

# How to maintain a healthy mind and culture during periods of challenge

A practical toolkit  
for school leaders



Created in  
partnership with



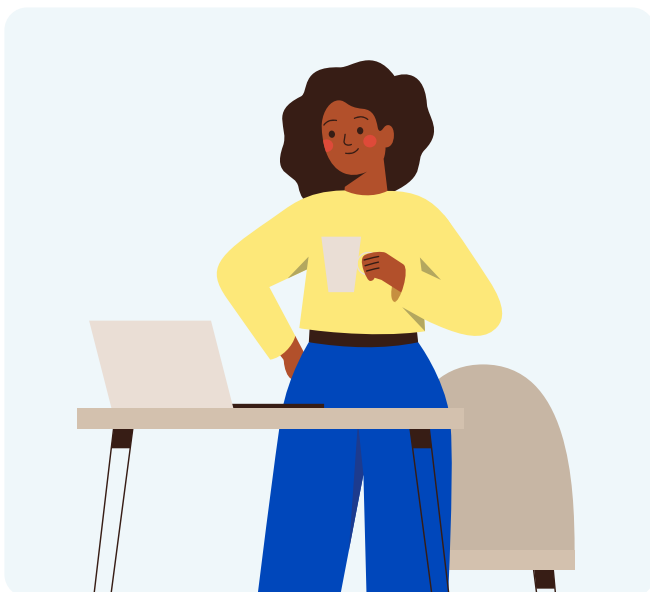
# An introduction to the toolkit

**As a school leader you have a vast array of skills and knowledge. You are strategic thinkers, data analysts, pedagogy designers, financial managers, people leaders, motivators... the list goes on! Above all, you care passionately about learning, your community and your pupils. You often put your team and others before yourself, giving time and energy to keep others going.**

What this may sometimes lead to is a sacrifice of your own wellbeing and mental health.

This toolkit offers practical exercises, tools and tips to help school leaders implement healthy habits for supporting their own wellbeing, and to maintain a mentally healthy working environment for themselves and their team during times of challenge, for example during the inspection period.

We have kept 'inspections' in mind while designing this toolkit, as we hear from school leaders that the inspection experience often triggers acute stress and poor mental health for them and their staff. However, most of the exercises, tools and tips will apply to other challenging situations faced by school leaders and their teams.



This toolkit has three sections:

## 1. Building a healthy mind and culture to deal with challenges and stress

This is the section to read (and hopefully implement some of the hints and tips) before a challenge arises. If you are in a strong position when entering a challenging time, you will be much better prepared to deal with it.

## 2. The challenge itself — the pressure of being under stress

This is the section to read during an acute period of challenge. For example, when you've received the call to notify you of an inspection.

## 3. Managing the after-effects

The impact of any acutely challenging scenario shouldn't be underestimated. Taking time to replenish your reserves and reflect before the next challenge arises is an important part of the process.

You can read the toolkit in one go or jump to whichever section feels most relevant to you. This might change depending on what's happening in your setting or your personal life. We hope that it serves as a useful document that you can re-visit when needed.

Please note that this toolkit is not a technical guide to handling specific challenges, such as inspections. **Advice and resources** can be found elsewhere to support school leaders with this. This toolkit is specifically designed to support school leaders with the emotional and personal impact of dealing with challenges for themselves and their staff.



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## 1. Building a healthy mind and culture to deal with challenges and stress 4

Often, periods of challenge or stress can happen without much prior notice. Even during inspection periods, it can feel difficult to 'prepare' for the impact it has on your wellbeing and your team's. How can you maintain a healthy mind and culture all year round, so that you all feel better able to face periods of challenge and stress when they arise?

This section offers some practical tools that you can use all year round to build a healthy mind and culture within your school.

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## 2. The challenge itself — the pressure of being under stress and dealing with stressful situations 11

This section explores what is happening in the body when you are experiencing high levels of stress. It provides an overview of the stress cycle, and importantly tips on how to close it.

