

# **Education Technical Note:**Teacher Wellbeing

Ensuring Education Resilience and Positive Learning Outcomes



# **Note to Right To Play Staff:**

# Using this Technical Guidance

This guidance is to help Right To Play staff advocate for and promote teacher wellbeing as schools reopen following COVID-19 forced school closures around the world. It can also be used in any setting where teacher wellbeing is a concern, whether in a crisis or non-crisis setting, following COVID-19.

While we already work on psychosocial support (PSS), life skills/social emotional learning (SEL) and wellbeing in many of our projects - and in some cases these are being measured in project LogFrames – much of this programming and measurement focuses on children.

Moving forward, we will aim to address *both* teacher and student wellbeing, as we acknowledge how both are vitally important for creating a positive learning environment which directly impacts students' learning outcomes.

As COVID-19 unfolds, after a long period of working differently, and as schools begin to reopen, there is a significant risk of teachers becoming 'burnt out' weeks or months into the resumption of the school year. If this happens, education quality could become further compromised, undoing the great work that many of our projects have supported to date. Teacher burnout or compromised wellbeing could manifest in many different ways: spikes in incidents of school-based corporal punishment and GBV; poor teacher attendance and even drop out from the profession leading to supply issues; or perhaps lower levels of motivation and creativity reducing PBL in practice. Demand for education may also suffer if parents are consequently unconvinced that their children are better off at school with their teachers versus being at home, working or married.

Right To Play wants to support the schools we work with to reopen and stay open so that children can return to their learning journeys and teachers can resume their professional lives. We want teachers to feel confident and comfortable to deliver any adapted curricula where required, and for schools to become resilient to future shocks and stresses by having a robust and dynamic school community in place that is confident, communicative and supportive. Encouraging a culture that values teacher wellbeing is central to making sure these aspirations can become reality.

Right To Play teams can use the content in this document in whatever way makes sense contextually. The content is deliberately presented in sections and can be extracted as needed. Some content is aimed directly at teachers and education personnel, others at Right To Play staff. Opportunities to use the material could be:

- i) At initial CoTT training sessions with teachers
- ii) At refresher training sessions with school staff
- iii) As a prompt for CoP discussions
- iv) As an aid to support coaching and mentoring discussions
- v) To provide head teachers and teachers with some ideas on how to safeguard health and wellbeing in their classrooms and schools so learning can take place.
- vi) To support our engagement and advocacy efforts at specific COVID-19 school, government or education cluster meetings

For any further support on using this material, please contact the Global Education Team: Andrea Diaz-Varela at ADiaz-Varela@righttoplay.com & Loulou Shah at Ishah@righttoplay.com



# **Understanding Wellbeing:**

# What is Wellbeing and Why Does Teacher Wellbeing Matter?

In its simplest sense, wellbeing is about how we feel about ourselves and how we function – personally, professionally and socially. It is not about how we feel in a particular moment, but rather how we feel more broadly, over the longer term.

## TEACHER TASK: Ask yourself, "How do I feel about and function in my job?"

## Are these statements true for you?

- ✓ I believe that I have a meaningful social role
- ✓ I feel happy and hopeful
- ✓ I am living according to good values, according to my context
- ✓ I have positive social relations and a supportive environment
- ✓ I am able to cope with challenges using positive life skills
- ✓ I feel secure, protected and am able to access quality services¹

These statements are statements of wellbeing. If they are all true for you, then at this moment you are feeling well. If however, some or all of them are not true for you that is okay too. You will receive information about what you can do to feel more positive.

Teacher wellbeing matters not simply because teachers are valued members of the community, but also because well teachers are able to establish and nurture healthy relationships with students, manage classes better and create a positive classroom climate for all students to thrive.

There is also a wealth of evidence to indicate that teachers are the strongest school-level variable associated with student learning, and that there is a significant relationship between teachers' well-being and students' social, emotional, and cognitive development.<sup>1</sup>

Essentially, where teachers are well, students will be too and therefore more likely to achieve positive learning outcomes.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Schwille, Dembélé, & Schubert, 2007; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jennings et al., 2017; Jennings, 2016; Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013; McCallum et al., 2017 – cited in Falk et al., 2019.



