

Feeling happy!

Poor mental health has become a primary concern among educators, health workers and policymakers. One in ten children have mental health problems. This figure rises to three in five adults currently suffering in the workplace.

Supporting your children

According to Dr Sam Wass, developmental cognitive neuroscientist best-known for commenting on the award-winning Channel 4 series, *Secret Life of Four, Five and Six-Year-Olds*, we are becoming brighter, but more delicate.

During his fascinating presentation at NDNA's 2018 Conference, Dr Wass, who researches stress and concentration during early life, said modern life has changed children. They are more intelligent and process information faster, but tend to be more stressed and anxious.

He has prepared these tips to support children to develop key concentration and emotion regulation skills.



Learning by playing with you...

Research suggests that children learn best in situations in which they are motivated. Let them choose what they do then follow with them to help them explore and to get the most out of their own idea

- **Play with them in parallel.** Adults naturally concentrate better, give up less easily and are better at planning a sequence of actions. Children can learn these skills from adults by doing things together
- **Play follower-leader.** You'll naturally be faster than a child and better at planning. But be careful not to charge ahead and finish the task yourself, leaving them demotivated. Try to follow their attention and support them. If they pick up a piece of a puzzle, support that by saying: 'I wonder where that goes?'. They will stay interested for much longer
- **Let them do the hard work.** Some of the key skills that children are learning are basic self-sufficiency skills: tying shoelaces, putting coats on, peeling fruit. These require 'fine motor skills'. So let them do it!

- **Let them make mistakes.** When a child puts a piece in the wrong place it's tempting to step in and correct it. But children will learn far more if you let them make the mistake, then go back and figure out for themselves what they've done wrong and correct it
- **Understand the parts of the task that they find hard.** One skill children find particularly hard is mental rotation. So seeing a picture of something on the lid, and then translating that into what the model looks like in real life is much harder for a child than an adult. You can help them by making sure the box is propped up, clearly visible, at the same angle as the model they are building and by encouraging them to look really carefully at the picture before they start
- **Finish the task.** Children live very much in the moment - one key skill that is particularly challenging at this age is completing things. It helps if they know the size of the task and roughly how long it's going to take them before they start. Looking at a picture of what a completed model will look like before they start to build it can be a great way to help with this. And it helps with motivation if when they finish the task they have something to play with at the end.

Learning by playing with their friends...

Most four-year-olds tend to be very much in their own world. One of the big skills that they learn is getting to know other children. Teamwork is something that all young children find hard.

- **Simple tasks** can be a good way to encourage young children to play together. Something simple like a painting that they have to do together on a single sheet of paper can be a great way to encourage cooperation
- One of the aspects of joint play that young children find particularly challenging is understanding the idea that they have in their head isn't the same as the idea that someone else has in theirs. So **creative, imaginative tasks** can be tough for good teamwork. It's easier to learn how to work together on tasks where there is a right-wrong answer - such as putting a puzzle together. When they get good at this, they can transition towards working together on shared, imaginative tasks
- **Be patient.** For many four-year-olds, sharing toys can be something that they find easy to do when they are in a good mood but impossible when they are tired or in a bad mood. When they are tired or upset, telling them off for not sharing can often make the problem worse. Help them to understand their own bad mood, by saying: 'I know that you're upset, or angry, but...'. Understanding their own emotions is something that almost all young children find challenging.



Encourage children to...

- **Ask questions!** If you want to be friends with someone, don't just go up to someone and start telling them about yourself
- **Say they feel nervous, if they are!** Saying 'I'm nervous' or 'I'm shy' can be a great way to start a new friendship - because it helps the person to understand how you are feeling
- **Always have lots of games to play.** If you have ideas for a game to play, you will find it much easier to get children to play with you. But don't be worried if they want to play their own game instead - just go along with it
- **Don't be sad if other children ignore you to start with.** There are so many reasons why a child might ignore you if you go up to them and ask to play with them. Maybe they were feeling shy or they didn't understand or they just needed to play on their own for a while. It doesn't mean that they don't like you! Don't be afraid to go up and ask them again later.



In the workplace - supporting your team

Happy staff make for happy children. Lead by example and build a mentally healthy workplace.

Jenney Ware, HR Business Partner at our partner Citation, said: "When we talk about mental health at work, we tend to think of employees who have been diagnosed with a disclosed mental health condition.

"But according to research, six in ten employees are currently experiencing mental ill-health. This can stem from anywhere. Workplace stress can be a contributing factor, or changes in personal circumstances, like a divorce, ill health or death of a loved one."

Nurseries can be a caring, fun environment but they can also be stressful, busy and noisy. Our workforce survey revealed that nursery practitioners work long hours with 79% working overtime too.

