

Healthy Habits and Youth Social Action

In addition to valuing the diversity in our students, the choice of learning that we get students involved with can also reflect this diversity. Working on a social action project that provides students with new learning outcomes can be a starting point. Generally, the more we move away from a monoculture of learning to create learning opportunities producing a range of outcomes. This enables us to tap into students' interests and skills, giving them a sense of ownership in the work they get involved in.

If working on a social action project on Healthy Habits, giving Young people more freedom to choose and lead the work, and letting them see where it takes them, will provide the best outcomes. In terms of teaching and learning outcomes, it helps teachers develop ways of teaching subject-based skills and knowledge in a much more engaging way, ultimately motivating students even more to learn.

Below are steps to explain how to use a theme of Healthy Habits to structure the social action project

1

Start with a question that serves as a focal point for the learning that will take place. Why is it important to learn about being healthy?

2

Provide exploration routes for the students to shape their thinking around the question. This can take the form of a trip, an afternoon exploring resources or watching a documentary.

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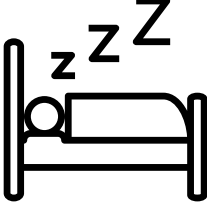

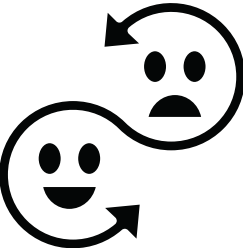
Get the students to gather up in groups linked to their area of interests around the topics and create opportunities for them to investigate further.

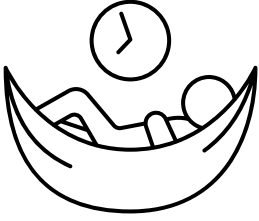
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Their investigation may lead to the identification of problems that can open the premisses of a future social action project or the actual knowledge that they develop and will continue to grow.

Through further investigation can be used as educational training for them to build their own action projects in the school/community.

Understanding a Child's Health as an Interaction of Different Factors

<p>Physical Exercise</p> 	<p>Young People and young people need to do two types of physical activity each week: aerobic exercise and exercise that strengthen their muscles and bones. The NHS guidelines recommend at least 60 minutes of moderate or vigorous intensity activity per day across the week.</p> <p>Across the week, this needs to be various types and intensities of physical activity to develop movement, skills, muscles, and bones.</p>
<p>A Healthy and Nutritious Diet</p> 	<p>Young People need to eat a variety of food, including fruits and vegetables, starchy foods, dairy, protein, and fat. As an estimation, adolescents and adults should have a water intake of 2.5 litres daily. The intake for a child of 9 to 13 is 1.5 litres and 1.1 litres for 4 to 8 years old. Fruits and vegetables contribute to 30% of this water intake.</p>
<p>Sleep</p> 	<p>Lack of sleep increases the risk of obesity, type two diabetes, attention and behaviour problems, and poor mental health. Young people ages 6 to 12 need 9 to 12 hours of sleep. Teenagers aged 13 to 18 need 8 to 10 hours a night.</p>
<p>Stable Home Environment</p> 	<p>A stable home environment enables Young people and young people to form positive, trusting relationships that contribute to social and emotional development. Schools and education bodies have a key role in linking with parents/carers when this needs to be met.</p>
<p>Emotional Support</p> 	<p>Social and emotional development characterises itself by a child's ability to understand the feelings of others, control their feelings/behaviours, get along with other Young people, and build relationships with adults. Parents have a key role in this, and teachers have direct access to a child's life's different facets and needs.</p>

<p>Relaxation and Breaks</p> 	<p>As for adults, regular breaks promote self-regulation and switch off the stress response. Exposure to stress can affect the digestive system, disrupt hormonal balance, and affect the gut and immune systems.</p>
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Mental Health: A Context on The Mental Health Crises.

This section provides contextual information on mental health. Dealing with mental health is an issue that is given serious national and international priority. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Good Childhood Report (2021) reported that the UK has the highest mental health problems among economically well-off countries. A ratio of one to six Young people/adolescents experiences serious mental health problems – one to five adults, which costs more than 100 billion pounds every year in the UK. This is estimated to reach 16 trillion dollars globally by 2030. 75% of serious mental health problems are in place before age 18.