# **How Might Teachers You Work With Be Feeling?**

# Some Possible Scenarios to Look Out For

#### Right To Play Staff: It is not advised to share this section directly with teachers.

This is because receiving all of this information may be overwhelming and therefore counterproductive as we try to help them feel more positive.

It is important to remember that everyone is an individual. We are not all affected by the same circumstances in the same way, and we certainly do not all cope in the same way. Teachers may be experiencing a mixture of emotions in any one moment, or their feelings may vary from day to day.

The reality is that while many teachers may be happy to return to school and their students, and to regain some sense or routine and normalcy, they may also have some very real concerns about their wellbeing, or that of others around them, which could become overwhelming if not given space to discuss and find solutions with their school communities.

Right To Play can - through its existing programmes and relationships with school stakeholders — create safe spaces to encourage discussion around what teachers are feeling as they return to school, and to brainstorm what support needs they may have and how these can be met. Such safe spaces could also explore how teachers could use newly gained or existing skills that they have been putting into practice during school closures to support their peers and wider school community. In this way, discussions can fully acknowledge challenges, but also end positively with a solutions and empowerment focus.

Below are some possible scenarios teachers may be experiencing. Right To Play staff can use these as prompts for discussions. (Again, it is not advised to read out the sources of anxiety.)

## **Sources of Anxiety**

- <u>Distance learning/adjusting to new ways of working</u>: relying on new technology or teaching methods, such as PBL if it is new for them, might cause doubts about capacity.
- <u>Loss of personal contact with students and colleagues</u>: isolating, disruptive to routines, reduced sense of purpose.
- <u>Uncertain job security/loss of income</u>: worries about sustaining self/family; may still may be an issue, and may impact on food security or other basic needs.
- <u>Personal tragedy or instability</u>: family and friends may have been affected/lost; grief may further
  compound fears about returning to work. GBV may have affected female teachers in particular who
  may have been able without their routine income and public persona to command as much power and
  agency. Some may have left home, and like Internally Displaced teachers or others who have lost their
  homes due to affordability or other reasons, may feel very unstable and anxious.
- <u>Challenges with work-life balance</u>: especially female teachers or those with additional care responsibilities, particularly where school workload has increased.



- <u>Gender/social hierarchies at school</u>: additional WASH, administrative or care duties at school may become the responsibility of junior, marginalised or female staff. Additionally, discrimination between who received PPE and other supports could be an issue.
- <u>Potential to contract COVID-19 at school</u>: especially where shielding vulnerable family members at home.
- Poor school management/leadership: risk-taking, lack of direction or enforcement of rules.
- Students returning with different levels of learning loss: perhaps more prevalent where teachers know that there was uneven access to distance learning. May have worries about managing this, especially where children are in exam grades or they may be assessed as professionals against their students' performance.
- <u>Children who have not returned or those at high risk of dropping out</u>: may be more acute in refugee settings, or if aware of children who have become pregnant, married or engaged in labour, armed militia groups or the military.
- Right To Play or other INGO programme activities/ government obligations: these may be required to take place out of school hours/ on the weekend.

## **Sources of Positivity**

- Seeing colleagues and students again: restoration of social connections, routine and hope.
- <u>Increased capacity and self-efficacy</u>: may have been able to adapt better than initially expected and learned new things along the way, including maybe new technologies to teach students remotely.
- Receipt of community/INGO/government support: teachers are often highly regarded members of
  the community, even if they are not from the same community. Either in-kind support or official
  assistance may have buoyed them up and encouraged a sense of gratitude or connection to their
  communities.
- Family/friends' wellness or recovery: gratitude for the safety and wellbeing of those they love.
- <u>Camaraderie at school</u>: students and teachers may have returned with a greater sense of purpose and community that will be positively reinforcing.

Right To Play Staff: Are there any other potential sources of anxiety or positivity that teachers in your context may be feeling that are not listed here?