We also provide ten other tips on how to stay well during times of acute challenge and take a look at maintaining a sense of focus on the things you can control. These are particularly important during the inspection period.

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## 3. Managing the after-effects 16

In this section we focus on the importance of taking time to talk about, and reflect on, the challenging and stressful experience you have been through. We include tips for supporting your staff and signpost to organisations that can offer support.

We end on an exercise that we hope will help you reconnect to your sense of purpose as an education leader.



# 1. Building a healthy mind and culture to deal with challenges and stress

Pressure and daily hassles can be a normal part of life. However, for some of us, repeated or accumulated stress can affect the way we live our lives and our ability to carry out our work. This is especially true if we do not pay attention to the things that help us maintain a healthy mind.

Education staff often show tremendous resilience to stress. The build-up of stress over time due to working in education can, however have a profoundly negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing. For example, a school leader might worry intensely about a future/impeding inspection for many years.

This section is about dealing with the ongoing stresses of the role and how to make sure you are well-prepared and ready when the challenge (e.g. the inspection) actually happens.

Below we examine a range of approaches and strategies that have proven to be effective for school leaders to maintain a healthy mind and culture when working under challenging conditions.

## Starting with the building blocks of good wellbeing

Many of us can take steps towards these three things that support good mental wellbeing:

### Step 1: Exercise



### Step 2: Eat well



### Step 3: Sleep well



Whilst the benefits that come with all three are well researched and reported, they are often sacrificed by those working in education. Many school leaders, for example, tell us they don't regularly take lunch breaks due to the demands of day-to-day life in their setting. To build a healthy mind, this is the most important place to start. These are your **building blocks** and although they seem simple they shouldn't be underestimated.



## The importance of breathing

It may strike you as strange to have a section dedicated to the importance of breathing. After all we do not need to tell ourselves to breathe, it happens automatically, right?

There is, however a lot of evidence to support the fact that focusing on, and practicing breath work, can be an effective part of managing your wellbeing and maintaining calm.

Being aware of your breath, noticing in your body when it is affected, and taking action to slow the breathing are all established techniques that are well understood to help manage the feeling of stress in your body and mind.

In the 1930s Edmund Jacobson, a psychiatrist living in Chicago, became interested in the 'startle reflex' — feelings of excitement and responses to stressful situations. Jacobson noticed that those people who regularly practiced relaxation techniques had a reduced 'startle' response to stressful situations i.e. they didn't experience feelings of stress as quickly or as intensely. The relaxation technique he used is what we now call 'the body scan'.



A quick online search will show you many variations of the body scan. Here is one to get you started:

### Simple 3 minute body scan



### Leaders helping themselves in the moment



We have also developed a [video for school leaders](#) to access in the moment when handling stressful situations, which includes a guided breathing exercise. This could be helpful for managing feelings of stress before or during an inspection. For example, you may have a difficult interaction with an inspector and be left alone with feelings of stress or worry after they leave your office. This could be a useful time to watch this video, or you might build it into your daily routine.



### Useful tip:

Try scheduling in your building blocks of good wellbeing and breathing exercises in advance i.e. you may want to set a reminder on your phone to carry out a short breathing exercise so that it becomes a proactive routine and not just a reaction to a stressful event.



## Create ongoing moments of re-charge

Claudia Hammond, author of 'The Art of Rest', argues that smaller moments of re-charge when done frequently throughout the day have a greater impact on our overall wellbeing than single but larger moments of pause or celebration. It is the regularity and frequency that has the impact on our wellbeing and resilience.

The following activity may generate ideas that can be used throughout the day and create moments of pause. You can carry it out alone or with your team, and can re-visit the ideas during times of challenge, such as inspections.