Tips and advice

Promote a healthy work-life balance, which can contribute to employee's sense of well-being and reduce sickness absence

- Encourage staff to take their full lunch break, to leave on time and use their annual leave
- Monitor workloads
- Deal with any requests for flexible working fairly and legally
- Small requests such as allowing an employee to finish early for sports day can make all the difference

Give employees a voice

- Give opportunity for feedback on issues that could impact on them
- Have regular 1:1 discussions to give them opportunity to raise any work or personal issues to give you a chance to support them
- Try confidential surveys or team meetings to find solutions to common problems
- Resolving problems will have a positive impact on employees

Be consistent

- Treat employees fairly and be seen to treat employees fairly
- Act in accordance with the policies and procedures you have in place



Foster good working relationships between team members

- When recruiting, think about how someone will fit in
- All employees must be aware of how your policies impact on working relationships eg grievance process - make sure this is included in your training induction
- Company-wide briefings, training and events are a good platform for employees to meet those outside their team
- Introduce new recruits and key members of staff so they have a support network

Don't avoid difficult conversations:

- Don't shy away from prickly subjects such as a change in attitude or performance
- Adopt a proactive approach to prevent it from getting worse and support the employee
- These issues can contribute to someone experiencing mental ill health

Further help

- Get practical advice and guidance from your local Business in the Community, Mindful Employer, Rethink Mental Illness and Remploy
- Check out Citation's video on how to have a sensitive conversation about mental health at www.ndna.org.uk/mentalhealthsupport
- Contact Citation for advice on HR issues on 0345 844 4848 or email: enquiries@citation.co.uk



Happiness is contagious...

Dr Andy Cope wanted to be happy, so he spent 12 years uncovering the secrets of happy people. The result was a PhD in Positive Psychology. His mission is to spread this positive 'disease' for the benefit of humankind.

Meet Andy – from regular person to incredible happiness trailblazer

Andy started off as a regular person. Aged one he left his rural community in Derbyshire for Ghana in West Africa for seven years. His first memory was at a level crossing watching a train zip past with people hanging off the side.

After school he studied psychology then tried several jobs including secondary school teacher and retail manager. One day his daughter showed him a picture of daddy with a straight mouth. Something had to change.



"Psychology has always studied ill people with anxiety and attachment disorders – we look at their problem and try to help them.

Traditionally, we never study people already feeling amazing – what if happy people already have the cure?

"So in 2005 at Loughborough University I started studying the 2% of people who were consistently happy and full of energy – the science of well-being and happiness. I followed happy people around. It was Britain's first academically-driven study

looking at how to live fulfilling, happy, positive lives.

"I have put into practice all this stuff and feel incredible. I am a lot happier and more positive than I used to be."

His training and presentation, *The Art of Brilliance*, was born from this research.

Are we more miserable now?

Andy believes that we are more conscious of our mental health and more likely to talk about it.

"We seem to be angrier and social media has spread that nastiness. You can become very brave behind a keyboard - but some people are now saying it to your face as well."

After the First World War, one in a thousand people were diagnosed as depressed, which rose to one in ten by the 1980s - now a quarter of us are diagnosed with depression.

"Either we are more depressed or more of us think we have a mental disorder. We can take better care of our mental wealth by learning strategies. Positive psychology can give you things to do before it takes hold of you.

"Some people are quite proud to have some sort of mental illness, but most of it is genuine. We are worried about stuff that doesn't happen - consuming less news can help. Some people enjoy having a grump, which is fine but don't lose your sense of humour.

"I call people who suck out your positivity 'mood hoovers'. This has no place in a nursery."

Early years – re-wiring toddler's genes

Andy feels that his message is most pertinent to those who work with young children.

"I love early years – but practitioners are

massively underpaid and undervalued.

"Young children role-play at being you, acting out what they have learnt during the day. It's a big responsibility. You are not just teaching them British values, maths and English, but really teaching them about positivity, resilience, how to communicate, kindness - the most important things."

But it goes further than that – a positive mindset can actually alter a child's genetic make-up for life!

Childhood epigenetics has discovered that not all genes are fixed – this is true for certain elements, for example the colour of your hair. But the sequencing of your genes is not fixed, they can be switched on and off.

"If, as a very young child, you are loved and hugged, this will switch on certain genetic patterns in your head that stick with you forever. The opposite is painful: being stressed and unloved also alters the sequencing of genetic make-up and will negatively affect their future. A stressed-out child at 18 months old will still have stress running through their system at 40.

"Early years practitioners are literally re-wiring the genetic make-up of children"

"Early years practitioners are literally re-wiring the genetic make-up of children. So it's crucial to look after your own well-being: if you go to work not feeling it, then the kids won't feel it."

Andy's mindset of positivity

Andy advises us to get in touch with our inner toddler – and let go of our negativity.

"Most kids are happy living in the moment – they haven't got mortgages and don't know if it's Monday or Friday.

"As adults we get really bad mental habits. A negativity bias predisposes us to catch onto the negative things. For example, an angry parent can ruin everybody's day. One bad driver can ruin your commute to work – you delete the

...pass it on!

hundreds of good ones. You have to rewire and rethink how you think."

Andy admits that even he has "grumpy" days - but the trick is to minimise these.

"Everybody has bad days. All the little stuff that used to upset me doesn't annoy me anymore. You are allowed to have down time, but know how to spring yourself back into being great again."

Andy began giving happiness tips to adults, but also speaks to children down to year four.

