

# Healthy Habits for Good Mental Health

KS4/5

45mins

An activity to explore ways to improve mental health and build it in to our lives.

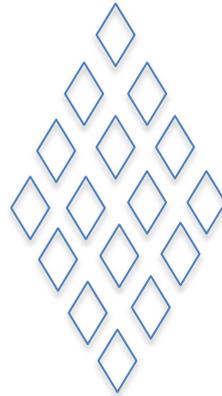
## What you need:

- '20 Healthy habit' cards: 1 set per group
- '5 ways to wellbeing' cards : 1 sheet per student

## Method:

- Explain that in this activity we will be thinking about some of the specific things we can do for ourselves to keep our minds in good shape.
  - They will be working in groups of 5/6 but also drawing up their own personal way to wellbeing list
  - There has been a great deal of debate and research into the things we can do to improve our mental health and the '**five ways to wellbeing**' is perhaps the best known list of things we can do to improve mental health.
  - Ask for suggestions of what is on the list.
- 1. Connect.....**  
with family and friends, at home, school or in your local community. Research has shown that contact via social media is no a substitute for face to face contact.
  - 2. Be active...**  
Go for a walk or run. Whatever you do getting active is good for us, especially when we are also outside in the fresh air. The most important thing is to find a sport/physical activity you enjoy and that suits your level of mobility and fitness.
  - 3. Take notice...**  
Be curious. Notice what's around you, the countryside, the changing seasons. Savour the moment, whether you are walking to school, eating lunch or talking to friends. Take note of how you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.
  - 4. Keep learning...**  
Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for a course, join a team, learn to play an instrument or learn how to cook your favourite food. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.
  - 5. Give...**  
Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Join a community group. Volunteering can be very rewarding as well as a great way of making new friends.
- Point out that 'The five ways to wellbeing' are broad categories. Within each category there are lots of different ways you can for example **connect** with people.

- Hand out the ways to wellbeing sheet (1per person) and give each group a set of 20 habit cards.
- While the ways to wellbeing are broad the 20 habits cards suggest more specific ideas for things you can do to improve wellbeing.
- Briefly run through the ideas on the 20 habit list to make sure everyone is clear about their meaning.(see below)
- Students then start writing their own 5 ways to wellbeing list, writing the specific things they will do in each of the 5 ways to well- being categories. For example in the '**connect**' box they might write meet a friend in town at the weekend .
- They may get some ideas from the 20 habit cards.
- They will also have some blank boxes at the bottom to fill in later.
- Next each group should diamond rank the 20 habit cards so that the most helpful suggestion is at the apex of the diamond, two suggestions that come second are just below, three equal third just below that, then four in fourth place before that. At this point the diamond starts to narrow again with 3 items below in 5th place, 2 items below that in 6th place etc. (They will have 4 cards left over)



- Ask each group to say which they chose as their top three and why
- Finally students can complete their personal way to wellbeing sheets by adding any other things they will do or not do to look after themselves.

## 20 Small Habits to Build To Become Mentally Stronger This Year

In the same way we exercise to keep ourselves in good shape physically there are things we can do to keep ourselves in good shape emotionally/mentally too. Through practice we can develop habits, which us show compassion towards ourselves and feel better about ourselves too.

Jenna Anderson from Life Hack developed this list:

### 1. Make your bed

You're already accomplishing things and getting off to a great start when you make your bed in the morning. The saying, "The state of your bed is the state of your head?" has some truth in it. While it may seem like a small step, it has benefits. Research shows people who make their beds daily are overall happier with their lives, more productive, and have a stronger sense of pride and accomplishment in their day for all the tasks they do.

### 2. Say nice things to yourself daily

This year, make a commitment to cut down on the negative self-talk and increase the nice things you say to yourself. You may feel ridiculous at first as you become your own cheerleader in your head, but it'll make a difference. Watch out though, negative thoughts can sneak in really quickly. Notice them and recognize them as untrue (You can even try saying it out loud). Then replace them with a positive thought.

### 3. Write down something great about each day

You can keep them in a jar, a diary, a shoe box, wherever you want, but write down something great about each day. Not only does this help create gratitude in your life, but at the end of the year you'll be able to sit down and look back at all the positive things you've experience and accomplished, instead of the challenges or rough patches which made you want to give up.

### 4. Write down the positive aspects of every challenge

Life is a lot about perspective. Change your perspective and you can change your life. Instead of complaining and being angry or disappointed try and write down positive aspects and things you are learning from the challenges. See if you can't find something to be grateful about every day.

### 5. Practice mindful happiness while travelling home from school

Mindfulness is about being in the moment. To get comfortable with being happy, practicing being mindfully happy. Take an event or moment or memory when you felt good and let yourself enjoy the feeling. Notice how it feels in your body and how your thoughts change. Spend time with your happy mood. At the end of it, notice the feeling of happiness and joy, it comes from you, and it spontaneously shows up when you are in mindfully in the moment.