## What can you do in 30 seconds or 3 minutes to create a moment of wellbeing re-charge?

Draw some boxes on a flip chart or white board and ask the questions below

30 seconds	3 minutes
<b>3 deep breaths</b> Breathe in (count to 3) breathe out (count to 5) and repeat	Read a book or a poem
<b>Squeeze and reassure</b> Put one hand into the other, squeeze gently and keep telling yourself that you will 'get through' this	Send a text to someone you love and tell them
<b>Feel the floor</b> Focus on feeling the floor through your feet, even better if you can take off your shoes!	Get out of the room you are in (if possible) and change your view
<b>Counting down</b> Count from 20 down to 0	Go outside (if possible)
<b>Repeat a personal 'mantra'</b> Choose something reassuring and say it silently or out loud, for example: 'I can do this, I'm going to get through this, I've got this' 'This is really tough right now so I'm just going to focus on this one task' 'This is a marathon not a sprint: I don't have to do everything today'	Make a colleague a cuppa. Make yourself a cuppa!
<b>Stretch</b> This can increase mindful awareness of our body and help to release feelings of stress	Take a 3 minute stroll down the corridor and only notice the good you see
<b>Stand up and move</b> Shaking or walking it out can release tension	Breathe — mindfully
<b>Look at a photograph</b> Revisiting a cherished memory or looking at someone we love can release oxytocin, 'the love hormone'	Listen to some music
<b>Look away from the screen</b> Allowing our eyes to focus on the horizon, or middle distance, can reduce eye strain	Do an even longer stretch

## Dealing with catastrophising and fearing the worst

Often, leaders can fear the worst when it comes to things like inspections. This is common — and not unreasonable given the high stakes of situations such as inspections. It doesn't mean that you're not coping or are less 'together' than other leaders. These thoughts may be valid based on previous experiences or a reaction to stories from peers or social media.

It fuels anxious thinking and you may find yourself catastrophising about the worst possible outcome and all the consequences for you, both personally and professionally.

Fearing the worst does not always have to be a bad thing. For one it helps us plan scenarios in our mind. However, when not managed well, fearing the worst can fuel our anxiety, keep us awake at night and generally cause a damaging effect upon our mental health.

Securing balance to ensure we are not spending too much time trapped in one cycle of negative thinking is important. But also as important is accepting in ourselves that when we feel worry, fear and doubt, it is a normal function of our brain. Dismissing this by saying, 'just think positively' is dismissive of your emotional place.

So, what can we do to deal with catastrophising and fearing the worst? We offer three tips below:

### 1. Choose where to place the focus of your attention and take responsibility



If all we allow our mind to consume (via social media, news, etc.) a predominantly negative or limited view of the world, that view will consume our focus of attention. We begin, sometimes without noticing, viewing the world through this negative and one-dimensional lens. For example, we read about the terrible inspection experience someone has had and worry that it will be exactly the same for us.

We need to pro-actively shift the focus of our attention and look for the balance. This does not mean we dismiss or brush aside any negative 'fact' we have encountered, but rather seek to balance out the daily, weekly and monthly experience. For example, it might help to remind yourself of previous positive experiences you've had with inspections or the fact that the majority of inspections tend to have a positive outcome.

“ At the time of writing, Ofsted's own figures show that just under 90% of schools are judged good or better.”



## 2. Manage anxious thinking

Give yourself some time and find a quiet spot. Go through the following questions to challenge your own thinking or ask a trusted colleague or friend to use them to challenge your thinking. You might also use this with your team members. Remember feelings are information and not always facts.



### Anxious thinking

Act like a scientist and test the validity of your thoughts. Challenge them!



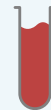
Is this thought absolutely true?



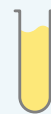
What if the opposite were true?



What am I predicting?  
How realistic is this?



What is a more realistic or balanced thought?



Am I confusing this thought with a fact?

Adapted from @journey\_to\_wellness\_



### 3. Give yourself space and time to worry

Simply trying to ignore the worries about an upcoming inspection, or other challenge, or to push them to one side won't make them go away. In fact you may well find that ignoring these worries makes them prone to appear at 3 o'clock in the morning! Even if you recognise that there are just some things you can't control, and accept these, you may still be worried about them.

