

Primary group activities | Healthy: Inside and Out | Children's Mental Health Week (4-10 Feb 2019)

These activities for whole class or group work will help primary-age children understand and explore the theme **Healthy: Inside and Out**. Find out how they support curriculum objectives in England, Wales and Scotland with our curriculum checklist, which you can find in the same folder. If you'd like to differentiate or extend the content according to the needs of the children, take a look at our secondary group activities, which you can find in our [secondary resources](#).

You may also be interested in our special **Show and Tell** activity, where children and adults can raise awareness and vital funds by sharing something that makes them feel good. Funds raised will help children get access to the mental health support they need. Find out more in our [fundraising ideas](#).

Infants

Food and feelings

Give each child an A3 page or piece of sugar paper with two circles on it. In the first circle, ask them to draw how they feel when they're really hungry and in the second circle, ask them to draw how they feel when they've had a big tasty meal.

Tell the children to show their faces to each other/the rest of the group and talk about what they look like. Encourage them to put their hands up and answer *What was different about the faces? Why?*

Suggest food helps us feel happy and healthy in our minds as well as our bodies – so we should tell someone if we feel hungry! If you have fruit and milk for your class, stop as a group to eat, drink and talk. If you do this already, ask the children about what they like about this time together and tell the children what you like about it.

Playground games around the world

Encourage children to share their favourite playground games. E.g. tag, what's the time Mr Wolf?, stuck in the mud, hide and seek. Ask how these games make them feel. *Are they happy? Excited? Full of energy?*

Point out that lots of these games involve moving around as part of a group. Explain that children around the world enjoy playing games like this too!

Look at a playground game from a different culture and if appropriate, play it as a group. You could draw on the cultural diversity in your school, or try this example from China: Catch the Dragon's Tail, p.10 tinyurl.com/ycywzdpn

Remember to ask how it makes them feel! Suggest that moving around helps us look after our minds as well as our bodies.

Sleep tips

Bring in a soft toy and introduce it to the group. Explain that it's having trouble sleeping and feels so tired in the morning that it can't think properly and feels very grumpy.

Alternatively, read a story such as 'Bad Mood Bear' by John Richardson, which tackles the same topic.

Ask them to put hands up and give advice to the toy or character. If they aren't sure, you could prompt them with

- Do something relaxing before bed (e.g. drink hot chocolate, have a bath, read/listen to a story)
- Don't do exciting things before bed like playing computer games or watching TV
- Keep the bed tidy – make sure any books and toys aren't stopping you being comfy, though a soft toy is sometimes nice to cuddle

Ask them to take one of these pieces of advice themselves.

Juniors

Connecting through food

Suggest we know how food affects our bodies – e.g. eating fruit and vegetables makes us strong and stops us getting ill. But we sometimes forget how important food is for our minds – and how much it plays a role in our lives!

Ask children to get into small groups and talk about when we use food to celebrate and connect with others. If possible, encourage them to draw on the diversity of the group and/or local community. Answers could range from a morning cup of tea or slice of birthday cake to Christmas dinner, Eid celebrations and Diwali sweets. One from each group could write their best answer on the board.

Collect all their answers and make a class display together about the role of food in different cultures and how it helps our wellbeing and brings us together.

Get up and go!

Ask three volunteers in the group how they feel out of ten – ten being really happy, one being really sad. Keep note of their answers!

Do a physical warm-up as a group – e.g. wiggle arms and legs, do stretches or yoga moves, make up 'freestyle' dances. If appropriate, you could put on some music.

Ask how they feel again and get them to compare the numbers. *Has their mood improved? Why?* Suggest that moving around helps us look after our minds as well as our bodies.

Talk about easy ways to stay active. E.g. walking to school, doing star jumps during playtime, dancing to music. *Is there something you can 'pledge' to do regularly as a group/class? How will it help your bodies and minds?*

Calm time before bed

Ask the group what happens to them when they've not had a good night's sleep. *Do they feel sad? Tired? Grumpy? Does it affect how they are in school, at home or with friends?*

Talk about some ways that you can help yourself get a good night's sleep. (See above bullet points for prompts)

If someone in the room mentions doing something relaxing – highlight it. If not, suggest that having calm time before bed is really important. Sleeping is a chance to give your mind and body a needed break.

Ask the children to close their eyes and focus on their breathing, or draw what they like on paper while you play them a series of relaxing audio clips. You can find your own or try these examples. Rain: tinyurl.com/y9yqbvo9 Bird song: tinyurl.com/y97fh9fv Ask them which one was their favourite and why.

Secondary group activities | Healthy: Inside and Out | Children's Mental Health Week 4-10 Feb 2019

These activities for whole class or group work will help young people understand and explore the theme **Healthy: Inside and Out**. If you'd like to differentiate or simplify the content according to the needs of the young people, you might be interested in our primary group activities which you can find in our [primary resources](#).