# A Note to Teachers:

# Acknowledging Your Challenges and Supporting Your Return

## **TEACHER TASK:** Reflect on or discuss these questions with your peers:

- 1. How did COVID-19 affect my family and me?
- 2. How am I feeling about returning to school?
- 3. If I am anxious or happy, what are the sources of those feelings?
- 4. What can I do for myself in order to feel more comfortable, valued or confident?
- 5. What can I do for someone else to help that person to feel more comfortable, valued or confident?

COVID-19 has presented a complex challenge for education actors around the world, and no more so than for teachers like you who are now operating on the front lines of an even greater education crisis.

We at Right To Play (RTP) know that teachers are the central cogs of any education system. For the education system to function successfully, you need to feel positive and supported to carry out the important work that you do for the children in your classrooms, schools and communities.

We also know that teaching is a vocation. After long periods away from your classrooms, you may understandably be keen to get back to recover lost teaching hours and get your students back on track.

Right To Play's field teams across the world are reporting that most back-to-school plans include teachers working longer hours, often because they are double-shifting or running additional remedial classes. We also know that many of you, as well as head teachers, education officials and other stakeholders, are using weekends alongside public and academic holidays to participate in training and to provide exam tuition.

Your return to work may leave you with a great mix of emotions – joy no doubt to be reunited with your students and colleagues again, but also perhaps some apprehension about how you've managed the past few months, especially if this has involved new teaching and learning approaches. You may also wonder what your 'new normal' at school will look like with new protocols or perhaps some students visibly absent or at risk of being, and whether your own safety, work-life balance or job will be protected as the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve. If left unaddressed, some of the more negative feelings you have may grow, as will the risk of you becoming 'burnt out.'2

While many of these feelings will be universally held by teachers across the globe, there is no singular 'back-to-school' script being followed since the pandemic has manifested differently in different

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> IFRC Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support defines burnout as "an emotional state due to long-term stress, characterized by chronic emotional exhaustion, depleted energy, impaired enthusiasm and motivation to work, diminished work efficiency, a diminished sense of personal accomplishment, and pessimism and cynicism."



countries, and this is in part because each country has markedly different risk factors as well as resources to monitor, manage and respond to the pandemic.

Some countries Right To Play is working in are considering blended learning, combining some online learning with face-to-face time in schools, others are continuing with home-based remote learning until they feel safe to reopen schools. Some are making adjustments to class sizes and operating shift systems, other are creating year group 'bubbles' to be able to track and contain any outbreaks should they arise within schools. Most settings are required to have basic WASH (water, hygiene, sanitation) facilities in place before reopening, though not all have a clear plan or budget for this.

Though these times are unprecedented for education personnel all around the world, not all challenges are insurmountable. There are many things that you and your school community can do that are within your control. Supporting teacher wellbeing - and indeed the wellbeing of the whole school community - is one such area. We know that when teachers are stressed, so too are children, and that *stress at school reduces everyone's chances of success at school.* With learning losses expected after long periods off and many children having been unable to access distance learning, it is important that these losses are not compounded upon children's return. One key way to avoid that is to make sure that you are well, and that your students are also well, so that you can both teach and learn, no matter what environment you are asked to do so in. Teacher wellbeing is considered the single most influential driver of student success at school. So, if wellbeing is prioritised, learning will come, and learning cannot come without wellbeing – yours especially.

An opportunity now exists for all of us in the education community – from government officials and (I)NGOs to students, parents, teachers and Head Teachers - to consider doing things differently, more innovatively, collaboratively, purposefully, and maybe even better than ever.

Ensuring that teachers like you get the vital support that you need to keep the children in your care happy, safe and learning is central to building a resilient education system and securing positive learning outcomes in the short, medium and longer terms.

Congratulations on making it through a challenging few months, and remember that Right To Play is dedicated to supporting you and your schools!

For some simple suggestions on how to support teacher wellbeing, see the **Actions to Promote Teacher**Wellbeing – What You can Do Yourself and What Others in the Education System Can Do tip sheets.

**Important:** If you try to improve your wellbeing but find after some time that you are still unable to cope, it is important that you seek professional support. Right To Play and perhaps also your school will have a service directory of organisations that you can be referred to in order to receive such specialised support. There is no shame in doing this, in fact, it means you value your life and are powerfully seeking change!



