

Engaging students with wellbeing survey findings

EBPU
Evidence Based
Practice Unit

A partnership of



Anna Freud
National Centre for
Children and Families

CORC
Child Outcomes
Research Consortium

The logo for the Child Outcomes Research Consortium (CORC), featuring the letters 'CORC' in a bold, dark teal font, with a stylized circular arrow graphic to the right.

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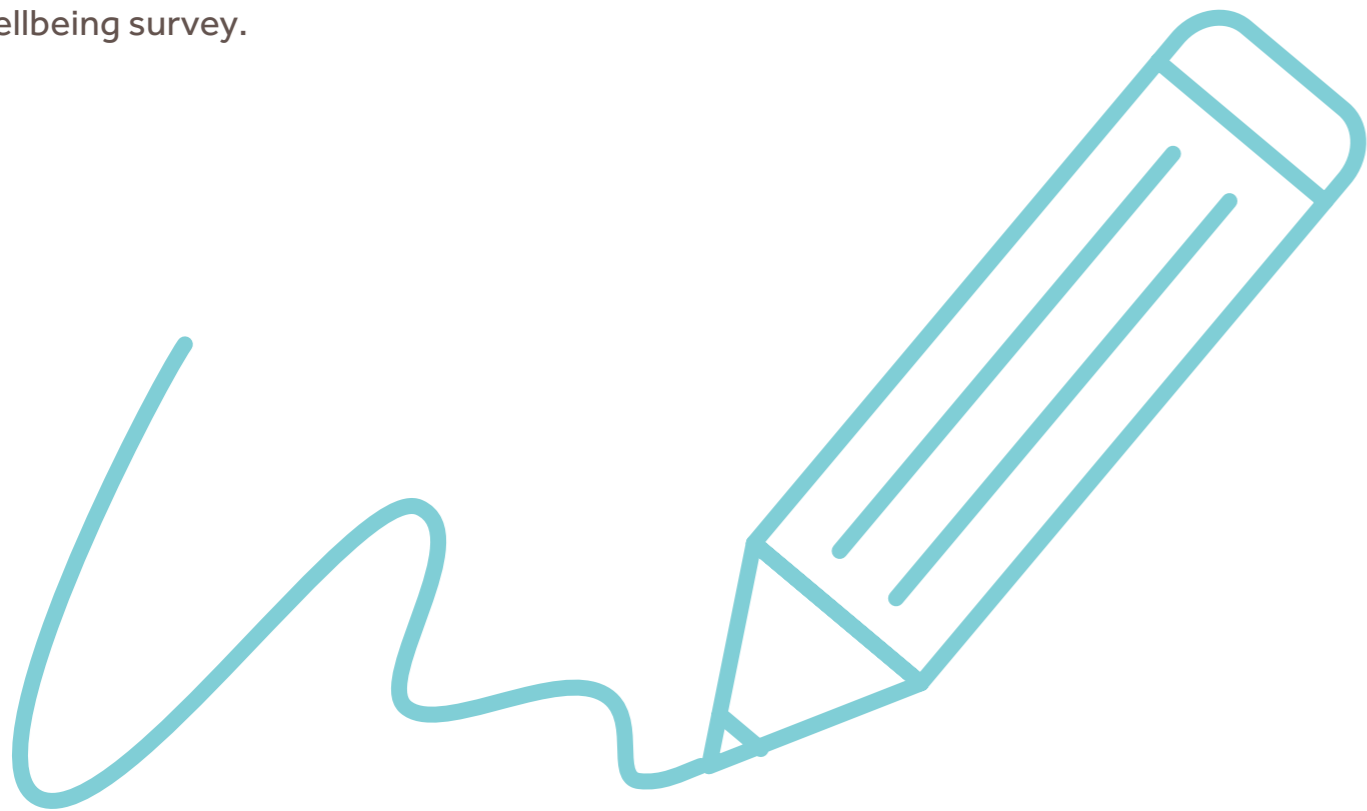
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Who is this for and why?

This document is designed to inspire and support education providers to engage students with wellbeing survey findings.

It introduces approaches to sharing complex information with students in an accessible way and to gathering their responses. The insights gained can help improve education providers' understanding of the findings.

We have provided practice examples from sessions we ran using findings from the Wellbeing Measurement Framework (WMF) student wellbeing survey but the principles and practical guidance apply to findings from any student wellbeing survey.



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Context

The mental health and wellbeing of children and young people has declined in recent years. Many mental health difficulties start during childhood and adolescence and early intervention is recognised as key to improving outcomes. As schools and colleges are the settings with the most consistent contact with this age-group they play a key role in providing support.