Content warning: *be aware that subjects like food and being active can be difficult or 'triggering' for some young people so make sure you know where to refer young people for support if they need it.*

You may also be interested in our special **Show and Tell activity**, where young people and adults can raise awareness and vital funds by sharing something that makes them feel good. Funds raised will help young people get access to the mental health support they need. Find out more in our [fundraising ideas](#).

Main task

Food and community

Suggest we know how food affects our bodies but sometimes forget how important it is for our minds and social lives. Encourage the students to get into groups of three and discuss quotes about the role food plays in mental health and emotional wellbeing. You could find your own or use these examples:

- "One cannot think well, love well and sleep well if one has not dined well." Virginia Woolf
- "Laughter is brightest in the place where the food is." Irish Proverb

What does the quote mean? Do you agree with it? Can you think of ways that food brings people together? E.g. cups of tea, Christmas dinner, Eid celebrations.

Next, ask them to write or talk about an important meal they had. *Why did they have the meal? What food did they have and what made it important? Who was invited? How did everyone feel?*

Why do we stay active?

Ask the group why people stay active. They may say:

- Stay fit/keep your body working/improve stamina
- Become stronger/build muscles/get better at sports
- Have fun/spend time with friends/community
- Feel good in themselves – improve their mood

If anyone raises the final two bullet points or anything similar, highlight it. Suggest that being active has a big impact on our mental/emotional wellbeing as well as our physical wellbeing – AND how we learn and approach problems.

Watch a video about the impact of being active on the body and mind, but emphasise that too much focus on 'the perfect body' can harm mental health. You could find your own or use this Ted-Ed animation (under four minutes): [tinyurl.com/gunpu9m](https://www.tinyurl.com/gunpu9m) *What are endorphins and what do they do? What are some psychological benefits of being active? What is a growth mindset and how can it help?*

Are we sleep experts?

Ask the group how much they think they know about sleep and encourage them to share facts. Decide together: *are they sleep novices, students or experts?*

Take a 'sleep quiz' as a group, with everyone voting on the answers. You could make your own, or use this example from the National Sleep Foundation: [tinyurl.com/ycp57w9y](https://www.tinyurl.com/ycp57w9y) Revisit the question: *are they sleep novices, students or experts?*

Watch a video about the impact of sleep on mental health to fill in the gaps in their knowledge. You could find your own or use this Wellcast animation (five minutes): [tinyurl.com/glk4fya](https://www.tinyurl.com/glk4fya) *How do you feel when you don't get enough sleep? What can it do to your health? What are five ways to sleep better?*

Hand out these tips from the Children's Sleep Charity: [tinyurl.com/y7cg6gv3](https://www.tinyurl.com/y7cg6gv3)

Extension

Relationships with food and drink

Talk about ways that people can struggle with food and drink. E.g. comfort eating, bingeing, restrictive diets, eating disorders, addictions to alcohol/caffeine/sugar. **Content warning:** *avoid describing symptoms or habits associated with eating disorders, as this may influence young people who are particularly vulnerable. If you're concerned, we recommend contacting the eating disorder charity Beat [tinyurl.com/ybo5x2tk](https://www.tinyurl.com/ybo5x2tk)*

Suggest that food and drink can have a powerful effect on mood and energy levels – e.g. coffee/energy drinks to 'keep us going'. *Is it healthy to rely on instant kicks like this? How are these products advertised to us? How else can we stay alert and focused throughout the day?* Ask the group to make a video or poster to advertise water, or a fruit or vegetable. *How would they make it appealing?*

Being active and mental health

Ask the group to think of short/long-term effects of being active on mental health. E.g. short: endorphins released when we run or play sport improve mood. Long: greater stamina = we can focus better and keep going.

Share research on the link between being active and wellbeing. You could find your own or use this 'Let's Get Physical' Report from the Mental Health Foundation: [tinyurl.com/y98j4sh2](https://www.tinyurl.com/y98j4sh2) (pages 14-23)

Ask the students to get into groups of three and each discuss aspects of mental health – e.g. mood, stress, self-esteem, depression – *Does being active have an impact on this aspect of mental health? How? How can we educate people about the link between physical and mental health?*

Screen time and sleep

Ask the group to raise their hands if they bring tech to bed. If you feel comfortable, share whether you do! It's important for them to know that healthy habits take work.

Ask questions like *Why do we do this? What are the positives and negatives? How can we continue to use technology while limiting the impact on our health?*

Explain that light from screens tells your brain not to release melatonin – a chemical that helps you sleep! And without sleep, your brain doesn't have a chance to clear out toxins. Watch a video about how phones change our brains. You could find your own or use this AsapSCIENCE animation (3 minutes): [tinyurl.com/hxq4ccc](https://www.tinyurl.com/hxq4ccc) *How can we make sure we have a healthy relationship with tech?*