# **Actions to Promote Teacher Wellbeing:**

## What You Can Do Yourself

#### **Personal**

- Prioritise safety and wellbeing above all other goals at school. If individuals do not feel good, they
  cannot work or learn.
- Accept uncertainty and normalise distress. As soon as we accept that these are part of our 'new normal' we can adjust to them, see them as a fact of life and practically manage better.
- Recognise that we all experience life and cope differently, and that is OK. Trauma and stress manifests in many ways including tearfulness, mood swings, aggression, withdrawal from social interactions, migraines, anxiety attacks, muscle tension, difficulty sleeping or concentrating and poor appetite. If you do not feel your usual self and think you may not be coping as best you could, tell someone who can provide you with support. Consider bringing issues to the Community of Practice to discuss and find collaborative and empathetic solutions together as a group.
- Focus on doing your best at managing what you can control and establish a simple routine. Eat as best you can, stay as hydrated as you can, get as much sleep as you can and exercise as often as you can. Turning off devices before bedtime will help you get better quality rest. Exercise can just be a daily walk. Whatever you do, try to build a healthy routine into every day, whether you are teaching daily, and at school every day, or not.
- Manage your information and communication carefully. If you find the news stressful, perhaps limit the number of times you tune in to it. Social media is helpful for receiving quick updates, but can be overwhelming and isolating. Ensure your news comes from credible sources, and consider limiting your daily screen time so that you focus on other ways to provide yourself with information and self-care.
- Write things down. Writing down your worries can help you process if you are being rational or overthinking, and whether you can control the things that are making you worry anyway. Being practical rather than letting worries 'bounce' around your mind is a proven technique for managing mental health. Keeping a gratitude diary also helps: you can write down three things every day that you are grateful for.
- Reflect on what you learnt about self-care in your Right To Play training. Remind yourself of your self-care plan and any strategies that you already developed for dealing with immediate stressors that you may need to revive, and the self-care routines you may need to reintegrate into your everyday life.
- If you work long hours or are now working in double shifts, try to schedule a break in between lessons where you can connect with colleagues briefly, have a quick change of scenery or do something to refresh yourself. Remember that you can use games over the course of your day to lift your spirits as well as your students, and to combat fatigue.

## **Social and/or Spiritual**

Spend time with people who energise you. These are isolating times, and it is important that you create a small social 'bubble' that works well for you. If you find certain people add anxiety or are often negative or catastrophize events and this exhausts you, gently find ways to limit time with them or respectfully communicate that you want to focus on what you can do that is positive. You do not need to cut those people out of your lives, especially if they are important to you, but you can set some boundaries that help you cope better and you can communicate your needs kindly.



- **Do things that reinforce your values and sense of community.** Depending on the context this could include engaging safely with your faith community; taking part in COVID-19 response efforts locally; or perhaps just conducting small acts of benevolence like bringing food and supplies to those who are most vulnerable. This will help you feel less powerless, more purposeful and more connected to others.
- Whatever you are doing, try to focus on the present. If at school or teaching, be present with your students, and when not working, be present in your alone time as well as with your family and friends.

#### **Professional**

- As teachers, support each other. Ask how you all are coping, be honest and share any tips you may have that could help others. You will rely on this network and your Community of Practice as the COVID-19 situation evolves. Perhaps consider a morning meditation, prayer or meeting as is locally appropriate as a staff team to begin your days positively, making sure that it is inclusive of all teachers.
- Plan your work in advance as much as possible so you feel prepared and organised.
- Remember that everyone will be learning new skills during this time, and it is not a competition. This can be an opportunity for your professional development. Try not to compare yourself with others, be patient as you learn, and ask if you are not sure about a new procedure or how to use technology, for example. It is better to ask than to worry without answers.
- Communicate clearly and calmly with parents and students. Try your best not to project your tension onto them. Remember that they too are going through something unprecedented. Work as a team.
- If you notice a child is behaving out of character, take action in a sensitive and discreet way. This may involve getting advice from their former class teacher who will know that child better. Model the empathetic culture and behaviour that will help everyone recover, including you, moving forward.
- Encourage children to follow safety protocols and classroom rules, and consider how they may want to lead on this. This will make you feel reassured, as well as them, and will provide all of you with a sense of order when the world outside of school feels unpredictable. This is your classroom and you can create an environment you all feel comfortable to be in.
- Brainstorm with your students. Openly and safely discussing what you have all been through will allow you to model empathetic behaviour.<sup>3</sup> You can agree on goals you all think should be in place to support everyone's wellbeing and learning. These could be posted on the wall and the class could debrief at the end of the day to see how you all did to reinforce positive messaging (see image).



