Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing

Tips to create the physical environment
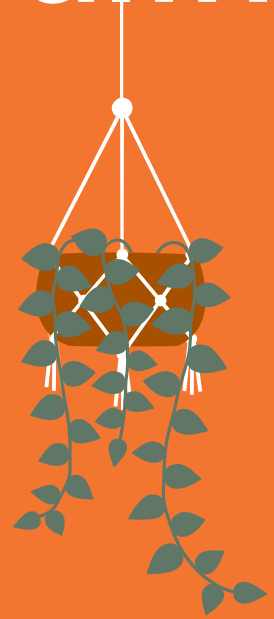
Education Support

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Bringing the outdoors indoors

Invest in some plants

Natural elements such as plants can help connect school staff with the outside world and create a calmer workplace environment. Colour psychology has shown that green is a mood-enhancing colour and is known to be a very effective stress-buster, so combining nature with the colour green is a win-win! Why not contact your local garden centre and see if they would be willing to donate some plants?

Create a photo board

Schools boards are used for many things, so why not create a wellbeing board for staff to add pictures to of their favourite countries, beaches, parks and outdoor spaces? Some *research* suggests that just looking at images of nature is enough 'natural' stimulus to lower stress levels. This is a great way to bring the outdoors in!

OUR WELLBEING BOARD

Let the fresh air flow

The quality of air within a workplace can have a significant impact on the health of staff and in turn productivity. One simple way to let the fresh air flow is to encourage the opening of windows.

But it's not just a case of letting the air flow from outside, you should also think about how you reduce any pollutants within the school environment. This may include pollutants from:

- Boilers and generators
- Air conditioning systems
- Garden equipment
- Kitchens and canteens

The clean air for schools framework can help you think about how you approach this and some of the things you may want to consider, both in terms of the internal environment but the wider impact schools have on pollution levels.

Exposure to natural daylight

Studies[1] of lighting in the workplace have consistently shown that sunlight has positive effects on workers' subjective well-being; and that employees prefer to work near windows or in workspaces with natural lighting.

Where possible staff should be exposed to natural daylight. Where this is not possible, staff should be given adequate opportunities to get outside and encouraged to do so. If your school building has little access to natural daylight, you should consider the following:

1. (Leather, Pyrgas, Beale & Lawrence, 1998; Oldham & Fried, 1987; Wang & Boubekri, 2009; Yildirim et al. 2007).

- Whether you are maximising the natural lighting you do have, for example move big, bulky furniture that blocks any sunlight.

- Taking into consideration the need for staff to get fresh air when allocating work and timetables.

- The possibility of adding skylights.

- Providing Seasonal Affective (SAD) Disorder lamps for any staff who are affected by this disorder, which usually starts in the autumn or winter and improves in the spring. SAD lamps produce very bright lights to recreate the morning sunlight that people miss during the winter months.

Making the best of the inside environment

Space for creativity

Creativity is another way in which we can create a happier school environment. Pupils are encouraged to be creative, but can we say the same for staff? It's important to think about the physical surroundings we're expecting staff to be 'creative' within. Here are five easy ways to create the physical space for creativity:

- When people become glued to a particular place, their perspective stays glued, too, so design space to allow for movement. Reduce the barriers to thinking creatively.

- Install a communal table or other gathering space to bring staff together.

- Provide space for projects - clear space where staff can leave projects-in-progress without worrying about the mess.

A tidy workspace

Some people do just fine in cluttered work environments. In fact, a messy desk can stoke creativity. But *research* has also shown that, for many of us, a disorganised space leads to a loss of emotional control. This means staff may struggle to maintain their attention—or to keep their stress or anxiety levels in check.

Within schools, the workspace is occupied by pupils as well as staff, so the likelihood of 'clutter' is much greater!

- Take creative thinking outside. This is a win/win, as we know nature boosts wellbeing so why not boost creativity as well?

- Or bring the outside in — surround your creative spaces with greenery, plants and nature.

Colour

Colour has the capacity to impact our mood, and have an influence on our mental and physical well-being. Research in neuroscience and psychology has shown the effect that colour has on our brains and our hormones, resulting in an effect on our mood, behaviour and our physiology. Therefore, the colours that we surround ourselves with on a daily basis can affect how we feel, and therefore the choice of colour in our schools is so important.

As already noted, colour psychology has shown that green is a mood-enhancing colour so getting as much green into your school can only be a good thing!

A dedicated quiet room

Allocating a dedicated quiet room where staff can take some time out is important. They'll be times throughout the day, where staff members may need time to be alone to breath, re-set and re-focus. They also might want to use this space to have a conversation with a colleague, especially if they are struggling and need some support.

School buildings are busy, often with many people occupying rooms at any one time, so creating an inviting space for people to talk should they need it is a good way of supporting staff mental health and wellbeing through the physical environment.

Lighting

Research has shown that lighting at work can have significant effects on brain function and productivity. Poor lighting can cause headaches, eye strain, and tiredness which can all contribute to stress, and thereby anxiety and depression.

A *report* by Professor Jo Silvester and Dr Efrosyni Konstantinou at the Centre for Performance at Work found that existing research documents good evidence of an association between lighting and work performance, mediated by employee well-being.

There are some simple, but important things, to consider:

- Controlling the glare from indoor lights as much as possible, especially on computer screens.

- Replacing flickering lights straight away.

- Layering different types of lighting in a workspace, such as ambient and task lighting.

Providing the right equipment

Giving staff access to the right equipment to carry out their roles, is a key component of creating a positive physical environment for staff to work in. If staff feel uncomfortable in their physical space, this will not only impact on their physical health but on their mental health as well. The type of equipment you may include is:

- An adjustable workstation, including suitable desk and chair

- Filing cabinet, drawers and shelving

- A PC, and laptop, including anti-glare devices. By law, all employers must carry out a Display Screen Equipment Assessment

- Phones and mobile phones if needed

- Stationery and office supplies

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