"By the time many children reach year four, their happiness is on the decline. Some kids now have burn-out by the time they are ten"

"By the time many children reach year four, their happiness is on the decline. Some kids now have burn-out by the time they are ten, which pains me greatly.

"We deliver presentations to schools and write books written for teenagers and key stage two children. The way we write it is different, but the message is the same: choose a positive mindset. We give people strategies for personal responsibility, resilience and kindness."

Andy and his team (pictured below) are often asked how to cure other people?

"It's not about anybody else, just keep yourself positive and stop getting ground down by mood hoovers. Take charge of your own well-being."



Come and meet Andy at our 2019 Conference! Dr Andy Cope, author, teacher and recovering academic has been changing minds across the globe with *The Art of Brilliance* – the science of well-being and happiness. He has written adult and teenage "self-help" books and the successful *Spy Dog* series which have sold millions of copies. Be transformed by his insight and energy on Friday 28 June when he will open our conference and set both practitioners and leaders up for a transformative day.

Spread happiness like a contagious disease

Happiness has a ripple effect, like a contagion which leaks out of you and into people around you. It also affects people three degrees removed from you.

"If you are having a good day, that impacts on every single person you come into contact with, who then also feels good - and everybody they meet too!

"Friends of friends of friends will benefit. In a nursery, the kids go back to their families happy"

"It doesn't stop there, friends of friends of friends will benefit. In a nursery, the kids go back to their families happy, then their parents go into a supermarket and have some banter with someone which cheers that person up. It reaches people you haven't even met!

"It's the opposite of the common cold. Let's spread something much better. Human beings are wired to connect emotionally. You can't not have an impact on the people around you. So make it positive!"

Meet more of our exciting 2019 Conference speakers

Leadership stream

- Quiz Ofsted's Chief Inspector **Amanda Spielman** on the new Education Inspection Framework
- **Pennie Akehurst** of *Early Years Fundamentals* will be explore why our understanding of leadership isn't always helpful
- Develop your staff's mental well-being by adopting strategies from *Mental Health First Aid's* **Caroline Hounsell**

Practice stream

- Explore telling stories using a holistic approach - 'Helicopter Stories' with **Trisha Lee** from *MakeBelieve Arts*
- Learn about creating Developmentally Appropriate Communication Friendly Spaces™ with **Elizabeth Jarman**.
- **Angela Spencer** of *Babyopathy* will help you explore how to recognise developmental delay in babies and learn techniques to support child and parents
- **TTS's Catherine Clark** will be sharing her wealth of knowledge to help you provide language rich learning resources
- **Speech and language therapist Jennifer Warwick** will be giving practical techniques for supporting children with speech and language difficulties.

Both leaders and practitioners will be able to learn about *The Daily Mile™* and how it is changing lives with founder **Elaine Wyllie** (right), as well as browse our exciting and relevant marketplace of early years products and services.

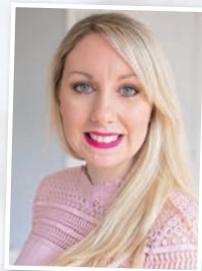


Join us at the **Chesford Grange hotel** on Friday 28 June. Check out the enclosed brochure, visit www.ndna.org.uk/conference or call 01484 407070 (option 1) to find out more and book.

Let's get cosy with Hygge

Part one

Reading stories by fairy lights, snuggling up in blankets and laughing with the children. These are all moments of “Hygge”, a Scandinavian concept which is sweeping across the UK. But how can you bring this to your setting and how can it benefit the children you care for? We invite you to read our article in a cosy corner with a hot drink and find out...



By Kimberly Smith, Early Years Consultant, Trainer and Author

The UK is currently experiencing a severe shortage of qualified Early Years Educators, with many reluctant to go into the profession due to the demands on workload and long hours. Those already working in the sector are facing difficulties around demands on the job that are leaving a negative impact on wellbeing.

With this in mind it's no wonder the UK is often seen to stand at the lower end of the world chart for happiness. At the other end of the scale, the Scandinavian countries of Finland, Norway and Denmark are top of the happiness chart again in 2018. What factors make these countries so successful at achieving a high level of well-being?

What is Hygge?

Scandinavia ranks highly on all the main factors found to support happiness: caring, freedom, generosity, honesty, health, income and good governance. With long dark nights in winter, they have to have a mind-set of positivity. So, when it's cold and snowing outside they turn the situation around and light a fire, candles and get blankets. They take enjoyment from the warmth they experience while reading a book by the fire and watching the snow fall outside. This concept around **living for now** is known as “Hygge”.

The concept of Hygge (pronounced hue-guh) doesn't have a direct translation into English but is about embracing the simple moments in life with joy and appreciation, whether it is a meal at home with good friends, playing board games or taking time to enjoy a woodland walk.

This isn't an approach that you have to buy into. The whole idea of this way of living is that you don't need anything new or to even spend any money. The precious moments in life are right there for you to discover.

For us to do our job well as educators we need to embrace aspects of this lifestyle into our own day - and a heightened level of well-being equips us to do our job well with the children.