By setting aside specific periods for being with your worry, you can acknowledge your concerns while also establishing boundaries to prevent them from becoming overwhelming and detrimental to your wellbeing.

The point of worry time is acceptance; acknowledging that 'worry', 'fear' or 'doubt' are natural emotions. It is a time to have compassion or kindness for yourself before moving to problem solving.

This way you do not dismiss your emotional place by 'just being positive' neither do you get caught up in the detail of the issue. The aim of worry time is to give yourself a short period where you allow yourself to simply acknowledge what is on your mind.

Use the hints below on how to create effective worry time. You may want to do this alone, but you may work with a trusted colleague or friend to share your worries. Saying them out loud rather than keeping them in your head can be helpful.

#### Need someone to sit with you during worry time?

Education Support provides a dedicated support line for NAHT members. When you call you will speak to a qualified counsellor.

It is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The number is **0800 917 4055**. If you are not an NAHT member you can still reach us on **08000 562 561**.



Create a comfortable space



Make a cuppa!



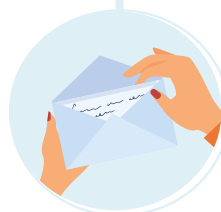
Write down your concerns



Practice not trying to find solutions



Talk them through if needed, with somebody you trust



Put away out of sight once time is up

## Make time to talk — the power of conversations

It can be difficult within the hectic and busy life of a school to find time to talk especially during a busy inspection. It can also be hard to talk without the need to find solutions, to just off-load or be a sounding board.

However, that cathartic release of pressure, having shared a concern or a worry and having been heard can be very powerful. Integrating talking into your day-to-day culture, means you and your staff are more likely to open up during those times of challenge.

### A space for leaders to talk — professional supervision

#### Professional supervision

Professional supervision provides reflection, learning and development organised around a professional identity and holds children/young people at its heart. In the education sector, professional supervision offers leaders the opportunity to reflect on their core purpose in the education of children and young people. Supervision is professional. While the work might sometimes touch on personal themes, or highlight matters that might benefit from a therapeutic lens, the supervision work is always about the job and an educator's connection to their purpose.

“ Concepts I worked on with my facilitator really helped me to understand myself and my reactions and where they were coming from. This has been absolutely beneficial in my work.”

School Leader

We know that some leaders worry about the cost of professional supervision. To find out more about fully funded supervision in England, from Education Support, visit [here](#)

#### Conversations between leaders and staff

Having the right conversation at the right time can open up the door to recovery from stress, burnout and mental health problems — as well as releasing stress in the moment.

Open and honest conversations about mental health help create a culture where staff feel valued, cared for and supported. It creates a culture where staff can be prepared for stressful and challenging times.

Watch this webinar where Education Support explores how you can improve conversations with colleagues and use them to support your own mental health and wellbeing: [The Power of Conversations](#)

We have also developed a video for leaders to help them support staff when handling challenging and stressful situations, including before or during an inspection and that can be found [here](#).

#### Maintain a broader view of life

You are not just an education leader. There are many facets to who you are. When life is busy, or all your energy is focused on an inspection, it's all too easy to find yourself “off balance”, not paying enough attention to important areas of your life.

In response to this, it can be useful to gain wider perspective on how you are thinking and feeling about things. To do this, you can use the ‘wheel of life’ tool. Commonly used by professional coaches, it helps you consider each area of your life in turn and assess what's off balance. And so, it helps you identify areas that need more attention.

An editable version can be found [here](#)



## 2. The challenge itself — experiencing stress

### Understand what is happening in your body: the stress cycle

When you experience something that is stressful or challenging, your body goes into a stress response. This means that stress hormones are released throughout your body. While this is helpful in the short-term (it helps us jump into action and respond to problems or threats), these stress hormones can cause physical harm to our bodies if they are present over the long term.

