

### Welcome!

Welcome to another newsletter from the SEAL Community. We've lots of top tips, plus new resources, some great case studies from schools, and the usual research round-up.

### News Update

#### Help build the #EmpathyGeneration



Empathy Week, the global initiative for schools, will be back for a fifth year from 26th February - 1st March 2024. It will focus on the theme of 'Home' **AND** is now **FREE** for all.

It offers:

**On-demand film resources:** Two film-based assemblies per age-group that explore the theme of 'Home'

**In-person experiences** that are beyond the curriculum and *beyond* fun.

**Online and on-demand webinars:** Age-differentiated webinars, assemblies and events will give students, teachers and parents the chance to learn from inspiring speakers and participate in live Q&As.

Register your class/school [here](#)

#### Antidepressant prescriptions for teens hit 1m a year for first time



According to NHS figures, the number of antidepressant prescriptions being given to GPs has now exceeded one million per year. Experts say this is further evidence of a significant decline in the mental health of young people after the pandemic.

## Sharing practice

### The Zen Den

More and more primaries are creating calm-down corners where children can independently take themselves when they need to self-regulate. But is it really possible to have spaces like these in secondary schools?

This US school suggests it is. At Lehi High School in Utah, they call it a Zen Den, or student wellbeing centre.



Jennifer Bitton, assistant principal, suggests these tips in an interview with Edutopia :

- **Involve everyone in the school**

Get input and buy-in from staff and students. Make sure staff have the chance to spend time in the centre and try it out. And talk to students.

It was student feedback, for example, that led to “Wellness Wednesday,” when the centre hosts sessions on emotional well-being on topics chosen by students. Topics have included how food affects mood, toxic relationships, meditation, and talking to parents.

It was also students who recommended adding weighted blankets to the amenities, which have proved the centre’s most popular item for decompressing.

- **Think about the design and the amenities**

From textures, to lighting, to the light blue walls, to the fabrics used in the converted classroom, “everything was done with intention,” Jennifer said.

There are for example adult colouring books, Rubik’s cubes, clay, and kinetic sand to help students self-regulate.

- **A trained staff member can improve students’ experience**

Having a wellness coordinator is critical to the centre’s success.

“You need to have somebody who is trained”, Jennifer said, such as a counsellor. That person has to be skilled at building trusting relationships with students. She recalls filling in for her former school’s coordinator. Students came in to ask for the coordinator, and when Jennifer said the coordinator was out for the day, they’d turn around and leave. They needed the person with whom they’d developed a relationship.

- **Give students options**



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While many students are seeking quiet, some actually want to talk.

The student wellness centre at Lehi High includes different options: the wellness coordinator asks whether the students want to talk or be by themselves. For those who want to be alone, the centre includes tools to help manage their emotions. They can take a timer and spend 20 minutes alone.

There's also a check-in system where students answer questions, ranking their emotions and what brought them to the centre that day. "Everything is kept for the purposes of figuring out triggers: Is it maths class, is it third period, is it before lunch?" Jennifer said.

After 20 minutes, the school is finding that 80 percent of students are ready to go back to class, and 20 percent need a little bit more. Many don't see anybody; they just need a place to decompress and manage themselves and then go through the rest of their day.

On their way out, students fill out a form on how they are doing and reflect on whether the centre helped them and how.

- **Make it a no-permission thing**

Students don't need permission to go to the wellness centre.

They make eye contact with the teacher and use one of the two wellness centre passes available in every class to leave the room.

An unintended positive effect of having the centre was that more children were staying in school all day,

"When kids were having a panic attack or when they're having a rough time in school, the wellness centre allowed them to actually stay in school because they had a place to go, and they had someone in there who could help them", Jennifer notes.

- **Destigmatise going to the centre**

It was students who asked the adults to work on destigmatising going to the wellness centre.

All students new to the school are given a tour, and a group of students made a video about the centre. "Wellness Wednesday," where students discuss mental health and social-emotional issues, have brought more students into the centre, too.

Parents are also taken on tours during parent-teacher evenings, and the centre is featured in the principal's weekly email to parents.