Hygge in practice

Now how can Hygge be applied to our Early Years teaching? There are some simple steps that we can take in our teaching to create more of a Hygge inspired approach to life. These might include:

- Letting in natural light and avoiding harsh strip lighting by adding lamps, fairy lights and LED candles into provision
- Does the space and layout of your setting naturally flow? We don't want a reading corner to be in a cold draft
- Are adults speaking at a quiet level and not above the children? You can also use rugs on hard flooring to reduce noise
- Bring nature inside with plants to care for, flowers in vases and natural loose parts to explore and investigate. Even better, spend time in the outdoors
- Are areas organised, clutter-free and minimalist?
- Have you created a sense of calmness with the colours of the interiors? Whites, greys and neutrals are good for this
- Add warmth by creating a reading nook with blankets, fairy lights and a star projector
- Slow things down: your planning, your day and teachable moments.

To get you experiencing the warm fuzzy feeling of Hygge, why not try a woodland walk today? This will help you feel completely in the moment and present in your surroundings. As the children walk along they could collect sticks, stones, acorns that they see along the way. This not only offers a brilliant talking point but also becomes a beautiful reminder of the journey they took.



"The love shared between our nursery family has flourished"

NDNA members Best Childcare put Hygge at the centre of their ethos and have found it is key to creating comfort and security. Best Childcare shared with Nursery News how they have developed the concept into their pedagogy:

Embracing Hygge means recognising the importance of a small interaction and reaping the benefits from the big impact, and at Best Childcare we do just that. Emotional well-being of children has always been at the forefront of our practice as our practitioners provide a safe, secure and stimulating environment.

The abundance of smiles is unmissable, the laughter heard is infectious and the love shared between our nursery family has flourished. We integrate Hygge through a combined ethos of Forest School and the Reggio Emilia approach.

The environment

Our outdoor provision includes a ‘Hygge Hut’ (read more on page 16), whilst indoors a simple adaptation to cots and floor space allows children to choose their own area when seeking cosiness.

The children and Hygge

Our children have profited tremendously from these adaptations, providing them with unlimited opportunities to seek out happiness at every turn. Support with transitions reduces stress and anxiety for both parents and children, encouraging feelings of self-worth and confidence through reflection.

We have strengthened this with “Lagom”. This is another Scandinavian concept, which means being fair and balanced, and it gives children a greater understanding of empathy and mindfulness in all they do. Overall our children are more comfortable and happier during their time at our setting, which translates through to the staff team.

Our practitioners

Our practitioners enthuse over Hygge! With its high emphasis on smaller groups, our unique key worker system allows for practitioners to share special moments in groups of two to four, where both individual and group ideas can stimulate deep conversations in a meaningful atmosphere.

We have also created “Fika Fridays” which allow staff to take time from their busy schedules to add an element of joy into their routines. We see from these interactions a team that are inspired and motivated to continue our outstanding journey.

Advice for other nurseries

Hygge is a unique concept that requires research and understanding to be fully embedded into a provision's ethos. It is not just an area, twinkling light or colour - it's a feeling which can be enhanced by the right resources. Our advice to other providers would be to research Hygge, meet with the staff team and decide how it can be embedded into your practice and tailored to meet the needs of the children. Once this has been established you need a creative, enthusiastic team who fully understand the concept and can drive it forward. The possibilities are endless if you let your imagination run wild and the feeling embrace you!

Member resources

- We will continue our exploration into Hygge in the early years in the next issue of Nursery News, with guest writers The Curiosity Approach and a case study from Little People Nurseries
- We have updated our face-to-face Leadership and Management training with information about Hygge and love-based leadership. The course is based on contemporary research from the University of Lapland in Finland and offers members a fresh approach to leadership, incorporating the emotional aspects of developing a strong team. Find out more about the training at www.ndna.org.uk/training.
- You can also find more from Kimberly, including case studies of settings that have transformed their practice and access free Hygge content, at www.kkeyconsultancy.co.uk - or read “Hygge in the Early Years” by Kimberly Smith.

Win a book

We are offering a reader the chance to win Kimberly's book, Hygge in the Early Years! Just post your stories, photos or videos of moments of Hygge in your setting on social media, making sure to tag @NDNAtalk on Twitter and National Day Nurseries Association on Facebook. You can also email us at marketing@ndna.org.uk. We will pick a winner on 1 December, so this could be a lovely Christmas present for your setting. You could also feature in the next issue of Nursery News.



A sense of Hygge

Part two

We hope you enjoyed our introduction to the concept of Hygge in the last issue of Nursery News, which featured author Kimberly Smith and member nursery Best Childcare. Thank you for the fabulous photos you have been sending in! Congratulations to Ashbridge Nursery at Maxy Farm who won a copy of Kimberly's book *Hygge in the Early Years*. In the second of our two-part feature, we invite The Curiosity Approach to share their thoughts on Hygge. We also have another member case study with some great tips for your provision, from Little People Nurseries. Snuggle down and enjoy...



By Stephanie Bennett and Lyndsey Hellyn, The Curiosity Approach

Hygge (pronounced hue-guh) is a Danish word used when acknowledging a feeling or moment as cosy, charming or special. In early years it's about providing a space that promotes emotional well-being, security, togetherness and comfort. A

place where children can feel comfortable to snuggle down or explore with confidence.