Remember: not everything is your responsibility to manage or control. Seek help where needed, know where your limits are and where school management's, students', parents' or others' responsibilities begin. 4

https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/18175/pdf/covid-19 welcome back check-in en - 2020-08-31.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> For guidance on how to have an initial back to school conversation with children: Save the Children and the MHPSS Collaborative, 2020, 'Let's Talk About It - Welcome Back Check In Guidance'

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> For examples, see Right To Play resource: *Actions to Promote Teacher Wellbeing: What Others in the Education System Can Do.* 



# **Actions to Promote Teacher Wellbeing:**

# What Others in the Education System Can Do

### **Head Teachers**

- Prioritise safety and wellbeing above all other goals at school. If individuals do not feel good, they cannot work or learn.
- Practice empathy towards your staff and school community, and towards yourself. Everyone will return with different experiences and abilities to cope. Patience, praise and positivity will go a long way.
- Ensure that recreational activities do not drop off the curriculum in entirety, and ensure that Play-Based Learning and Social Emotional Learning/ Life Skills are integrated into lesson plans. Now more than ever, play is a vital to mitigate the risk of toxic stress. This applies to teachers too!
- Consider mobilising Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and sanitation facilities and any other material, human or financial resources required to ensure teachers and all school staff, including those on temporary or part time contracts, can carry out their jobs safely. Think about how all school stakeholders can help.
- Provide leadership: risk assess your school environment, consult all stakeholders (including children) before confirming plans, inspire positivity, hope and trust, and communicate clearly so that everyone knows how reopening will take place, and is on board so that school can stay open.
- If the school is operating on a shift system, ensure that everyone knows when to come in and that safety is paramount.
- Provide or coordinate teacher training on any new resources or approaches so that they can be confidently administered. This may include use of technology, new workbooks, or other new ways of interacting with or assessing students, including accelerated basic education or remedial approaches. Other partners may need to be engaged with where appropriate.
- Raise the whole school community's awareness about how they stay safe at school during COVID-19, and how to adapt to the new educational environment. Ensure rules are enforced.
- Avoid any additional uncertainty or unnecessary workload for teachers so that they can focus on their job of teaching.
- Consider different teachers' personal circumstances and try to adapt ways of working to be supportive. Are female staff are balancing duties at home? Do staff have family that are especially vulnerable and avoiding all external contact (shielding). Be mindful not to deny any teachers opportunities for professional growth, or indeed salary, simply because of their circumstances.
- Encourage positive and nurturing teacher-student, peer and teacher-management relationships. Use this opportunity to build your school community positively.
- Provide awareness, information, resources and space for psychosocial support for teachers and students, and encourage all to take these services up/break taboos on seeking help. These may include:
  - i. A good school referral system that serves both children's and teacher's needs, and includes a directory of locally available services that have been quality checked. These should include