#### **Pembroke Dock and *The Invisible***

Y1 children at Pembroke Dock Community School read the fantastic text 'The Invisible', by Tom Percival, which is great for work on empathy.

It tells the story of a young girl called Isabel and her family. They don't have much, but they have what they need to get by. Until one day, there isn't enough money to pay their rent and bills and they have to leave their home full of happy memories and move to the other side of the city. It is the

story of those who are overlooked in our society - who are made to feel invisible - and why everyone has a place here. We all belong.

Children at Pembroke Dock stepped into the characters' shoes to empathise with their feelings and collaborated to put their ideas on Jamboard.



### Practical tools and tips

#### When is banter OK? When is it not OK?

Have your students work in groups to come up with their own criteria for deciding whether something is banter, and when it might actually be bullying.

Use the sentence stems:

It's banter when..

It could be bullying when...

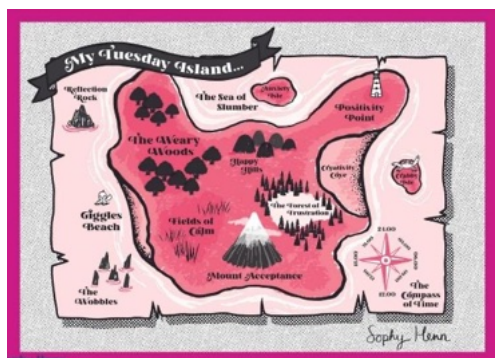
Students might say that it is banter when it is targeted at someone in their friendship group. But is this true? Ask the groups to discuss and give their opinion.

Compare the criteria the students suggest with these from expert Martha Edwards, Director of the Anti-Bullying Alliance.

She suggests:

- ❖ The topic: Topics that are sensitive, personal, appearance-based, or which involve offensive language are often inappropriate to make jokes about. If this is the case, it is probably not banter.
- ❖ The relationship with the person: Banter is more likely to be received positively by people or friendship groups you know and are close to.
- ❖ Where the banter is happening: If the banter happens in more public settings or includes individuals beyond a friendship group, then this is more likely to be perceived as bullying.
- ❖ Whether the banter is repeated: If the banter is repeated many times, then it may stop being funny.
- ❖ The intent behind the banter: Is the intent to cause harm, discomfort, social division/exclusion, or public embarrassment?
- ❖ The size of the audience: As a group's size increases the acceptability of banter may decrease.
- ❖ The reactions of the target: If the person receiving the banter feels uncomfortable, regardless of the initial intent, it may be perceived as bullying.

### Design your own emotion maps



In the last newsletter we shared Empathy Lab's [emotion maps](#), which children can use to identify how they are feeling.

One of them - Islands of Emotion - inspired The SEAL Community's Julie and her family to come up with ideas for places on their own Islands, to describe their 'worst days':

- Endless Crying Cove
- Ruminating Rock
- Irritation Isle
- The Sea of Self-Hatred
- The Mountain of Misery
- Beach of Broken-Heartedness
- Sinkhole of Despair
- Relationship Cliff Edge
- And ... No Paddle Shit Creek

We think older primary and Y7 could have fun designing their own islands and inventing their own place names (without the swears bits), perhaps!

### Teach children about negativity bias

You are probably teaching your students about [the neuroscience of emotions](#) (the fight or flight response, the upstairs and downstairs brain and so on).



We can also teach them the reason why we often seem to look on the downside of life - perhaps in the context of helping them learn to replace negative thoughts with positive ones.

Early in our evolution, humans had to be constantly on the alert for dangers in order to survive. So our brains evolved to be hyper-sensitive to anything that might harm us.

We still have the same sort of brains (basically, we are just cavemen with internet). This means we are wired to look for the negative, rather than the positive. If we understand this it can help us fight off negative thoughts and perceptions.

Here's a good quote about this 'negativity bias' from Dr Rick Hanson: 'The human brain is like Teflon for the positive and Velcro for the negative.'

### Can you bring work on kindness into a maths lesson?



Yes you can!

Tell the class a story based on the picture book *Ordinary Mary and the Extraordinary Deed* by Emily Pearson (there's a You Tube read aloud [here](#) but it's a bit tedious)... in which one act of kindness is passed on to another five people, who in turn do something kind for another five each, and so on...