At The Curiosity Approach we believe Early Years educational settings need to be far removed from an institutionalised sterile feel, and they need to be "an extension of home and not a watered-down version of school".

Hygge fits so well into this pedagogy by taking joy in all the little things, being mindful and feeling grateful. It helps us to create a place where we can nurture our amazing little children in an environment of homely charm.

How can we bring Hygge to our provision?

A Hygge setting will have a calm relaxed feel to the play space with areas for children to retreat and get comfortable or cosy:

- **Through the eyes of a child** - get down on the floor and see the environment from a child's perspective. Is there sand left on the floor which is uncomfortable for babies to crawl upon? Are there any draughts? Is it soft? Provide younger infants opportunities to crawl inside a baby nest or enclosed area where they feel safe and secure
- **Softness and more softness** - use lots of soft furnishings and cushions, as well as snuggly blankets and fabrics which the children can wrap themselves up in. Maybe you could create a cosy reading nook or a soft den for the children to retreat to

- **Warm drinks** - nothing beats a warm milk or hot chocolate on a cold day to create that Hygge feeling inside. Offer the children something different at meal times or for a snack and delight in their little faces as they receive it
- **Seasonal scents** - fill your environment with the aromas of the season, and let the scents evoke memories in your children, their families and the staff team. Fir needles and cinnamon sticks bring to mind the magic of winter.

Don't forget the tips Nursery News shared in Part One of our Hygge feature too:

- **Lighting** - candlelight is a feature of Danish homes, but this is not really an option for early years settings - however fairy lights, lamps, and battery-operated flickering candles can create soft lighting and bring a sense of warmth and cosiness
- **Embrace the seasons** - being outdoors all year round is incredibly important for children, so be a weather warrior not a weather whiner! You can read our blog at: www.thecuriosityapproach.com/are-you-a-weather-warrior/
- **Nature** - fill your environment with nature's delights.

A Hygge approach to early years education

At The Curiosity Approach provisions, we believe that we can only truly educate the child with true connections of heart and mind:

- **Build strong relationships** - the relationships within the setting, and particularly that of the key person, are fundamental in helping create that sense of Hygge for both the child and practitioner. That deep feeling of contentment and ease that a child should feel within your setting comes from mindful and passionate educators
- **Be present and in the moment** - you experience Hygge when you are in the moment. Hygge encompasses Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, right up to a feeling of love and belonging which raises your self-esteem and leads us to be the best we can be! So be "present" with yourself and the children you are with
- **A sense of team** - no dramas - leave those at the door! Show respect and gratitude for your job and workplace. Remember you are a unit and together you will achieve more. Make the most of your lunch break, so you feel refreshed and ready to be back "in the moment" with those special little people
- **Be thankful** - show gratitude for everything you have within your life, and teach the children the importance of being thankful. Model manners at every opportunity, encourage

situations where children can support each other and participate in helping someone else. Remember to be patient as thankfulness and gratitude doesn't come overnight, and children in their earliest years are typically egocentric, but stay with it and you will be nurturing a lifelong skill.

The importance of the environment

At Curiosity Approach settings, we pay particular attention to the play space that children inhabit. We understand the need to take into account how it really feels for a child to be within the nursery. Maria Montessori said: "Adults admire their environment; they can remember it and think about it - but a child absorbs it."

In the 1800s, Friedrich Froebel said that when care is applied to a child's surroundings, behaviour can be guided and inspired. The simplest of spaces can become a haven of play and learning.

As we are all aware in Early Years, levels of well-being are so important to children's development and progress. Practitioners must remember that the physical environment is fundamental to children's well-being:

Ingredients of "well-being" for children

- **Enjoyment** - the children look happy, smile or laugh easily, and engage spontaneously in chatting or even singing
- **Relaxation & inner peace** - children have a relaxed and open expression, not feeling wary or uncomfortable in any way
- **Vitality** - children's body language is strong, their chest and head is high and not slouched. Their expressions are radiant and bright
- **Self-confidence** - children are confident in their own self and abilities.

A Hygge approach

Including the concept of Hygge within your Early Years provision will positively impact learning. It helps us to cherish the little miracles we have the privilege of educating, and create environments that show them how special and unique they are.

Hygge is a feeling we cannot translate into words, but recently our attention was drawn to this amazing quote:

"Children are miracles. Believing that every child is a miracle can transform the way we design for children's care. When we invite a miracle into our lives, we prepare ourselves and the environment around us....We make it our job to create, with reverence and gratitude, a space that is worthy of a miracle!" - Anita Rui Olds, 1999

Find out more about The Curiosity Approach online at www.thecuriosityapproach.com

NDNA has launched a FREE online well-being course to support staff - find it at www.ndna.org.uk/onlinelearning



"Every day they come to us feels a bit like coming home"

NDNA member Little People Nurseries (www.littlepeoplenurseries.co.uk) have implemented the concept of Hygge at their setting in Stanningley, Leeds. They shared with us how they have done this in practice: When we first started our journey embracing the concept of Hygge, we were coming into a cold blustery English Autumn. The evenings were drawing in and we were working with each of our playrooms to focus on a cosy, warm environment. To introduce the Hygge concept, our manager Becky asked the team: "What makes you feel warm and fuzzy inside?"