Across the UK, many schools and colleges are collecting valuable data using student wellbeing surveys. These surveys are being used both to understand the strengths and needs of students and to determine the impact of support provided by schools and colleges. However, engagement with students around what the survey results show and how they might be acted upon is often overlooked.

Why does student engagement matter?

The findings from survey data are unlikely to tell the full story if considered in isolation. Students' insights help bring the findings to life – adding nuance, checking assumptions and proposing some explanations.

Students can illuminate problems and solutions that may otherwise not have been obvious to staff, positioning students as active participants in the wellbeing of their school or college community. Involving students in this way can also help improve the communication of the findings to others, especially their peers.

Students who have participated in the surveys can actively connect with the results and see that they made a meaningful contribution.

Engagement sessions will start a conversation which might lead to further student involvement in similar activities.

Sessions create an open forum for discussions about wellbeing. They provide an opportunity to signpost to existing services and support, which can then lead to increased help-seeking behaviours.



It is important that this is not a tokenistic activity. The students' time and effort should be valued and prior consideration should be given to how the insights gained from the session may be incorporated into school or college plans.

While the benefits are clear, there are challenges associated with engaging students with often complex findings. We offer recommendations about how to approach this work.

Engaging students with findings from wellbeing surveys: practice examples

This guidance is based on work undertaken with Mercers' Company associated schools and colleges to explore survey findings with students, as part of the Mercers' wellbeing evaluation. Learning is presented to help other education providers work with students to improve their school's or college's provision of mental health and wellbeing support. We have included sample session plans which can be adapted for different school or college settings, year groups, group sizes and session lengths.

The Evidence Based Practice Unit (EBPU) is a child and youth mental health research and innovation unit based at UCL and the Anna Freud Centre. We were commissioned to provide wellbeing surveys and to evaluate wellbeing interventions in Mercers' Company associated schools and colleges. Throughout this document we refer to this team as the evaluation team.

Mercers' wellbeing evaluation

Schools and colleges participating in the Mercers' wellbeing evaluation programme implemented the WMF. The WMF is a survey designed with education settings and young people to measure mental health and wellbeing. Students complete the surveys online and the school or college receives a detailed report that enables them to identify strengths and challenges and compare the mental wellbeing of their students with students in schools and colleges across the country.

The evaluation team worked directly with three participating schools (Dauntsey's, Abingdon School and Walsall Academy) to trial different engagement session structures and to support them to make best use of this valuable information. We worked with staff in each school to develop bespoke sessions which we facilitated alongside school staff. Sample session plans can be found at the end of this briefing.



What we learnt: facilitating student engagement

Choosing a focus for a session

It is important to consider the focus of the session when planning to discuss survey findings with students. It is helpful to narrow the focus rather than attempting to present all of the findings. This can reduce the complexity and make it easier for students to engage with the findings. If you have a longer session, or the capacity to involve students at an earlier stage, it would be even better to establish the initial focus with the help of the students.

All findings presented should be anonymous. It is a good idea to choose something from the findings that stands out. This may be something surprising, an area of concern or something encouraging that you would like to understand better. You may also consider which findings are more robust – for instance, where the data are more complete or the sample size is larger. You could choose to compare findings across different groups – for example, comparing across year groups or by gender. The area of focus may also have a particular relevance for the group of students participating in the session.

The focus will be narrowed further by the students themselves during the session, although they may also wish to discuss additional areas that feel relevant to them.

In the practice examples, the evaluation team chose to focus on summary findings presented for each theme in the survey. These compare the individual school's data with aggregated data from other participating schools, providing a quick but limited way to see how students are reporting relative to their peers in other schools. Staff could then work with the students to choose which of these areas to focus more on in their discussions.



Choosing which students to engage

It is important to carefully consider which students you wish to engage with to discuss the findings. Identifying which students to invite first may then help to determine the focus of sessions. Alternatively, the focus could be determined first and then a group of students with appropriate experience could be identified to contribute to the discussion.

Select a group that will represent the diversity of the student population and try to avoid relying solely on students who are regularly invited to share their opinions (e.g. school council members). You could consider which students may benefit most from the experience of taking part in this activity. Where relevant, it is good practice to involve students who have taken part in the survey. There may also be an existing group of students engaged with the topic of mental health.

In one practice example, the students were a group of wellbeing champions and represented a range of year groups. In another school the students had all previously taken part in the survey.