Then get the class to do the maths to find out how many people end up on the receiving end of a kind act.

It looks like this ... one act of kindness can end up affecting 30, 517, 578, 125 people. 30 billion is more than the people on the planet.... It's called the ripple effect.

### Play Just Like Me

Help children understand that 'we have more in common than that which divides us' by playing 'Just Like Me':

Tell the class that you're going to read a few statements to them. If the statement applies to them, they are to stand up next to their chair. If it does not apply, they are to remain seated.

Try these statements - after each one, all the children should sit back down.

- Have a pet at home
- Have a sister
- Have ever been on an airplane
- Live with a grandparent

- Are x years old
- Like broccoli
- Speak more than one language
- Like roller coasters
- Have a birthday in February

Afterwards help children notice that they all have things about them that are the same and things about them that are different.

This can be repeated with increasing complexity by adding “and,” “or,” or “not” while adding related statements (e.g., “Stand if you do not have a dog and if you have a brother”). Good for promoting cognitive development and listening skills.

### Top resource

#### Which sheep are you today?

We loved these sheep memes, to use in emotion check-ins

## On this sheep-scale how do you feel today?





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### Resource Round Up

#### New uploads to the SEAL site

If you're planning work on SEAL themes Getting on and falling out/Learning to be Together , or any work on peer relationships/conflict/valuing differences you'll find [these lessons](#) useful – they include

- An upper primary lesson on reading body language and resolving conflict, from the Australian Student Wellbeing Hub
- A primary resource (detailed lesson plan and PowerPoint) from The Linking Network. It uses the brilliant Philosophy for Children discussion approach, to help pupils to learn about identity, diversity, community and equality.
- A KS1 and lower KS2 lesson on valuing differences/diversity from the Australian Student Wellbeing Hub
- An Upper KS2 and KS3 lesson from Bounce Forward, to help children understand empathy and how it differs from sympathy

We liked [this resource](#) from Northern Ireland , which contains lessons for work on some of the difficult feelings that can arise within relationships between people - jealousy, resentment, shame and guilt, and feeling excluded. Suitable for lower KS2.

Looking further ahead to January (Going for Goals/Keep on Learning) we've uploaded a very useful [worksheet](#) for secondary students to use to set schoolwork-related goals, give their teachers feedback, suggest things that would improve their learning and let their teacher know of anything they'd like to discuss with them. Check out this [fab film](#), too , for work on bouncing back and keeping going. It tells the story of the athlete who developed the Fosbury Flop high jump style, when everyone told him it was a crazy idea.

Some great books for work on perseverance are *Ada Twist, Scientist*, by Andrea Beaty (author of *Rosie Revere, engineer*) and *Jabari Jumps*, by Gaia Cornwall.

We also like *Tilda Tries Again*, by Tom Percival ... Tilda's world is just as she likes it . . . until one day, it turns completely UPSIDE DOWN. All of a sudden, everything is topsy-turvy, and nothing feels right. Things that were once easy now seem incredibly challenging. Can Tilda discover a new way to approach her problems and believe in herself? Bold, bright and empowering, this is an inspiring story about keeping trying.

#### Recent finds

We liked these [two lessons about non-verbal communication](#). The first one is for secondary and comes from Place2Be. It's about how we communicate, especially through non-verbal signals and facial expression. It will get students thinking about how they communicate online.

Note that the film link it suggests doesn't work but you could use this classic, fabulous clip instead [https://youtu.be/\\_JmA2CIUvUY](https://youtu.be/_JmA2CIUvUY)

On the same theme of nonverbal communication, the second (primary/secondary lesson) is from the Wellbeing Hub in Australia. It explores how to interpret different emotions.