For some it's snuggled under a blanket drinking warm milk, for others the joyful reunion hug from a missed friend, or the feeling you get when someone's face lights up as they are genuinely happy to see you.

"What does Hygge mean to me? Feeling warm and snug as a child cuddled up on the sofa in a big blanket next to my mum = Happiness" - Becky Farrell, Nursery Manager, Little People Stanningley

Many parents say they pick their children's nursery not because of the resources, or the wall decoration, but because of the feeling. We have tried to capture that feeling for our little people, so that they feel safe, secure and warm inside - so that every day they come to us, feels a bit like coming home.

In practice for us as a setting this has meant really looking at the equipment we have. The traditional primary colours and loud signage were reconsidered and we started to think more about natural materials and neutral colours. As we've started to de-clutter we've really analysed each piece of equipment and its uses, and we discovered that less is more.

We introduced wonderful little nooks and cosy corners for the children to access. We made the most of natural and artificial lighting, from hidden fairy lights in the play areas to a warm glow of candle light, and light boxes for the children to explore shadow. We've embraced natural beauty with plants and fake ivy to give children that calmer and more inviting environment that they thrive in.

"A sense of belonging, a feeling of being welcome, safe and accepted... it's like coming home" - Vicky Hallas-Fawcett, Company Director, Little People Nurseries

As the inside of our setting became established we started to spread the inspiration outside. The key to success here was really getting our parents on board so that they fully understand the concept and worked with us. We've found our all-weather suits invaluable and the Yorkshire weather can sometimes be challenging but we're certainly seeing the benefits for the children that feel much more at home outdoors.

Mental Health First Aid



You will know the three Ps in first aid: to Preserve life, Prevent further injury, Promote recovery. These are also the main principles for Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), which is much less known, but saves lives in the same way.

We interview Director of Communities and Content Development at MHFA England Caroline Hounsell, who will be speaking at our Conference on 28 June 2019.

Psychotherapist Caroline Hounsell trained with MHFA founder Betty Kitchener and was one of the first 14 national trainers to spread the word in the UK. There are now more than three million trained across the world.

The course aims to give people the skills and knowledge to provide initial support to people developing mental health issues or in mental health crisis. It also raises awareness of mental health issues.

Caroline said: "The people we train are often surprised by how common mental health issues are. You are more likely to come across someone with thoughts of suicide than having a heart attack.

"A big part is challenging the stigma. When I started, mental health was not talked about."

Graduates of the one day MHFA England course become Mental Health Champions. The two day course certifies Mental Health First Aiders. Everyone - but course graduates in particular - should maintain and improve their own mental wellbeing to support others.

MHFA training does not make anyone an expert, but it gives delegates information about signs and symptoms and how to act in a life-threatening situation. They are trained to signpost people towards professional help, self-help information, or EAPs - whichever is most appropriate.

What's in it for employers?

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act, employers have a duty of care to look after employees' mental health and wellbeing in the workplace "so far as is reasonably practicable". Most tribunals are going the way of the employee in cases of work-related stress and depression.

Forward-thinking companies recognise that a happier workforce is more

productive and less prone to absence.

"The business case, and more importantly the moral case, for addressing mental health in the workplace is clear. Mentally healthy workplaces enable people to thrive in work and life. They support both sustainability and productivity."

Take the stress out of it

Stress is the leading cause of more serious mental illness. Some of the biggest offenders at work are:

- Workload pressures
- Tight deadlines
- Poor job design and unrealistic expectations of staff
- Lack of managerial support.

There's an expectation we can achieve more because technology has enabled more multi-tasking. With the early years sector under pressure, it's easy to get sucked in.

Caroline said: "It starts with you. Caregivers are very good at deprioritising themselves. You are the most important person in your life and need to look after yourself so you can continue to support those around you.

"What's difficult is if you have leaders who are very stressed themselves supporting stressed staff, this will filter down.

"It's really important to ask staff what

they need. Ask them to give feedback about how they are being line managed."

Coping strategies

To prevent stress building into a serious mental illness like anxiety, it's important to put coping strategies in place.

These depend on the individual, but include exercise, laughter, fresh air, sport, spending time with friends, singing, nature watching.

Caroline added: "We all need rest and reflection time. The human brain is not designed for this high level of consistent pressure, we are designed for little injections of adrenaline to run away from predators.

"We need processing time but we're filling it with screens and distractions. If you don't have downtime, you will be awake at night. Social media is brilliant but can be our downfall. It's not the technology at fault, it's how we use it.

"With all the current mayhem going on, it's important we look at our lives and see which bits nourish them and how we can increase our contact with that. Spend time doing things you love to do, minimise unhelpful coping strategies and don't bottle things up."

Substance misuse

People misusing substances are much more at risk of mental illness. Many turn to drugs and alcohol initially as a coping mechanism. They make the symptoms worse. Between 30% and 50% of people with a mental illness also abuse substances.

