

Practitioner Wellbeing: Research Review

Nurturing relationships: Why practitioner wellbeing is important

Relationships are key to learning and mental health and wellbeing: Children and young people learn more when their education practitioner is happy and performing well. Practitioners experiencing challenges to their mental health may find it more difficult to develop and model positive relationships with their pupils.



"Every interaction with a child carries the potential for change and for long term impact on that child's outcomes. But interacting can be hard, it can give rise to vicarious trauma and adversity, and can lead to burnout and withdrawal, both of which can be disastrous for teacher, student and for their relationship...[Practitioner] care simply must come first." (Burley, 2019)

Good practitioner wellbeing can lead to more productivity, less sickness-related absences, higher job satisfaction and healthier coping strategies.

Practitioner wellbeing: How are we doing?



Education Practitioners have been consistently found to be at increased risk of experiencing challenges to their mental health and wellbeing compared to people in other occupations.

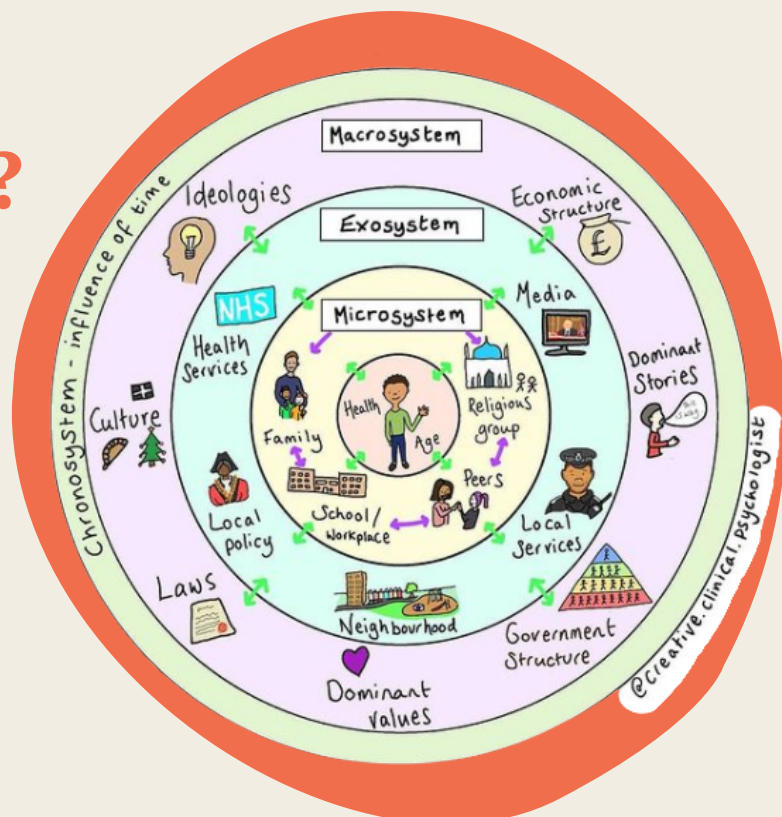
The Teacher Wellbeing Index (2020) reports:

- 66% of education professionals in the UK described themselves as resilient.

- 74% of all education professionals reported they had experienced at least one behavioural, physical or psychological symptoms of poor mental health, that they attributed at least partly to work.
- Senior leaders report experiencing the highest levels of work-related stress.
- There is large variation in the wellbeing support offered to education practitioners across the UK.
- 50% of all education professionals felt their mental health and wellbeing had declined either considerably or a little during the Covid-19 pandemic.

What affects practitioner wellbeing?

Mental health and wellbeing at work is influenced by the relationship between the individual, the nature of their work and their work environment.





Research has suggested that there are 5 fundamental human needs that must be met to improve joy in work:

- physical and psychological safety
- meaning and purpose
- choice and autonomy
- camaraderie and teamwork
- fairness and equity

The presence of these in any workplace could be considered protective for staff wellbeing.

Education-specific research has further identified a range of protective and risk factors for practitioner wellbeing:

Protective factors

- Positive school climate fostered by supportive leadership practices
- Personal organisation and ability to prioritise
- Life satisfaction and personal happiness
- Strong, supportive relationships
- A sense of agency and self-determination
- High teacher self efficacy
- A positive sense of identity

Risk factors

- Negative school climate
- Personal stress
- Busy times of the year (e.g. national assessment periods)
- Extra curricular activities.
- Unexpected and unplanned events
- Frequent changes
- Changes in school leadership
- Workload pressures and lack of time to prepare
- Increasing demands (including pupil behaviour).

Trauma and practitioner wellbeing

"The expectation that we can be immersed in human suffering and loss and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water and not get wet" (Remen 1996)

In a 2020 survey of UK education professionals, over 40% of respondents spoke about the emotional load of working in education and the negative impact this can have on their own mental health and wellbeing. In another survey of UK teachers (2018-19), 79% of respondents believed more should be done to ensure that school staff are able to recognise and respond to trauma and childhood adversity.

When considering the wellbeing of education practitioners, we must therefore recognise the potential for impact of vicarious & secondary trauma on staff and incorporate approaches to staff wellbeing which help to prevent or lessen the impact of this on staff.



Vicarious trauma: The experiences of trauma symptoms which builds up over time as a result of being repeatedly exposed to other people's experiences of trauma.

Secondary trauma: The emotional distress that results when hearing about another person's experience of trauma.

What can we do to support practitioner wellbeing?

Examples of healthy individual coping strategies:

- Mindfulness
- Physical exercise
- Counselling

As we can see from the protective factors above, strategies to support practitioner mental health and wellbeing can generally be separated into: Individual coping strategies and organisational strategies.

There is a concern that by focusing on promoting individual strategies over organisational strategies, the responsibility is placed on the practitioner to be personally resilient without addressing wider risk factors. Organisational strategies within education settings have not been well evaluated.

Examples of organisational strategies:

- School ethos
- Teacher autonomy
- Workload
- Coaching/mentoring

Based on research in general workplace settings, it is thought that whole-establishment approaches that combine proactive and preventative organisational strategies with approaches to build individual practitioner resilience are likely to be most effective.

A recent survey found that 53% of education professionals reported that they did not have enough guidance about their mental health & wellbeing at work. Only 8% of respondents had access to supervision.

What do we already do to support practitioners in Renfrewshire?

Barnardo's 2019 paper highlights a need for support and guidance for practitioners on how trauma-informed practices can help support the mental health and wellbeing of both staff and pupils.

RNRA is a relational and trauma informed approach that is currently being embedded across most Renfrewshire establishments. It is both a universal and targeted approach to supporting child and practitioner wellbeing

The Anna Freud Centre provides a helpful framework to consider how strategies and services can be incorporated into establishment approaches to practitioner wellbeing. Existing local and national supports have been mapped onto this framework:

Specialist Support
Time for Talking (staff counselling)
Occupational Health

Targeted Support
Stepping Stones post-probation support
Place2Think peer supervision
Coaching & mentoring Matters (Education Scotland)
Renfrewshire's Locality Inclusion Support Networks (LISN)

Universal Support
Renfrewshire's Nurturing Relationships Approach (RNRA)
Skills for Recovery Staff Program
Skills for Recovery Digital Leaflets
EPS-led training (e.g. positive psychology & mindfulness)
Mental Health & Wellbeing Policy development support for establishments
'Our Wellbeing' (Renfrewshire Council)
Barnardos Spaces for Wellbeing workshops
Place2be wellbeing webinars

What do we want to find out more about?

- **Local needs:** What is working? What more is needed?
- **Approaches to supervision in education.**