



TeachingEnglish

British Council: TeachingEnglish

A podcast series for teachers
of English



**Episode 9: How can I support
my own and my students'
wellbeing?**

Transcript



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Duration: 0:26:15

Chris: Hello, and welcome to Teaching English with the British Council, a podcast in which we try and provide solutions to some of the key questions being asked by English teachers around the world.

Chris: I'm your host, Chris Sowton. In each episode, we address one such question and attempt to answer it in two ways.

In the first part of each episode, we hear from a British Council project, programme or publication about something which is being done to address this issue. Across the 10 episodes of the series, we hear from teachers, trainers and researchers in a wide range of contexts, including India, Lebanon, Uruguay, and South Africa.

In the second part, a leading English expert and practitioner will provide practical solutions which you can immediately try out wherever you work. Each episode of Teaching English is accompanied by a full transcript and show notes. These show notes provide additional information, a glossary of keywords and links to relevant websites.

Sting: This is episode 9: how can I support my own and my students' mental wellbeing?

Chris: Welcome to Episode 9 of Teaching English with the British Council, in which we will try to answer the question: How can I support my own and my students' mental wellbeing?

The last two years have presented huge challenges for both teachers and students in terms of their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. And yet, as our interview guest in this episode said in a recent blog, so many teachers neglect their own self-care, focusing their time and energy on other aspects of their professional practice. In episode seven of Teaching English with the British Council, we looked at the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and how they could be used in the language learning classroom. In this episode, we follow on from this and look specifically at SDG 3, Good Health and Wellbeing and, in particular, at how you can support your own and

your students' mental health.

And so, in this episode's field report, we look at a recent publication by the British Council as part of their Connecting Classrooms programme. As well as hearing all about this publication available free on the British Council website, and the activities you could do with your students, we'll also hear some entries from one of the resources mentioned in the book from the Positive Lexicography Project, which celebrates so-called untranslatable words related to wellbeing from across the world's languages.

Emily: Hi. I'm Emily Pelter, the senior consultant at the British Council who oversaw the publication of *Mental Health and Wellbeing: Staying Healthy and Resilient*.

According to the World Health Organization, depression is one of the leading causes of disability. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15–29-year-olds. People with severe mental health conditions die prematurely – as much as two decades early – due to preventable physical conditions. Despite progress in some countries, people with mental health conditions often experience severe human rights violations, discrimination, and stigma.

Rachel: Hi I'm Rachel, and I'm a Welsh speaker. My positive word is 'Cwtch', which means a hug or a cuddle, as well as a sanctuary or a safe, welcoming place.

Emily: This publication, *Mental Health and Wellbeing: Staying Healthy and Resilient*, was created in order to promote positive mental health and wellbeing among teachers and pupils and their broader school communities. The publication is very practically focused, and contains a range of activities which you can use to develop positive health and wellbeing for both yourself and your students. While these resources were developed as a response to the Covid 19 pandemic, the activities are open-ended, and so provide a flexible resource to support children and young people's mental health.

Hala: Hi I'm Hala and I'm an Arabic speaker. My positive word is 'Eshra', which means the connection you have with someone having known each other for a long time, and from your shared experiences.

Emily: Another really strong theme in the publication is gratitude. Showing gratitude is really important for mental wellbeing, and it also provides many opportunities for language development. Three suggestions for this are given in the publication. So first there is a gratitude tree, where students each design their own leaf, in which they write something which they are grateful for. The leaves are then all displayed on a class gratitude tree. Second, students can create gratitude books, which are made by folding a piece of A4 paper many times. They can record their gratitude in this book on a daily

or weekly basis. And thirdly, students can, individually, write what they are grateful for on pieces of square paper. And then these bits of paper can be brought together and displayed in the form of a 'gratitude quilt' to show connection and interdependence.

Book: Hi, I am Book and I'm a Thai speaker. My positive word is 'Nam jai', which literally means 'water from the heart', but can be used to mean kindness or generosity.

Emily: Throughout the publication, there are also lots of things for teachers, to help them think about how they can integrate mental health and wellbeing into their daily activities. One suggestion concerns the importance of promoting learning throughout our lives. And one way to do this is to create a board in the staffroom, or even in a public part of the school, where teachers can share photos of their learning in action. The whole staff team could even focus on one particular skill which they're all attempting to learn. And this can be a really valuable learning and sharing experience for teachers, and also very motivating for students.

Linda: Hi, I'm Linda. Sometimes, the last thing which teachers want to do after a hard day or week of teaching, is to sit down in a room for training or a meeting. So rather than having a meeting sitting in the staffroom, could you go for a staff meeting walk instead? Or is there something different which you could do, something unusual, which is a bit more fun and brings the staff team together? Alternatively, you could create a 'wellbeing jar' in which you put pieces of paper in where you can write ideas, quotations, initiatives, challenges or promises that might inspire others.

Emily: It's really vital that we all look after our mental health in the same way as our physical health. Mental health is about having a positive mental outlook with the ability to take control over life's challenges. We need to work to maintain it. And there are things which can be done in the classroom to understand mental wellbeing better and to do things which can improve it.

Rosa: Hi I'm Rosa, and I'm a Catalan speaker. My positive word is 'Sobretaula', which means the time you are sitting around the table after eating with friends or family, when the food has finished but the conversation is still flowing.

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Chris: Thank you to all our contributors to that field report. And following Rachel, Hala, Book and Rosa, I would like to add my own positive word from English which is Petrichor: the smell of rain, particularly the smell made when it falls on dry soil. As ever, please remember that you can access a full transcript and show notes from the British Council website.

Chris: Sarah Mercer is professor for foreign language teaching and the head of the ELT Research and Methodology department at the University of Graz in Austria. Her main area of current research explores language teacher wellbeing, looking at how mentally and physically healthy teachers are more engaged, motivated and efficient. Her most recent book was nominated for the British Council ELTon's in the Innovation and Teacher Resources category and titled Teacher Wellbeing. Sarah, welcome to the podcast.

Sarah: Thank you so much, Chris, it's lovely to be here.

Chris: So Sarah, from your website, there's a quotation I just wanted to ask you about it says "positive teacher wellbeing is one of the key ingredients to being not just a good teacher, but a great teacher." Could you expand a little bit on why you think that?

Sarah: There's a strong connection between teacher wellbeing and learner wellbeing. Now I don't want to make teacher wellbeing just about the learner, as it should be about the teachers in their own right. You know, they deserve to be enjoying wellbeing in their professional lives anyway. But if the teacher is in a good place, physically and mentally, they just have more capacity to be creative, to deal with difficulties in the classroom without having a meltdown, without their nerves being fraught, to think about how to deal with things differently. You know, teaching's a very demanding job, you have to think on your feet a lot, you have to be quite flexible. And you know, everybody listening, every teacher knows that when you're tired, you're a little bit more cranky and irritable, everything gets on your nerves a lot quicker, you just go through things that are familiar and comfortable because you just don't have the brain space to do anything else. So you can have the best tools in the world, the best materials in the world.