Worst case scenario

- One in 15 in the UK has made a suicide attempt (NHS, 2016)
- For every suicide it is estimated there are 10 to 25 attempts (WHO, 2014)
- In the UK, more than three times as many people die from suicide than are killed in traffic accidents (NHS)
- More women suffer from mental ill health than men, but 75% of all suicides are men (ONS, 2016).



Who is at risk?

Anyone can be at risk of suicide. But people are more vulnerable if they:

- drink or use drugs
- have been abused or neglected
- experience traumatic events
- had poor parenting
- experience bereavement
- undergo major life changes
- are physically ill.

MHFA courses explain the warning signs and what to do if someone you know is planning to take their life, or if you are present when a person is trying to take their own life.

Good mental health in the workplace

The course aims to give a positive approach towards life and work. A MHFA England Champion is trained to promote good mental wellbeing and resilience as well as offering support in a crisis.

Improve overall staff wellbeing by doing any of the following:

- Treat staff as individuals
- Provide training to identify who is at risk, recognise the signs and support them in the workplace - HSE includes long-term mental ill health as a disability so strategies should be put in place to support people with mental ill health
- Promote wellbeing and positive working relationships
- Encourage exercise and social events
- Develop mental health strategies
- Talk about wellbeing with staff one to one
- Train managers in mental health first aid skills
- Engage with your staff through a mental health wellbeing survey - an emotional temperature check
- Create a health and wellbeing team - it's everybody's responsibility
- Normalise mental wellbeing - include it with physical wellbeing.

Why it's crucial for children

We need to value the people who are caring, nurturing and educating our children. If you're struggling with your mental health, it's tough on the children.

Have age appropriate conversations with children and do that with the adults and parents so everyone is used to this sort of dialogue. Talk about mental health when you talk about physical health. Ask the children how they are feeling.

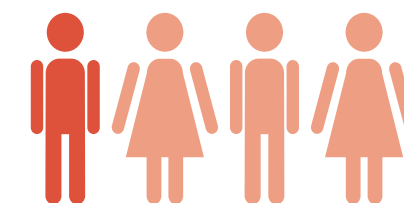
Mental health at work

- 1 in 5 people take time off for stress but 90% cited a different reason for their absence (Mind, 2013)
- Presenteeism - turning up for work but not productive - costs twice as much as absenteeism (CIPD, 2015)
- 15% who disclosed mental health issues to their line manager were disciplined dismissed or demoted (BITC, 2017)



Did you know?

- Globally, one in four people will experience at least one diagnosable mental health issue (WHO)
- In 2017/18 stress was responsible for 57% of working days lost in the UK (HSE)
- Only a fifth of people in the UK with long-term mental health issues are employed (NMH DU 2010)
- The most commonly reported mental health issues are anxiety and depression
- By 2030 depression will be the single leading cause of global disease burden (WHO)
- People can and do recover from even the most serious mental health issue.



1 in 4 will experience at least one mental health issue

By 2030 depression will be the leading cause of global disease burden



NDNA trains managers in MHFA

NDNA is so committed to improving mental wellbeing that all its managers have been offered training in Mental Health First Aid. About 20 managers were trained on the One Day MHFA England, learning all about sources of workplace and home-based stress, coping strategies and the mental health continuum.

LIVING IN THE PRESENT a skill for life

Mindfulness is not just a current buzz word, but a way of bringing attention to the present moment, creating a calming effect; evidence shows it can help with anxiety and depression.

What role should a nursery setting play in teaching children about mindfulness? What are the practicalities and how can you go about introducing it?

What are the benefits for children?

There is an increasing amount of evidence showing that intentional mindfulness can decrease stress, anxiety and feelings of depression. In particular, a review of the evidence on mindfulness in schools showed that children who used mindfulness practices more frequently achieved lower levels of stress and higher wellbeing scores.

But mindfulness isn't just about helping children manage their mental health. Young children exist almost entirely in the present moment, so teaching them how to be more in control of it is a key life skill.

Sue Wilson founded Circus Day Nursery and Pre-school in Cheltenham twenty years ago. They began practising mindfulness in their setting earlier this year and see a clear link between mindfulness and helping children understand their feelings.

"The early years are so fundamental to developing emotions," Sue says. "It's so important to be in the moment, but also for children to be able to identify what they are feeling and when they need to take time out. It's also about learning how to be kind to themselves and others."

We all know that young children can have very intense feelings which can lead to outbursts of anger or frustration, or perhaps being withdrawn. Helping children break the cycle of emotion and learn techniques to calm themselves is an essential life skill and mindfulness can help with this too.

Circus has a mindfulness area with travelling trunks, a parent's beautiful idea of a legacy from her son who was transitioning into school. It's filled with items with lots of different textures and calming water-filled bottles containing glitter that the children can use to bring awareness and focus to understanding their emotions.

Mindfulness can also be very useful in shifting states, says Tracy Hutchison of Beach Babies Nursery near Cambridge.

"We use simple mindfulness techniques to help the children with transitions," she explains. "That could be about coming in from running around outside and settling down before eating, or after wake-up shake-up sessions in the morning."