Research on Prevailing Contextual Factors of Mental Health Problems in Young People and Adolescents.

Novel studies have proven that associations between family relationship experiences and Young people's behaviours and outcomes are not due to common genes shared between biological parents and Young people but other factors, including economic disadvantage, economic stress, adults' mental health, parenting behaviour, inter-parental conflicts, and domestic violence as well as parental separation.

These studies emphasised the important role of parents and carers in influencing a child's outcomes. The internalising symptoms of anxiety and depression experienced by young people and adolescents communicate the externalising problems expressed through school conduct and behaviour. They potentially also lead to neurodevelopmental disorders, impacting social competence, academic attainment, and mental health into adulthood.

Interparental Conflict and Young People's Mental Health

The relationship quality between parents or carers significantly affects Young people's mental health and development. Young people and adolescents who witness frequent and poorly resolved conflict between parents are more likely to experience significant mental health problems, do less in school, engage in substance misuse and criminality, and initiate and experience conflict and violence in their future interpersonal relationships.

Supporting parents and adults to manage conflict and animosity in their relationships substantially enhances mental health and other outcomes for Young people and adolescents, as well as improving adult mental health, promoting positive parenting practices, reducing adult substance misuse, reducing intergenerational interpersonal violence 'cycles', and improving physical health and wellbeing. Interventions that promote positive inter-parental relationship dynamics may promote positive mental health, education and long-term outcomes for Young people and adolescents.

Health and The Natural World

Ecological health is a term that refers to the link between human health and that of the natural world. The state of nature defines the quality of our soil, water, air, and the health of the animals that directly interact with our health. From an educational viewpoint, a fundamental understanding of the relationship between our health and nature is essential to understanding human health and the environment. The examples below can inform planning and illustrate this concept within schools.

Some Facts

The population of insect pollinators is in decline. Many of our crops depend on pollinators, which is proportioned at three out of four quarters of our dependent crops. Because the largest-producing crops in the world harvest food that is not dependent on pollinators, the global proportion of crop production reliant on pollinators represents one-third.

Rates of soil depletion exceed replenishment rates, which makes fertile soil an endangered ecosystem. The minimal soil depth for agricultural production is 15 cm (150 millimetres). It takes approximately 500 years to replace 2.5 cm of topsoil lost to erosion (25 millimetres of topsoil).



The role of bees, wasps, and butterflies pollination in food production.



The link between farming systems and the physical properties of soil.



The role of the weather and seasons in harvesting nutritional food.



Clean water and preservation of human health and biodiversity.

Health and Nutritional Food Value

Increasing evidence in research links farm management, soil, and plant health together. However, their relationships to food crop nutritional quality and human health are less understood. Studies comparing organic farming to conventional practices shed light on these links. More recent evidence advances that organically grown foods contain higher health-promoting phytochemicals. Still, because of the overlap between management practices in farming, it isn't easy to make broader generalisations. **However, the interactions between the environment and the species/varieties of crops may exert stronger effects on the quality of the food produced and human health. Management practices that enhance plant, soil and human health remain a leading goal for a sustainable food production system.**

The UK's 'five-a-day' guidelines state that everyone should eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables daily. These guidelines clearly state that it should include a variety of vegetables and fruits, not concentrating on an intake of extra-sweet fruits or liquid juices, which will add to the daily sugar intake.

Another reason for eating various vegetables and fruits is that our microbiome gut bugs feed on plant-based fibre. A diverse and balanced gut microbiome is a complex interconnected system with a direct role in our immunity. By providing our microbiome, we are directly strengthening the immune system. Scientists have recently begun to look at the importance of a healthy microbiome to our mental and physical health. This link can hardly be overstated.

Young people can work to create their list of fruits and vegetables following a palette of colours, a rainbow, or another type of table/diagram. They can develop adjectives to describe those categories linking to their shape, tastes, look, colour, etc. This can also inform vocabulary for a piece of writing, e.g., a poem, a story, or a speech on healthy eating.

