

A Wisdom & Wellbeing Curriculum for education settings - November 2018

Why is this needed?

In the words of a leading psychotherapist from within the contemplative tradition, 'We are in the midst of a planetary crisis. Everyday, we witness massive suffering and distress, socially, environmentally and politically. Poverty, the war economy and ecological devastation are crippling vulnerable communities around the world while wealth inequality creates unprecedented disparities between people'. (*Thanissara, Sacred Mountain Sangha*)

Many nations are becoming richer, but not necessarily happier. Technological advances bring many benefits but are not necessarily making us wiser, or more compassionate. Prevailing economics favour growth, at any cost, contributing to many issues from mental health and loneliness to the planetary crisis. The rise of individualism, coupled with the rise of the nuclear family, means we are losing ways of living that were supportive to our wellbeing. Among young people, mental health issues are dramatically rising. In the context of increasingly stark environmental forecasts, we urgently need to provide children and young people with tools and guidance to support their wellbeing and enhance their resilience to meet whatever demands may come, now and in the future.

What does it look like?

Wisdom & Wellbeing in schools aims to provide children and young people with the knowledge, understanding and tools which will enable them to cultivate healthy relationships with themselves and in their lives. It is comprised of six modules, which together represent a holistic education of the whole person – body, heart and mind. The modules are intended to support and interlink with each other, in a way which will provide a coherent overall message.

Summary of modules

- **Love:** the skill of how to cultivate loving relationships with oneself and all others
- **Ethics:** the cultivation of an ethical life, which is governed by causing as little harm as possible
- **Self-care:** learning how to care for oneself physically, mentally and emotionally
- **Ecological civilisation:** developing and sustaining an appreciation of the natural world and our interconnectedness
- **Inspiration:** providing sources of inspiration and supporting young people to create a meaningful and purposeful life
- **Community:** enabling young people to find ways to serve the wider community and experience the joy and wellbeing the act of service brings

Vision of Wisdom & Wellbeing

- To facilitate young people in gaining knowledge, insight and tools to understand their inner world, and how in relating skillfully to the outer world
- To facilitate young people in gaining knowledge and skills about how to take care of themselves, those around them, the wider community and the environment
- To create a generation of wise, compassionate and inspired young people who have a sense of purpose in their life, and want to make positive change in the world

Examples of issues increasingly faced by young people today, which will be addressed by Wisdom & Wellbeing

- Mental health problems caused by anxiety, depression, stress, low self-esteem, cyber-bullying, body image dysmorphia etc
- Health issues such as substance misuse, factors which can contribute to obesity, problems related to poor posture
- Over usage of/addiction to screens, social media, gaming etc

More detail on the modules

1. Love (incorporates relationships and communication)

- Exploring what 'love' means and the many types of love. An understanding of love as a desire to want to support another person to live skillfully and wisely
- Creating a foundation of self-love and acceptance as the starting point for being able to love and accept others
- Focusing on the importance and cultivation of qualities such as friendliness/kindness, forgiveness, compassion, respect, intimacy

2. Ethics

- Teaching an ethics of care, a relational and context-bound approach toward morality and decision making
- Exploring non-harm as the founding principle for wellbeing of self, rippling out to the wellbeing of community and planet
- Exploring the role of intention in our lives, guiding our hearts, minds, words and actions
- Showing 'forgiveness in action'; in both small every day ways, to processes of restorative justice and non-violent communication
- Incorporating sustainable living - not consuming more than we need is also ethical

3. Self care of bodyheartmind (physical, emotional, mental health)

Emphasis on physical body

- A focus on embodiment; keeping children and young people in touch with their bodies, learning how to stay attuned to the felt sense of the body, and supporting healthy posture
- Cultivating an appreciation of the body's ability to heal given the right conditions (the naturopathic/natural health approach), and learning from how animals behave in nature. In contrast to the allopathic approach of treating symptoms rather than causes.
- Included in this module will be principles of nutrition, spending time in nature, yoga, mindful movement and meditation - learning how to sit still and rest
- Reminder of the connection of the body and the planet – we are made from the same stuff as stars!

Emphasis on emotional and mental world, relating to thoughts, feelings, moods, mind states

- Learning how to be with difficult mind states, including emotions such as anger, blame, shame, guilt, lack, tackling perfectionism/not being afraid to make mistakes
- Cultivating understanding that 'your thoughts are not your fault', and looking at how resistance and reactivity can be underlying our difficulties
- The importance of cultivating qualities such as forgiveness, compassion, joy, gratitude, empathy, steadiness
- The exploration of a basic human tendency to want more of the pleasant and to avoid the unpleasant; the consequences of this in our lives and why it is ultimately a futile exercise
- How to increase our capacity to be with what is unpleasant; to turn towards our sadness/negative feelings/negative events
- Exploring the role of intention as key to bringing anything to fruition which we have identified as important or helpful in our lives
- Understanding stress and its effect on our bodies and providing an insight into neuroscience and brain plasticity

4. Ecological civilisation .

- Cultivating care and appreciation for the natural world
- Learning about local and global environmental issues and practical ways to contribute
- Training in global injustice and the abuse of power, learning about the role of critical literacy and protest

5. Community

- Exploring the importance of supporting each other the best we can and nurturing a sense of compassion for vulnerable individuals, communities, groups
- Facilitating relationships with the local community and cultivating acts of generosity, and widening 'circle of concern'

6. Inspiration (and doing what you love)

- Supporting children and young people to find out what it is they love doing, and how to translate that into a livelihood
- Cultivating and/or sustaining a sense of mystery, reverence, awe and wonder
- Providing exposure to inspiring figures from all walks of life throughout history - music, art, poetry, science, explorers, social change activists etc

As summarized by Wendy Ellyatt, Founder of the Save Childhood Movement, in her paper on Healthy and Happy: Children's Wellbeing in the 2020s, 'Young children today are struggling with pressures that were completely unknown to previous generations. The changing nature of family and community life, the rise in technology, the increasing influence of the media, the lack of contact with nature, the pressures of the schooling system and the demands of having to constantly look right, achieve and be subject to the incessant judgment of others, have all steadily eroded the environments and experiences children need in order to refine their senses and develop into happy, confident learners, in touch with themselves and the wider world'.

There are many initiatives rising up in response. The aspiration of the Wisdom & Wellbeing Curriculum is to plant seeds for cultivating this healthy intimacy with oneself, others and the wider world, in the lives of as many young people as possible, within a wide range of education settings, demographics and cultures.

Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all (Aristotle, 384-322 BC)