting staff in contact with pupils with mental health needs.
- Providing advice and contributing to specialist training programmes for school staff on mental wellbeing.
- Overseeing the outcomes of interventions for pupils' education and wellbeing.



Mental health leads are likely to be members of staff in senior positions, who can take a strategic overview of the school's approach towards mental health. Schools are not required to appoint a designated mental health lead; however, it would be considered good practice to do so. Your school should have the flexibility to deliver the role so that it fits within existing staff responsibilities and your approach to supporting mental health and wellbeing.

Example interview task

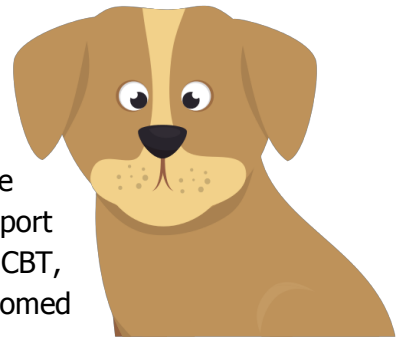
If your school plans to assign a mental health lead, think about who will be best suited for the role – come up with some questions and scenarios to help you recruit the right candidate. An example task is provided below.

Mental health is something that society is becoming ever more aware of and the school would like to include it more within the curriculum.

Spend the next 10 minutes establishing a plan for how mental health can be taught within three different subjects of your choice. You can choose any aspects of mental health, e.g. promoting good mental health or signs that someone is struggling with mental health. You should outline the cross-curricular links and explain the decisions that you have made.

Wellbeing centres

Irfan Latif, of DLD College London, has created a Wellbeing Centre which promotes the welfare and mental health of all students and staff. Irfan explained that his school has a coordinated approach to mental health – the school has appointed a student liaison officer, a head of wellbeing, two college counsellors, a college nurse and a life coach. The centre provides a range of sessions and activities to support students' mental health, including meditation, mindfulness, yoga, CBT, and the recent introduction of a therapy dog – which has been a welcomed addition with a positive impact felt on a college-wide level!



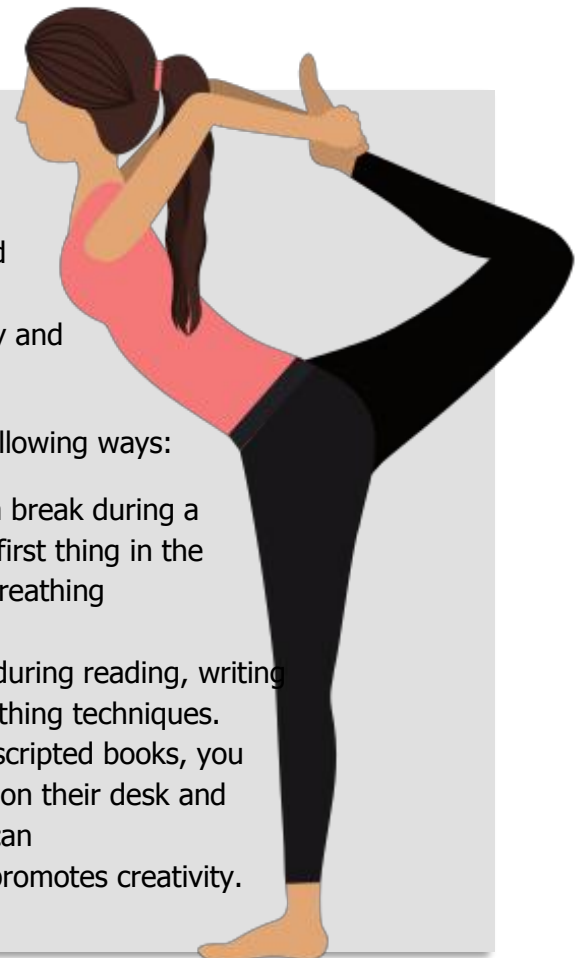
Of course, not all schools will have the capacity to set up a dedicated wellbeing centre; but this doesn't hinder your ability to effectively support pupil mental health. Consider the tips outlined in this report and how they can be implemented in your school in different ways, whether this is during class time, PSHE lessons, or allocated sessions for CBT or counselling.

Yoga

Schools that promote positive mental health and wellbeing, and implement yoga, breathing, focus and relaxation techniques, are more likely to have staff and pupils who tend to be calm and more focussed. Yoga has many benefits for pupils, including enhanced concentration, improved creativity and work ethic, and more!

Yoga can be implemented as part of the school day in the following ways:

- **Take yoga breaks** – give pupils a 5-10 minute yoga break during a transition time, such as after lunch, before a test, or first thing in the morning. This can consist of a variation of different breathing exercises, which can be used to calm pupils.
- **Use yoga in the curriculum** – incorporate a story during reading, writing or science time and include some yoga poses or breathing techniques.
- **Guided visualisation** – Using different stories and scripted books, you can read to pupils and ask them to place their heads on their desk and close their eyes. When reading out the story, pupils can listen and visualise, which calms anxious pupils and promotes creativity.



Helpful resources from TheSchoolBus

TheSchoolBus has a number of resources that can help schools to support pupil mental health, we have categorised these to help you with the good practice recommendations made in this report.

Mindfulness and meditation

- [Strategies for Supporting Pupils with Mental Health Concerns](#) – this article provides guidance and strategies for encouraging positive mental health in pupils.
- [Supporting pupils' mental health e-Learning Course](#) – this course has everything you need to know about mental health in pupils and outlines how you can develop a positive, whole-school approach to promoting mental health.

Mental health and wellbeing link governor

- [The Role of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Governor](#) – this template sets out the main responsibilities of a mental health and wellbeing link governor and provides examples of questions they may ask while visiting their school.
- [Mental Health and Wellbeing Trustee Role Descriptor](#) – for academy trusts, this role descriptor sets out the main responsibilities of the mental health and wellbeing trustee, including leadership and strategy, organisational structure and more.

Utilising and supporting staff

- [Supporting Pupil Mental Health Meet and Brief Pack](#) – this can be used to bring staff in your school up-to-speed with supporting pupil mental health. It covers the prevalence of mental health problems, signs and symptoms of different mental health problems, how to implement a whole-school approach to supporting mental health, and more.
- [Key Questions and Considerations for Leaders to Support Successful Teaching Assistant \(TA\) Deployment](#) – created in collaboration with our SEND and safeguarding expert, this article can help you to determine how effectively you are deploying your TAs, and identify the best way to deploy them for maximum impact.

Wellbeing centres

- [Introducing Yoga in Your School](#) – this article outlines the benefits of introducing yoga and includes some quick and effective techniques that can be delivered in the classroom.
- [Dogs in School Risk Assessment](#) – if you decide to introduce a therapy dog, be sure to use our risk assessment to help eliminate any risks and ensure the health and safety of the school community.

Our [Pupil Mental Health Resource Pack](#) contains even more resources to help you build effective provisions for nurturing and protecting pupils' mental health.

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