- gender-based violence support services, disability support, child protection, medical (including mental health), legal and police/judicial services in the area.
- ii. Putting teacher (and student) wellbeing at the top of the agenda at Community of Practice meetings, staff meetings, Parent Teacher Association/School Management Committee meetings, and in coaching and mentoring meetings.
- iii. Discussing school mental health and wellbeing in child clubs and establishing peer support networks or buddy systems for both students and teachers.
- iv. Providing information that is accessible for those it is intended for. For example, information related to Gender-Based Violence could be posted inside girls and female teacher's toilets. Where children are the target audience, information should be presented in a child friendly way and can be shared through play.
- v. Morning assembly, circle times or when the class register is being taken could provide opportunities for students and teachers to bond and ensure that each day starts and/or closes with good intentions and community spirit. (Right To Play has a host of Psychosocial Support and Social Emotional Learning/ Life Skills activities to draw from ask our staff!)
- Have a system for staff and students to communicate if they feel unsafe, and make sure that everyone knows how to use it and feels confident to do so. Clearly explain how any feedback, complaints or disclosures of abuse will be handled. Feedback could be gathered by:
  - i. Placing a secure and routinely unlocked and checked box in a discreet place at school for people to post (anonymous or otherwise) notes through.
- ii. Providing a helpline to call or text
- iii. Designating teachers as focal points for receiving feedback or complaints
- iv. Setting up peer-to-peer support networks (or embedding these into existing child clubs or Communities of Practice).
- Have a contingency plan in place guiding all stakeholders on what will happen if new cases of COVID-19 occur at school. (Communication, coordination, teaching and learning approaches, timelines etc. under various scenarios.) Year group or class 'bubbles' (where a group learn, play and eat separately from others) may be a way to uphold social distancing and avoid whole school closures; follow government advice in context.
- **Provide a trained school counsellor where possible**, or a pastoral care staff member who can make a referral to specialised services for individual children, and possibly even be available for staff.

#### **Parents**

- **Ensure that children return to school** when expected and continue attending school.
- Encourage children to maintain safety protocols and classroom rules when they are at school.
- Be patient with children's learning and support their study time at home so that they can catch up on learning losses; this will help teachers immensely.
- Maintain a respectful and cooperative relationships with teachers, and trust that they are doing their best. This is essential to avoid teachers 'burning out' and then being unable to support children.



## **Government Officials**

- Ensure that and health and education guidance is clear, well-coordinated between ministries and well communicated to the teachers and the public generally, so that it reaches all members of the community.
- Prioritise wellbeing when conducting monitoring, supervision, or coaching and mentoring visits at schools.
- Consider special support for teachers who are particularly vulnerable, including those shielding family members, and children and teachers with disabilities. (Could they reduce face-to-face time with students in enclosed spaces by supporting other teachers with marking or lesson planning, or by taking outdoor activities?)
- Provide PPE/WASH supplies and monitor schools to check that they have the correct provisions and are following government issued protocols. If they need support to meet standards, provide this support.
- Provide curriculum aligned teaching and learning materials to support teachers and students in the new environment (e.g. home learning packs, online content etc.) Ensure that this is as accessible and inclusive to all as possible.
- Provide training on any new materials or government protocols that teachers should be using or following.
- Consider providing public space for any supplemental learning that is taking place out of the school grounds, if required.
- Consider temporarily using trainee teachers to support qualified teachers as assistants as part of their pre-service training.

## **Right To Play**

- Disseminate this Teacher Wellbeing note to teachers before or at the beginning of training. Consider starting with the Self Care session, a back to school reflection activity, or run wellbeing games from the PSS Manuals.
- Follow up on teachers' Self Care Plans in CoP meetings and ensure that coaching and mentoring places a heavy focus on teachers' social-emotional competence and wellbeing.
- Consider providing training on teachers' own social emotional competencies/ life skills, as well as any COVID-19 safety training.
- Consult teachers on the scheduling of project activities, especially training, to ensure that they are
  accessible to all. If teachers have care responsibilities during weekend or evening activities, an inclusive
  solution should be found.
- Encourage feedback from all school community members, and act on it.
- Help all school staff to adjust to these expanded roles and circumstances. This may include thinking through WASH requirements<sup>5</sup> and how to uphold government regulations, or simply adapting games and activities to the new setting.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> See WASH in Schools: Ensuring the Return and Continuity of Quality and Inclusive Education Through and After COVID-19 (2020); Right to Play Global Programme Development Team to release in early October 2020.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> See Right To Play resources, Psychosocial Wellbeing Through Play Games Manual (2018) and Play at Home Manual (2020).



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- 8. Positive Discipline Positive Development, Session 4: Activity 2 Anger and Stress Management (2014)
- 9. WASH in Schools: Ensuring the Return and Continuity of Quality and Inclusive Education Through and After COVID-19 (2020)
- 10. Right To Play Promoting Life Skills for Aboriginal Youth (PLAY) Community Mentor Workshop Self-Care Session (2015)