

## Section 3: Strategies to support youth mental health

This section will explore the types of strategies that may help support young people as they navigate this period of change.

It will include suggestions for the young people to do every day to promote and support their own mental health and wellbeing. While considering their own interests and hobbies, they will learn to be more aware of their own coping strategies and what works for them.

2. **Be active** - playing sport, going for a walk, anything that gets you moving
3. **Take notice** - being mindful, spending time in nature or practising gratitude
4. **Keep learning** - learn a new skill, try a new hobby or research something interesting
5. **Give** - make a cup of tea for someone else, hold open a door for someone or pay a compliment to someone

### The 5-a-day for mental health

The 5-a-day for mental health is based on the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* report 2008 by the New Economics Foundation (NEF).

The NEF had been commissioned by the UK Government to develop a set of simple but evidence-based actions on how people could improve their wellbeing. NEF drew on a very broad base of research for their recommendations, from psychological to economic literature.

The research suggested that there were five simple and practical things we can do every day to promote and support our mental health and wellbeing. These are:

1. **Connect with others** – spend time with friends and family, or reaching out for support when we need to

### Identifying strengths

This section of the toolkit is designed to support you as you work with young people to reflect on their own strengths, which may be useful for them during this period of change.

#### What is a strengths-based perspective?

The strengths-based perspective was developed by people working in mental health services in North America in the 1990s (Saleebey, 1996; Rapp, 1998). They sought to challenge key ideas in medical and psychiatry services. The strengths-based perspective suggests that concentrating on problems and the past can take up too much energy, resources and therefore be fruitless.

Using a strengths-based perspective with young people means focusing on the positives of the young person's

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circumstances. The approach does not disregard the young person's difficulties but it draws heavily on the young person's expertise and potential to resolve their own problems.

### **Concepts of a strengths-based perspective:**

- Adverse life events are not strong predictors of future capacities.
- Young people usually demonstrate resilience, not pathology, when faced with adverse life events. It is important to trust the young person's perception of their situation and it is critical that those working with the young person do not assume the upper limits of their capabilities.
- To support a young person using a strengths-based perspective, one must identify and mobilise the young person's strengths (talents, knowledge and capacities) with the aim of reaching their goals.
- The strengths-based perspective avoids pathologising and thus avoids unhelpful labelling.

### **Key features of a strengths-based perspective:**

1. Adopt an optimistic attitude.
2. Focus primarily on assets within themselves and their environment.
3. Collaborate with the young person.
4. Work towards the long-term empowerment of young people you work with.

### **Coping with difficult feelings**

The first step in taking care of our feelings is identifying and naming them. In section 1 of this toolkit, young people identified feelings that the characters in the animation experienced as they transitioned from primary to post-primary school.

This activity will support young people to manage the difficult feelings that they may be experiencing during this transition. It will invite the young person to reflect on some of the practical things they can do to feel better, which they will have explored in the lesson on the 5-a-day. They will also be invited to think about their own personal strengths and who they can talk to when they feel this way.

We know that all young people will experience challenges differently and the way they deal with these challenges will vary from one young person to another. Therefore, it may be important for them to reflect on what works for them and develop their own coping strategies.

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