Learning about your body's stress response can help you to identify when you are in state of high-alert and take action to feel safe and lower the levels of stress hormones in your body.



### Danger and fight, flight, freeze

When faced with a perceived danger (i.e. an inspection) this sets in motion what we call the fight, flight or freeze response. During this response our heart rate increases to improve blood/oxygen circulation to the muscles, and cortisol is released into the body which increases sugars (glucose) in the bloodstream for energy. Cortisol also curbs functions that would be non-essential or harmful in a fight-or-flight situation.

This can mean the rational thinking brain is 'cut off' as the body is required to ACT and not THINK. (This is what happens when people 'see red' or when you feel so panicked you can't 'think straight'.) Your thinking brain has literally switched off and disconnected.

This is the way we have evolved to keep ourselves alive in a dangerous situation. We may just meet the danger head on and 'fight' or we may choose to run away 'flight' at other times we may 'flock' together to feel safety in numbers or we may 'freeze' and do nothing. All of these responses are valid given different circumstance.

This high alert state is the body's natural stress response to impending danger and in the short term is a state the body can cope with. When this period of time extends to weeks and months then it can begin to have a negative effect upon the body and our health.

### You feel safe

We can often make the mistake of thinking that once the stressor has been removed, the stress itself disappears, and you are safe. However, there is a difference between you feeling safe, and your body 'being safe'. Stress is an embodied response. For example, the impact of an inspection can be felt in the body for many months after the inspection period and without completing the stress cycle you continue to embody that stress. Completing the stress cycle takes you from feeling safe to being safe.



## You are safe

So, how do you complete the stress cycle and become safe?

The image below shares seven evidenced based suggestions for completing the stress cycle and becoming safe.



### 7 evidence-based strategies for completing the stress cycle

#### 1. Physical activity

20-60 minutes most days



#### 5. Affection



#### 2. Breathing



#### 6. Crying



#### 3. Positive social interaction



#### 7. Creative expression



#### 4. Laughter



### Other tips for staying well during challenging and stressful times

#### 1. Practice breathing techniques

Breathing is an evidence-based tactic for closing your stress cycle. On a very busy and pressurised day it is also very efficient way of managing stress levels in the moment e.g. before taking the inspection call. Taking a moment to do these breathing exercises before leaving your office and telling the rest of the staff etc. can also have a positive impact on how you communicate with them.

Breathing exercises reduce your fight or flight response by lowering stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline. This allows your rational brain to take charge, so you can respond thoughtfully, rather than react impulsively.

Useful breathing techniques:

### Box breathing:

- Breathe in for four seconds through your nose, counting the breath in your head.
- Hold for four seconds.
- Breathe out for four seconds, through your mouth, counting the breath in your head. This helps to regulate your nervous system and help you feel calm.

### Attention breathing:

- Sit or lie down and get comfy.
- Close your eyes and focus your attention on your breath. Let your chest and abdomen rise as you inhale and fall again as you exhale. Can you feel your breath in your lungs, or on the inside of your nostrils?
- Bring your full attention to your steady and rhythmic breathing.
- After a few moments, your attention may wander. You may start thinking or worrying about something else. That's natural and totally OK. When it happens acknowledge the thought and let it float away. Return your focus on your breathing.
- Try this for two minutes to start with. Then build up to five minutes.
- When your time is up, take a second to notice how you feel. The physical sensations in your body and the activity in your mind.
- With practice you'll find it easier, and be able to focus on your breath for longer. You may also find increased mental clarity, the more you do it.
- If you find it difficult, so not worry or be annoyed with yourself. Thank yourself for taking the time to try.

We have also developed a [video for school leaders](#) to access in the moment when handling stressful situations, which includes a guided breathing exercise. This could be helpful before or during an inspection.

## 2. Deliberately slow down

When panic takes over we tend to rush. Can you deliberately speak 20% slower, read things slower, take an extra few minutes to ask yourself 'am I clear on what I have just heard'?