Practical arrangements

Consideration should be given to the time available for the session. The session will need to fit into the busy school or college schedule but allow enough time for some meaningful input and for all voices to be heard. Another consideration is whether it will be delivered in-person, online or perhaps using a hybrid approach.

In the practice examples, the sessions we carried out varied in length between 30 minutes to 1 hour to fit with the needs of the schools. Two sessions were offered in-person and one was offered online. The session plans provide further information about using digital tools within sessions or making necessary adaptations to run sessions remotely.

You will need to prepare resources for the session. These are likely to include the findings you wish to discuss and materials to aid the recording of discussions.

In the in-person practice example sessions, hard copies of the findings were used to generate discussion and ideas were recorded on post-it notes or large pieces of paper. In the hybrid session, the facilitator gave a presentation of the findings and digital apps were used to gather responses. See the session plans for further details.



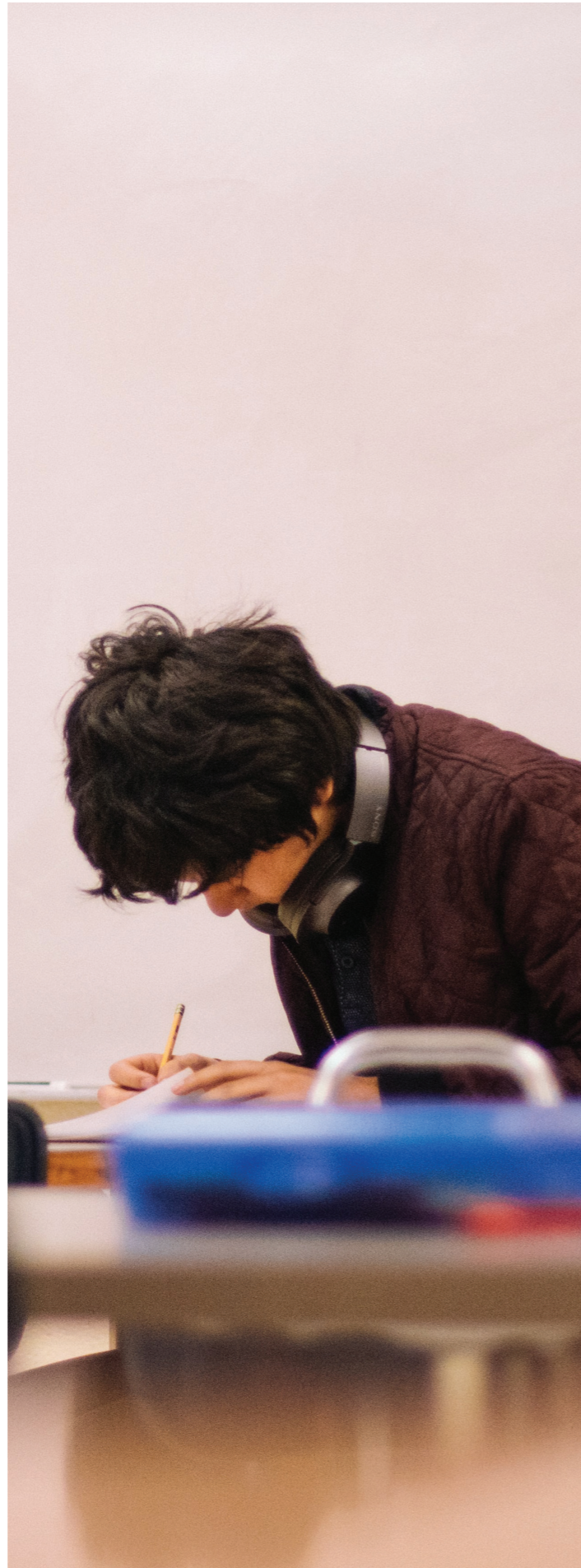
Facilitating the session

When choosing who will facilitate the session, consider their knowledge of the wellbeing survey, their involvement in mental health and wellbeing support in the school or college and their relationship with the students engaged in the session. It is beneficial for the facilitator to have thorough knowledge of the topic under discussion so that they can answer questions the students may have. However, it is also important to support the students to feel confident to share their opinions and experiences openly.

In the practice examples, all sessions were co-delivered by an external facilitator from the evaluation team and a member of school staff. In some schools this was someone closely involved with the collection of the survey data; in others it was someone not associated with this work.