<p><i>Reddish Purple'</i> beetroot, radish, tomato, rhubarb, red pepper, cabbage, raspberry...</p>	<p><i>Funny-looking'</i> mushrooms, purple carrots, aubergines, blueberries, olives, purple potatoes.</p>
<p><i>'Round'</i> artichokes, brussel sprouts, cabbage, broccoli, garden peas, green peppers...</p>	<p><i>'Sweet'</i> apricots, carrots, sweet potato, oranges, butternut squash, pumpkin...</p>
<p><i>Plain'</i> chickpeas, cauliflower, turnips, lentils, and potatoes..</p>	<p><i>'Yellow'</i> sweetcorn, yellow peppers, lemons, summer squash, pineapple, pears...</p>

Table 1. Organising fruits and vegetables with adjectives.

Health as a Social Value in Schools

This section of the guide provides teachers and school leaders with guidelines to understand the changes teaching the social value of Health can bring to how Young peoples experience their lives. Schools would already have some knowledge of health education through the teaching of Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE); however, for social action education, here we encourage educators to approach any learning on the topic of Health in an integrated way within the school community so that Young peoples can understand the interrelationships between their health, through what they do daily within the school community and outside this environment.

Health as a System

Quality health education teaches Young people how **to understand Health in terms of systems that can be seen in nature with replicated functioning in our human bodies.** This terminology of systems is semantic to explain the interdependent relationship of Health with what an adult/child is exposed to daily.

To embed an understanding of the social value of Health, we encourage teachers to link the teaching on Health to what can be seen in and out (inside us/in our community and out in nature/the world). This can be initiated through questions such as:

- *'What is a healthy system?'*
- *'Are our food cycles healthy?'*
- *'What does it mean to have healthy relationships?'*
- *'Is my school a healthy system?'*

Young people should investigate the interrelationship between nutrition, physical exercise, and emotional/mental well-being when approaching different factors contributing to human health. Diagrams can be useful tools to initiate discussions on these relationships:

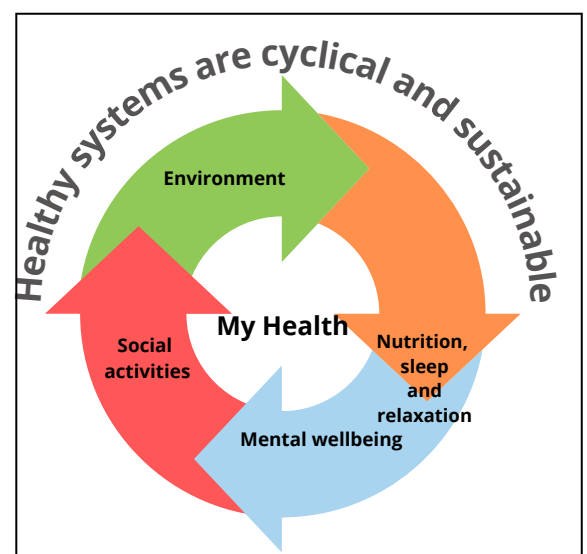


Figure 1 - Healthy cycles in health education

As for physical health, health education also relates to the mental well-being of adults and Young people within schools. Progressively, schools are realising that mindfulness and similar meditative sessions can positively impact the well-being of young people and adults. Incorporating short mindfulness sessions within the day's timetable can positively affect young people's and staff's health.

Staff should understand the fundamental interrelations between interparental relationships, relationships built in schools with teachers, as well as the importance of play and friends to promote young people's social-emotional development as well as mental health and well-being.