This may also help when interacting with your staff. Giving them an extra few moments to check in (or process what you're saying) might make a big difference in how they respond to the challenges they face.

## 3. Eat (well)

People may forget to eat or think they don't have time. But your body needs to be nourished even in times of stress. Skipping meals can disturb your blood sugar levels, leaving you susceptible to mood swings and cravings, which may make the inspection process even more fraught.

If you are able to eat small but regular meals, you might find this more efficient and less daunting — possibly less work for a stressed-out digestive system too.

If you have a history of disordered eating, the stress of an inspection may be particularly difficult. Please speak to your GP or specialist and remember that you can also talk to a qualified counsellor via Education Support's dedicated support line for NAHT members on **0800 917 4055**. If you are not an NAHT member you can still reach us on **08000 562 561**.



## 4. Maintain your usual sleep routine

The temptation is to work through the night. Some people try to convince themselves that they can cope with little sleep ‘just for a few days’ during an inspection, but again you won’t be at your best if you do. If you usually sleep well, aim to stick to your usual bedtime routine, but also don’t be alarmed if you find it hard to sleep.

If you usually have trouble sleeping, inspections may be particularly difficult, and you might struggle to sleep even more than normal.

NHS Every Mind Matters suggest the following tips and advice for those who are struggling to sleep:

- Ideally your sleep routine should be the same 7 days a week (even on weekends and during inspections). And remember, your sleep routine starts before you get into bed.
- Avoid electronic devices at least an hour before bed, as mobiles, tablets and computers all throw out blue light that stops sleep.
- Reading, listening to soft music or a podcast, or **sleep meditation** can all help if you have trouble sleeping.
- If you often lie awake worrying, set aside time before bed to make a to-do list for the next day — this can be a good way to put your mind at rest.
- Sleep is easier when it’s quiet, dark and cool — although the right sleep environment is personal, — so try different things and see what works for you such as earplugs, black out curtains or better ventilation.
- Don’t force sleep. Rather than lying awake feeling stressed, try getting up and reading a book or listening to some calming music until you feel sleepy.
- Avoid eating large meals close to bedtime.



- Avoid caffeine, alcohol or nicotine. They are stimulants and can make you feel more alert.
- Regular exercise helps with sleep, but it might help to avoid anything too energetic in the 90 minutes before bedtime if you find it stops you from sleeping.

You can also download these **9 tips for a good nights sleep**

## 5. Physical activity

Yes, you may think that the last thing you have time for in the middle of an inspection is to go for a walk, or move your body, in the fresh air, but it can help to release stress and improve your mood. Even gentle exercise releases serotonin which helps you feel good. Even just for 20-mins one evening can help to close your stress cycle, and transform how you feel.

## 6. Write things down

As a school leader experiencing an inspection you will be taking notes and keeping a record of key experiences and events with the inspection team. However, when experiencing a stressful event such as inspection keeping a journal separate to the ‘inspection’ notebook can help reduce stress.

Research has shown that writing things can improve cognitive function, it can strengthen immune system response and it can help counteract the effects of stress.

You can read more about the benefits **here**

## 7. Make space for quick re-charges

During stressful and challenging times, it's even more important to look for those small moments of re-charge. Even during busy times like inspections, taking 5-10 minutes to re-charge can give you that little extra motivation. Some ideas might include:

- Going to the window and taking 5-minutes to notice what's outside.
- Standing up and stretching.
- Sitting down and taking 5 slow breath.
- Having a 5-minute check-in with a colleague — can you diarise reminders during an inspection to help you remember to do this?

## 8. Transition out of your day

For school leaders, particularly during busy periods, managing the transition between work and home can be difficult. Taking an action to signal the end of your day can help. You could try writing down the things that felt difficult and putting it away in the draw, writing down 2-3 things that went well or choose an action that signifies your day ending.

## 9. Be a role model

Even if you don't feel like it - deliberately go out and act like the person you want to be — this will not only be good for you but will remind others of the need for things like eating, taking moments of rest, showing appreciation for colleagues etc.