"Palm breathing or starfish breathing are both simple techniques the children can easily learn which help them focus on that moment, calm their breathing and relax." (See box on the right for an explanation of the techniques.)

Pear Tree Nursery in Haddington near Edinburgh, has seen definite benefits after they recently introduced a mindfulness and relaxation time combined with yoga every day after lunch.

Manager Heather Goode said: "We have been doing this for six weeks so far and the difference in the children is clear. After the relaxation time they start learning and playing for the afternoon and are focused and engaged. It has definitely benefitted us and we are keen to see how it continues to grow over the coming months."

Benefits for nursery practitioners

All of the nurseries we spoke to talked about the benefits of mindfulness for their team, whether directly or indirectly.

The Old School House Nursery near Cambridge has long believed in building the knowledge and skills of the staff team associated with positive wellbeing.

One way they have achieved this was to integrate mindful techniques into the day-to-day routines of the nursery as a way of supporting children, staff and parents. Now every staff meeting starts with a two-minute mindfulness exercise

such as mindful listening, tasting or a meditation.

"We saw immediately that it complemented our strength-based approach," says nursery manager Lisa Weston. "In a busy job like working at a nursery, having the time to stop, pause and think is so important. Equipping our team with these skills has meant that are better able to help children deal with their feelings and emotions, giving them the vital skills that they can take through life."

Linda Baston-Pitt, nursery director, said: "It has definitely made a difference to the staff team, they are less reactive and more patient, and also less stressed. The knock on benefit has been in strengthening relationships between staff, children and parents."

Mel Mackin of Mackin Childcare in East Kilbride and Anniesland in Glasgow has been practising mindfulness and meditation for more than 20 years. "It has saved my life, literally, on a practical, physical, medical level, and also provided me with the usual benefits associated with meditation."

She recently introduced mindfulness and meditation to the nursery and has seen immediate benefits for both the staff and children. "Parents cannot believe that the children opt to come in and get so much from it. I have watched children afterwards and spotted better concentration, more calming behaviour and more eye to eye contact."

"One staff member disclosed after a

"Mindfulness is the informal act of paying attention to the present; meditation is the formal practise of mindfulness, often by paying attention to your breathing."



Pear Tree Nurseries Haddington participate together



Old School House Nursery trying out a yoga tree pose

few sessions that it had helped her personal anxiety a lot and that she was going to practice it in her own time. She is studying at the moment and believes she performs better after meditation bursts. The children's relationships with staff and their peers have also improved."

Are there any curriculum links?

There are very clear links to the Personal, Social and Emotional part of the curriculum, including teaching children and understanding of and techniques to help regulate their emotions, emotional language and, critically, empathy.

Listening and attention are also important early learning goals in the EYFS. Regular practise of mindfulness can help children develop these skills by including them in lots of ways throughout the day.

"If children are already familiar with a technique they will find it easier to resort to it at a time of need," says Jo Baranek, NDNA's lead Early Years Advisor. "Anything that's embedded will come more naturally."

So children who are familiar with tools or techniques such as calming bottles or palm breathing will find it easy to use them at a time of acute emotion, helping them to take back control more quickly.

"If children know their emotional trigger points and can spot them, they can make the decision to remove themselves from the situation or seek help, rather than things spiralling out of control," Jo continues.

Whatever your view of mindfulness, can you afford not to not spend two minutes trying it out with the children in your setting to see whether you notice a difference? Based on the people we've spoken to, you won't be wasting your time.

Mindfulness activity ideas

- **Palm breathing** – encourage the children to stroke a finger up their palm as they breathe in, and down as they breathe out. It can help to engage the child with the shortest attention span by using them as the model, helping them to trace their finger up and down
- **Starfish breathing** – hold one hand out in front of you and spread your fingers wide like a starfish. Trace the outline of your hand with a finger of the other hand, up the side of one finger as you breathe in, down the other side of the same finger as you breathe out
- **Toy breathing** – good for younger children. Get them to lie on their backs and balance a toy on their tummy – a Duplo block works well. Talk the children through breathing slowly in and out, pointing out the toy goes up when they breathe in deeply, and down as they breathe out. Can they make the toy go even higher and even lower next time?
- **Rain shakers/calming bottles** – filled with water and glitter (and easy to make yourself), they are particularly useful when a child needs to calm down
- **Be free** – put on soft music and tell the children they can move however they choose to free their emotions
- **A listening exercise** – stand outside and be quiet for a minute; then get all of the children to list the sounds they heard and talk about what they might have been – for example animals, vehicles, birds, or other people
- **Cloud-spotting** – lie down and watch the clouds pass over. Describe the shapes. Talk to the children about how their bodies feel in contact with the earth
- **Eating mindfully** – use a raisin or something else with an interesting texture. First get the children to hold the raisin, noticing how it feels. Then look carefully at it in their fingers/palm. Move on to smelling the raisin, breathing in deeply through the nose. Now put the raisin in your mouth and feel the texture before chewing it. Swallow the raisin and notice how it feels in your throat. Can you follow it all the way down into your stomach?