When facilitating the session there are a few key principles to adopt. At the start of the session, explain the purpose of engaging the students – including how their feedback will be listened to and incorporated into the school's or college's plans. Explain that this is not a therapeutic space but do use the session to signpost to existing support and services. Finally, encourage students to direct the conversation to areas that feel most relevant to them; this will support the discussion to be relevant and rich.

To encourage meaningful contributions, employ active listening by reflecting thoughts back to students to check you understand them, ask open questions and summarise their ideas throughout the session.



Obtaining feedback

We recommend that you collect feedback about the session. This will add context to any comments made and can be used to improve any future engagement sessions. There are many ways of doing this, for example:

- using a short evaluation form at the end of the session
- asking students to raise red, amber or green cards in response to questions about feeling heard or likely attendance at future sessions
- using post-it notes or digital apps to allow anonymous suggestions to be made.

Considerations for ongoing engagement

Involving students in a session like this can be the start of meaningful ongoing engagement. There are a few things you can do to enhance this. Always follow up to let the students know the impact of their input: what actions were taken or are planned in response to their insights? Where possible, encourage students to take action in relation to the areas discussed, for example by joining a group at the school or college or by promoting the support offer to their peers. You may wish to meet with the group again to explore the findings in more depth. The students could be invited to form an extra-curricular group of wellbeing champions to contribute to school or college wellbeing strategies.



Key points:

- Ensure that you involve students that represent the diversity of the school population.
- Focus the session on areas of wellbeing that are important to students and that stand out in the data or findings.
- Explain the purpose of the session clearly and set ground rules, including the limits to confidentiality.
- Have a clear idea of how learning from these sessions can be incorporated into school or college plans and share this with the group.
- Collect feedback about the session and offer ways that the students could maintain involvement.
- Use this opportunity to signpost to support available in school or college.

Potential benefits of student engagement sessions

Students attending engagement sessions often welcome the opportunity to feed into their school's or college's plans. When students start to express their opinions, this can prompt others to speak up as they see their peers' views being valued. This sense of being heard can spark continued involvement with issues that matter to them in the school or college community. Teachers find that listening to the students can bring a new perspective to a problem and can help to clarify their next steps. These sessions can also create a space to raise awareness of existing support services.

In our practice examples we found that students were enthusiastic to join the conversation. They gave thoughtful and considered feedback, reflecting on their experiences. They were quick to see things the schools did well as well as areas that could be improved. A few students came forward after the sessions to ask for support with their mental health or wellbeing.

Practice example sessions

The following pages contain sample session plans similar to those we used with schools in the practice examples. These can be adapted to your particular context and we hope they will assist you in engaging young people with wellbeing survey findings.

School	Session length	Students	Format
Walsall Academy	30 minutes	15-20 Year 10 students who had previously completed the wellbeing survey	In-person
Dauntsey's	1 hour	16 students from Year 9-12 who volunteered as wellbeing champions	In-person
Abingdon School	30 minutes	<10 students from Year 13	Hybrid, with the external facilitator joining remotely



Sample session plans

Session plans for 60-90 minute and 30 minute sessions

These sessions ran with 8-20 students but can work for up to 30.

Materials

- presentation
- print out copies of key survey findings to be discussed
- post-it notes or large pieces of paper
- pens

FAQs to prepare for

- How many students were involved in the survey? What were their ages?
- How do you know whether students were answering honestly?
 - You could respond by praising this curiosity and describe efforts made to increase reliability (e.g., assurances given about privacy and anonymity during data collection).
 - See the bonus activity below for a suggestion of how you can harness this conversation to support future data collection.
- How do you know that the survey is representative of the diversity of the student population?

Session structure

	60-90 minute session	30 minute session
1) Session purpose and expectations	5 minutes	5 minutes
2) Introduction to the survey findings	10 minutes	5 minutes
3) Small group activity	25 minutes	10 minutes
4) Whole group activity	25 minutes	5 minutes
5) Session close	5 minutes	5 minutes

1) Session purpose and expectations (5 minutes)

- Explain the purpose of the session and the impact you hope it will have – you could try: *“Today we’re asking the question ‘What next?’ Survey findings are only as helpful as what we do with them!”*
- If relevant, remind students that the findings come from the survey that they or their peers participated in.
- Set ground rules for the session:
 - Establish the limits of confidentiality.
 - Encourage participants to be mindful about what they disclose to the group.
 - Signpost to support that is available.
 - Encourage the students to listen to each other.
 - Stress that there are no right or wrong answers; all perspectives are needed.