### 6. Practice being your own best friend every day

This is a great way to become mentally stronger, because it teaches us to rely on ourselves, and not rely others to pick us up. Next time something isn't going quite as planned, or you start to insult or criticise yourself, pause and ask, "Would I let my best

friend treat me this way?” or “Would I treat my best friend this way?” The answer is probably no, and it’s a great idea to love yourself as much, if not more, than you love your best friend.

### **7. Practice saying “no” without explanation**

As a society we’ve decided somewhere along the lines we have to have a reason for saying no, and not wanting to do something isn’t a good enough reason. If you find yourself thinking like that stop. Learn to say no. You don’t have to explain your actions or explain your decisions to anyone about why you don’t want to do something.

### **8. Practice 20 minutes of self-care daily**

It doesn’t matter who you are or what you do, but if you don’t take some time to care for yourself, you won’t be able to love and care for those around you. Self-care can be something as complex as having a manicure or spa day, or as simple as locking yourself in the bathroom for five minutes just to have some alone time. It doesn’t matter what it is, make sure you create some space and/or activities which leave you feeling relaxed and happy.

### **9. Do a hobby or activity daily which brings you joy**

This is a great way to look after yourself. Find a hobby or activity, which you enjoy. As you become more confident and competent at it, you’ll see how confidence and self-belief spills over into other areas of your life. The positivity and joy you find in your hobby will help you tackle the tougher challenges in life.

### **10. Set a goal to practice more gratitude and less complaining**

Getting caught up a cycle of complaining or moaning can make you hard to be around, but it can also take quite a toll on your mental health. Instead of endless complaining about a situation, try and find something to be grateful about.

### **11. Set a goal for at least 8 hours of sleep a night**

This is important! When you’re tired you make poor decisions and become more stressed. Make sleep a priority. A minimum of eight hours is essential. If you’re stressed make sure you are giving yourself sufficient time to rest and relax before going to sleep in order to allow your body to maximize the sleeping hours.

### **12. Set a goal to eat fresh unprocessed food daily**

New research has shown a link between your gut health and your mood, and one of the things that directly relates to your gut health is the food you put in your body. Eat a wide variety of fresh fruit and veg and try preparing meals from scratch using raw ingredients.

### **13. Cut your social media time in half**

Half your social media time and spend the time reconnecting with people you love, reading a book, or practicing a hobby. Whatever you do to fill the time, make sure it’s something which you enjoy.

### **14. Put up at least three inspirational/motivational quotes to read daily**

When things get tough and you feel like you’re not making progress, uplifting words can go a long way toward keeping you on track. Take the time to post a few inspiring and

motivational quotes or pictures somewhere you'll see it every day. Words of encouragement and motivation can go a long way when you're in a bad place.

### **15. Visualise your goals for 10 minutes daily**

Take the time to visualise the end result of your goals, but also the challenges you'll overcome in between. Practice visualising how you're going to deal with the things which could go wrong and coming out on top. See yourself where you want to be, and notice how great it feels to accomplish your goals.

### **16. Let go of your people pleasing tendencies**

In an effort to be a good person we often over-extend ourselves and commit to things we really don't want to do. Accept the fact you can't please everyone and don't let other people's happiness and goals always take precedence over what's best for you, your health, and your happiness.

### **17. Set time and money aside each week to do something fun**

You don't have to spend a lot but plan some fun into your weekly plans.

### **18. Stop indulging in relationships or activities, which drain you of energy.**

Do things, which leave you feeling joyful. Build positive relationships and let go of toxic ones. This doesn't mean it will be easy but make a commitment to being stronger. Without the mental and emotional drain you'll find more energy and more happiness throughout your day.

### **19. Cut the word 'should' from your vocabulary**

Think about when the last time you thought you '**should**' do something. Wasn't exactly a fun and exciting thought was it? '**Should**' is a word that usually comes with the feelings of obligation and heavy responsibility, and rarely a feeling of joy. Should has a tendency to come with self-criticism and judgment. Instead of using should, re-phrase your sentence into, "I would like....."

### **20. Write a journal for five minutes morning and/or night**

Choose a time in the morning and use it to write about your dreams, dump all your worries or concerns on the page, to creatively express anything which may have worried you the night before. It's also a great way to write down your goals and inspirations for the day, get a feeling for what you want to see happen and an action plan. If you prefer to write at night use it to unwind about all the things which may have stressed you out, and to congratulate yourself on all the things you did right.

No matter what approach you take, remember that with practice you can strengthen your mental muscles and over time you'll become mentally stronger.