Take a moment to read up on some more **useful tips on role modelling wellbeing as a busy leader**

We have also developed a video for leaders to help them for support staff when handling challenging and stressful situations, including before or during an inspection and that can be found **here**.

## 10. Ask for support

There are times when we can all benefit from seeking help and support. This is especially true in times of challenge. If you need help, it's there. See **page 17** for a list of organisations you can reach out to. Whether you just need some reassurance or feel that you are struggling with your mental health, there are organisations that can support you.

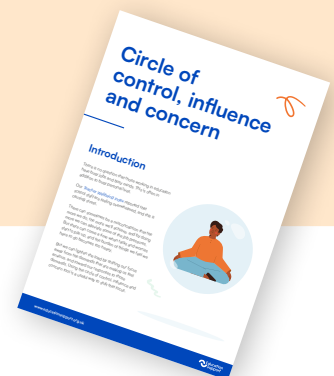
### Focus on what is within your control

Having a lack of control and influence on things that are important is something that can negatively affect somebody's wellbeing. School leaders report the inspection process can feel as though they are being 'done to' rather than being 'done with', and this lack of control can feel overwhelming.

Using the circle of control, influence and concern tool is a useful way to shift that focus by understanding what we have the power to control, influence and what is out of our control.

This tool can be used by individuals in moments of challenge and stress. You can take just 10-15 minutes to complete to help you gain perspective in the moment. Or this tool can be used with your team as part of building a healthy mind, and culture, to deal with challenges and stress. It's also a good tool for connecting team members, as opens up space for talking about their worries.

You can download the full tool **here**





# 3. Managing the after effects

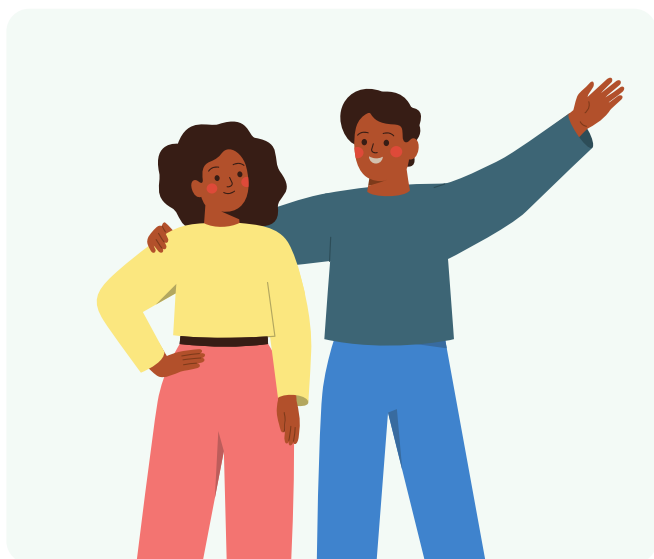
## Taking time to talk — for yourself

Being able to talk, and reflect, on what has been a challenging, stressful and possibly even traumatic event for you as a leader is an important step in processing what you have been through.

Studies have shown that talking about your experiences and sharing emotions with a sympathetic other person can be a healing process. It can reduce stress, strengthen the immune system, and soothe both mental distress and physical ailments (Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, & Glaser, 1988).

For example, if your school’s inspection was a disaster and you are trying to manage some difficult emotions, talking to somebody else can help with gaining perspective. Even in the case of inspections where they have gone well, there is an important need to process and de-brief. Ofsted has recently confirmed that leaders are able to talk to colleagues and support networks about their provisional judgement. The judgement only becomes final once the report is published.


This is where, for leaders, Professional Supervision can be of huge benefit. Visit [page 10](#) for more information on what supervision is and how you can access it.




## Taking time to talk — for your staff

It is important for school leaders to have space to talk, and reflect. It’s also vital to create the space for staff to do the same. This is an important part of creating a culture where people feel valued, cared for and supported.