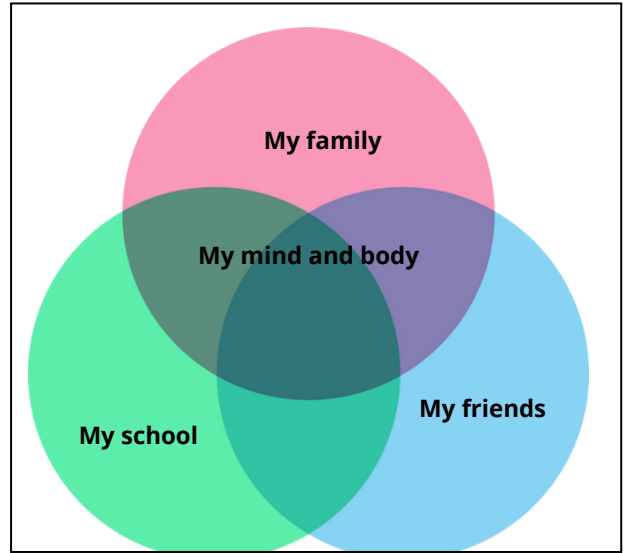


Figure 2 - Health in my relationships

Health can also become part of the learning culture of schools. Each school should have developed characteristics of learning behaviours that reflect the education the children are receiving. Healthy and happy learning can inform these. Below are statements that can be used to develop an understanding of what beneficial learning looks like:

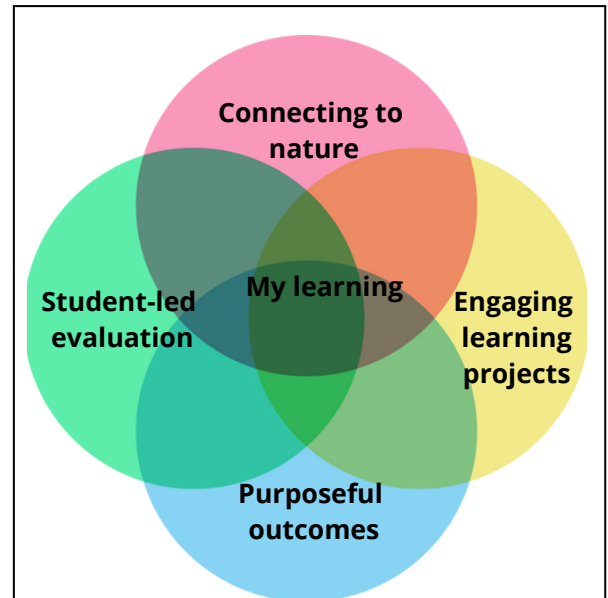


Figure 3 - Health in learning

My rights: a healthy mind and a healthy body

'I feel happy and healthy in my mind when:

- I enjoy keeping fit and active
- I have the right to be me and feel confident
- I can manage my emotions and feelings
- I know how to stay healthy and safe.'

Criteria for Healthy Living

Teachers and young people should work together to develop their criteria for healthy living/being in the class/school community. Below is an example of statements created by a school where health was at the heart of what the school valued. As a result, the value of health permeated through life and the learning that took place.



1. My Health

- I am well:
- When I am valued
- When I learn new things
- When I stand up for what I believe in
- When I realise my potential
- When I care for others
- When I am creative and imaginative
- When I connect to nature
- When I have time to think, reflect or pray

2. Our Health

My team is well:

When everyone has a say

When we break down a big challenge into smaller tasks

When we have good communication

When we show leadership to guide the team to its goal

When everyone enjoys the experience

When we find the right pace

When we see the need and respond to it.



3. Planetary Health

The world will be well:

When we have happy, healthy communities.

When we are fair and value everyone.

When we live in peace.

When all our energy and water are clean.

When there is no waste or pollution.

When food and farming are organic.

When the biodiversity of nature thrives.

When we all grow as leaders.



To help practitioners teach the skills necessary for social action planning around Health, we have set out in Section 2 a progression of four activities for key stage 1. We have carefully centred the activities for each key stage so that whilst learning social action skills, they can explore and deepen their understanding of what makes them well and what contributes to good health. It also engages Young people in tasks that require them to take action to explore what they can do to improve their wellbeing. Some of the components of the learning intentions and skills set out draw on National Curriculum guidance for teaching PSHE and other subjects in primary schools.

To approach social action at the primary level, we have ensured that the activities proposed are child-led. This will empower them to have a tangible realisation of the roles they can take to transform their school/community/city. Below, we provide more guidance on approaching social action project teaching in the primary classroom.