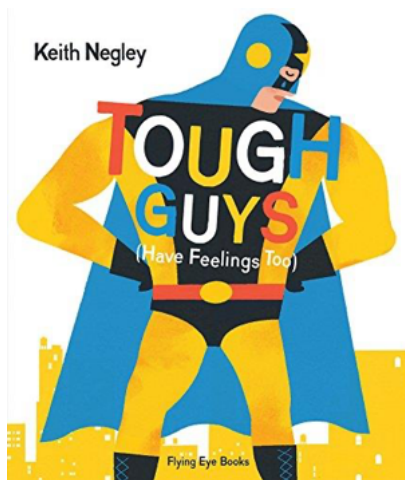
Also from the Wellbeing Hub we have:



- ❖ [a secondary lesson with a useful video on understanding emotions](#) - how the brain works , how to respond to different emotions
- ❖ a [wellbeing activities booklet](#) – short activities children (all ages) can do at school or home

### How to be a real man

It feels important to help boys explore what masculinity means, and to be able to understand and communicate their feelings. Here are some books to share with them:



For younger children, *Tough Guys Have Feelings Too* , by Keith Negley, which explores role-models from knights to ninjas and wrestlers

For 6- 9 year olds, just out is [The Council of Good Friends](#) by Nikesh Shukla. Nikesh explains ‘it became important to me to show boys showing their feelings. I was concerned that I didn’t see enough books out there, for boys, that showed them to be vulnerable and communicative and forgiving when they annoy each other. Boys who could be soft and sad in front of each other. The truth is, those books are out there.’

He suggests, for older boys :



Phil Earle’s [When The Sky Falls](#), about a friendship between a boy and an ape, which deals with feelings of anger and hopelessness in the face of war and devastation, and is masterful at never shying away from the depth of feeling

[The Ostrich Boys](#) by Keith Gray, a devastating book

about grief and friendship and loss, that shows that it’s okay to feel sad



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Musa Okwonga and Ian Wright's brilliant [Striking Out](#), and its protagonist Jerome's dreams of football stardom and the reality of his life

#### Help children put themselves in another person's shoes

[This](#), from the Book Trust is a nice list of picture books for 3-8 year olds that help develop empathy and inspire compassion: whether that's towards animals, friends, or people in very different situations to our own.

#### Emotional literacy and children with learning difficulties

A new charity has developed useful video-based teaching resources for children with Down Syndrome (but also relevant to other types of learning difficulty) . Find them at <https://www.learnandthrive.org.uk/learning-for-life>

#### Research

##### Strong evidence for restorative practices

[This study](#) looked at what happened when Chicago Public Schools adopted restorative practices.

An outside organisation provided training to school staff that emphasized less punitive and more reparative strategies when engaging with students (for example, developing restorative mindsets and language in school staff, creating and implementing restorative protocols and processes in response to disciplinary incidents, and strengthening student-teacher relationships).

The study used cross-school variation in the timing of the introduction of restorative practices (RP) to understand how adoption of a restorative approach affects students' behavioral and academic outcomes, their perceptions of school climate, and their involvement with the criminal legal system.

The researchers found that the introduction of RP reduced the number of out-of-school suspension days by 18 percent, and reduced the number of in-school and out-of-school student arrests by the police (including for violent offences) by 19 percent.

There were also significant improvements in perceived school climate, suggestive of genuine changes in underlying student behaviours and attitudes. Within the various school climate measures, students' perceptions of their peers' classroom behaviour, their psychological sense of school membership (sense of belonging) , and their perceptions of school safety showed the greatest effects.

The introduction of RP did not significantly impact student grades or test scores overall , and the researchers suggest that this means the introduction of RP did not lead to greater classroom disruption of learning for students without behaviour problems.

The introduction of RP had the greatest effect on Black students, who faced the highest suspension and arrest rates and had the most negative perceptions of school climate at baseline. The reductions

in exposure to punitive measures were particularly beneficial for Black boys, who attended school more frequently after the introduction of RP and experienced significant maths test score gains.

#### **SEL programme improves teachers' mental health**

Many European countries are now using a social and emotional learning curriculum called PROMEHS, which has been found to improve students' mental health, with an increase in prosocial behaviour and a decrease in both internalising and externalising difficulties, according to teachers' and parents' evaluations. PROMEHS looks like our SEAL curriculum, plus specific modules on mental health (anxiety and depression) and risky behaviour. It has materials for 3-18 year olds.

Now, taking part in the programme has been shown to improve teachers' mental health too.