No one is born with the skills to have good conversations, it’s something we all have to learn and practice. You don’t need to have all the answers. Good conversations about mental health are about asking open questions, showing you care, listening and showing empathy, and withholding personal judgements.

 **Useful tips:**  
Here are **some useful tips** from Education Support to help get you started



We have also developed a video for leaders to help them to support staff when handling challenging and stressful situations, including before or during an inspection and that can be found [here](#).

A key thing to remember is that you are not a mental health professional, so understanding your boundaries and signposting effectively is important.



## Where can you and your staff go to talk?

- **Education Support 24hr Helpline**  
**Tel: 08000 562 561**

Anyone working in education can call the free and confidential helpline on 08000 562 561 and speak to a qualified counsellor.

If you are an NAHT member you can call our dedicated support line for NAHT members. It is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The number is **0800 917 4055**.

- **Samaritans**  
**Tel: 116 123**

Whatever you're going through, a Samaritan will face it with you. They are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

- **IAPT** (NHS psychological therapy service). The NHS Talking Therapies, for anxiety and depression programme (formerly known as Improving Access to Psychological Therapies, IAPT) [nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-an-nhs-talking-therapies-service](https://nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-an-nhs-talking-therapies-service)

- **Assist Trauma Care**  
**Tel: 01788 551919**

Offers telephone counselling and support to individuals and families in the aftermath of trauma [assisttraumacare.org.uk](https://assisttraumacare.org.uk)

- **NAHT**

If you have technical queries in relation to an inspection or other work-based challenges you can contact **NAHT** on **0300 30 30 333** where you'll speak to a NAHT specialist advisor.



## Complete your stress cycle

Following a challenging period or event where you have experienced high levels of stress, such as an inspection, requires you more than ever to make a concerted effort to complete your stress cycle.

Revisit **page 11** of this toolkit to find out more about the stress cycle and the things you can do to help close it.

## Gaining perspective — reconnecting with your purpose

When faced with challenging times, you can often be left with a mix of feelings. If an inspection doesn't go to plan you could be left with feelings such as shame, anger, disappointment, and fear. It's all too easy for this single experience, and the feelings that follow, to cloud how you view yourself as a professional, or person.

Reconnecting with your purpose during these times can be hugely helpful in helping you gain some perspective.

You could try using these reflective questions think about what your career means to you:

1. What inspired you to enter education?
2. What makes a day in school joyful?
3. Who was your favourite teacher or member of staff as a child?
4. Think about the last time you really connected with a pupil or colleague at work? What encouraged that connection?
5. Can you remember the first time you helped a child have that 'lightbulb' moment or overcome a particular challenge?
6. What makes you feel valued at work?
7. What do you enjoy most about your role?



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15. [Burnout: The secret to solving the stress cycle](#)
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# Who we are and why Education Support?

**Education Support was established nearly 150 years ago. We were set up by teachers, for teachers. We're here for everybody working within education, across all four nations of the United Kingdom.**

Our mission is to improve the mental health and wellbeing of teachers and education staff. We believe that better wellbeing leads to better education. This leads to better life chances for everyone. We provide high quality, evidence-led, support across the sector. We offer support at three levels:

- **Individual**

We work with individuals to prioritise their own mental health and wellbeing, recognising that everything can't be fixed at the individual level but that people can be supported to make positive change where possible, as workplace and system change take time.

- **Workplace**

Plenty of evidence indicates that cultures in schools and colleges has a real impact on staff experience, their wellbeing and effectiveness. By helping leaders create great cultures, we increase the number of workplaces where staff thrive.

- **The whole system**

Individual educators and workplaces exist in a wider system that is facing many challenges. We are working to influence sector stakeholders and the government to create the conditions that support good staff wellbeing across education. Our research activity helps us build evidence around key challenges of national importance, such as staff retention in schools.

Find out more about us at [educationsupport.org.uk](https://educationsupport.org.uk)

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