A total of 687 teachers participated in the study, which involved an experimental group and a 'waiting list control group' who took part in the programme later on. The teachers in the experimental group received 25 hours of training/supervision, covering:

- The contents of the PROMEH curriculum and how to teach it
- Understanding students' mental health and how to promote it through role modelling and developing positive teacher-student relationships
- How to look after their own mental health and develop their own social and emotional skills and resilience

Applying a pre- and post-training study design with experimental and waiting list groups, teachers were evaluated using published measures of social and emotional learning, resilience, and self-efficacy. The results showed that there was a significant improvement in all competences of the teachers in the experimental group compared to those in the waiting list group, and consequently in their mental health.

Find out more at [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/370130551\\_A\\_multi-component\\_curriculum\\_to\\_promote\\_teachers%27\\_mental\\_health\\_Findings\\_from\\_the\\_PROMEHS\\_program](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/370130551_A_multi-component_curriculum_to_promote_teachers%27_mental_health_Findings_from_the_PROMEHS_program) and [https://www.promehs.org/\\_files/ugd/d89677\\_40c1d7a81aba4469a965bc8866a00ac0.pdf](https://www.promehs.org/_files/ugd/d89677_40c1d7a81aba4469a965bc8866a00ac0.pdf)

#### **What makes an effective school?**

A [recent study](#) has found that secondary schools which prioritised social- emotional development had double the positive long-term impact on students as compared to those that focused solely on improving test scores.

Researchers drew their data from six cohorts of 14 to 15 year olds who attended Chicago Public Schools between 2011–12 and 2016–17, a total of 55,564 students. 42% were Black, 44% were Hispanic and 86% received free or reduced-price lunch, a key indicator of poverty. The study examined students' administrative records — including those related to attendance and discipline — plus surveys provided by both children and teachers about their school's climate, whether it had effective leaders, collaborative teachers, involved families, a supportive environment and ambitious instruction. Students also completed a questionnaire focusing on their emotional health, connectedness to school, academic engagement, grit and study habits.



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The study concluded that the most effective schools provide a welcoming environment for students, in which students feel safe — physically, socially, psychologically. “How deeply connected they are to others, how much they trust their teachers and their peers matters”, say the researchers.

Students who attended a school that was highly effective in providing a safe and welcoming environment— one ranked by the researchers as being in the 85th percentile based on their collected data and student and teacher survey responses — saw their academic test scores improve more than those at other schools. The researchers noted, too, that attendance increased for this group while suspensions and disciplinary infractions dropped.

Students who attended a school at that 85th percentile increased the likelihood of graduation from school by 2.41 percentage points and the chance of attending college within two years of graduation by 2.57 percentage points. They also were 20% less likely to be arrested on campus as compared to the average rate of arrest for all high schoolers in the district.

### **The importance of self-regulation in protecting children from mental health difficulties if they have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences(ACEs)**

The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (NSCDC) in the US have summarised research on the resilience factors that can mitigate adverse childhood experiences(ACEs):

- The availability of at least one stable, caring, and supportive relationship between a child and the important adults in his or her life. These relationships begin in the family, but they can also include neighbours, providers of early care and education, teachers, social workers, or coaches
- Helping children build a sense of mastery over their life circumstances. Those who believe in their own capacity to overcome hardships and guide their own destiny are far more likely to adapt positively to adversity.
- Children who develop strong executive function and self-regulation skills. These skills enable individuals to manage their own behaviour
- The supportive context of affirming faith or cultural traditions. Children who are solidly grounded within such traditions are more likely to respond effectively when challenged by a major stressor or a severely disruptive experience.

A [new study](#) has examined which of these resilience factors have the strongest relationship with mental health issues among children with 4 or more ACEs. Using the 2019 National Survey of Children’s Health in the US, data analysis was conducted with a sample of 1,225 children between 6 and 17 years olds who had experienced 4 or more ACEs.

The researchers found that self-regulation had the strongest relationship with whether a child with 4 or more ACEs ever had a mental health issue. A supportive parent/caregiver relationship was also associated with a lower likelihood of ever having a mental health issue.

The authors conclude that interventions that teach children skill-based self-regulation have promise in mitigating the impact of ACEs on mental health outcomes.