2) Introduction to the survey findings (5-10 minutes)

- Explain the purpose of the research, how it was conducted and by whom.
- Describe the survey findings that you will be discussing, what they represent and how they can be interpreted.
- Explain why you want to explore the findings with the students.
- Ask the group if they have any questions.

3) Small group activity

Small group activity for 30 minute session (10 minutes):

- Divide students into groups of four or five.
- Distribute the printed survey key findings or other material you wish to discuss and the post-it notes and pens.
- Choose one area to focus on – it could be an area that is concerning or in need of improvement.
- Brainstorm problems and solutions related to the area of focus, recording thoughts on the paper or post-it notes provided.

Small group activity for 60-90 minute session (25 minutes):

- Divide students into groups of four or five.
- Distribute the printed survey key findings or other material you wish to discuss and the post-it notes and pens.

Task 1 (10 minutes)

- Discuss the findings as a group. What stands out?
- Choose one area to focus on – it could be an area that is concerning or in need of improvement.

Task 2 (15 minutes)

- Brainstorm problems and solutions relating to the area of focus. Record all thoughts on post-it notes or large pieces of paper.

Discussion prompts:

- Thinking about these findings:
 - What already works well in your school or college? Why?
 - What can the school or college do better or differently?
- Thinking about an average day and year at your school or college, are there particular times when additional support would be useful?
- Are there differences for students of different genders? If so, you may wish to explore these differences with students.
- Thinking back to when you were in Year 7/8/9/10/11 (as appropriate), what support did you find helpful? What would you want to be different?

4) Whole group activity

Whole group activity for 30-minute session (5 minutes):

- Take feedback from each group, hearing their ideas and checking in with the rest of the class to see if they agree and if they have anything to add.
- If issues are raised by students don't be too quick to move on; ensure that the students feel heard but when appropriate, try to focus on possible improvements.

Whole group activity for 60-90 minute session (25 minutes):

Task 1 (10 minutes)

- Ask groups to feed back their ideas. (Remember: all ideas are welcome!)
- The teacher or facilitator can explore these ideas by asking open questions like “What makes you think that?”
- This can spark further discussion, so you could take a bit longer to explore this conversation further or move to the next section.
- If issues are raised by students don't be too quick to move on; ensure that the students feel heard but when appropriate, try to focus on possible improvements.

Task 2 (15 minutes)

- Shortlist your ideas as a group.
- Together, choose one or two ideas to focus on and develop further.

Discussion prompts:

- How would this idea work at the school or college?
- Who would need to take part in this idea to make it work?
- What would need to change?
- What groups or structures do we already have that can support this work?

5) Bringing the session to a close (5 minutes)

- At the end, thank the students and let them know how valuable it has been to hear their thoughts.
- Reflect back the key messages that you picked up from the group and, if you can, what you will do with them:
 - Are there particular ideas that are easy to implement?
 - Are there ideas that you can take to a group of teachers or other decision-makers at the school or college?
 - Will you facilitate further opportunities for consultation?
- Signpost to mental health and wellbeing support available at the school or college.
- Leave some time at the end in case any of the students need to speak to the teacher.

After the session, facilitators should:

- summarise key points and debrief as necessary with colleagues
- plan the next steps.

Bonus activity: future engagement in surveys (5-10 minutes)

If the school or college plans on repeating or continuing the survey activity that is being discussed in the session, you may wish to use some time to gain insights about how to improve data collection. Explain the existing processes clearly and pose the following questions:

- What would encourage more students to take part?
- What would make students feel more comfortable in being honest with their answers?

You may feel as if the conversation is just getting started

To keep the conversation going:

- signpost to services available in the school or college
- plan another session as a follow up
- invite the students to take part in any extra curricula wellbeing activities – for example, you may have a wellbeing champions programme or you might consider establishing wellbeing groups.

Using digital tools in sessions

There can be a number of benefits in using online tools in these sessions. While the session format can be largely the same as sessions delivered offline, the use of online tools encourages students to share their thoughts and ideas anonymously. Online tools also provide a visual electronic record of all thoughts and ideas; none are dismissed, forgotten or neglected.

Online apps such as Jamboard or Miro are free to use (within limits); they are easy to access and to use and are visually engaging. As ideas and thoughts are added by participants, they show up anonymously on the main page, which you can show to the group during the session for discussion. To use such apps, students will need access to electronic devices such as laptops, smart phones or tablets.

Resources

For more information about the Wellbeing Measurement Framework visit: <https://www.corc.uk.net/resource-hub/wellbeing-measurement-framework-wmf/>

For help with measuring and monitoring student mental health and wellbeing and evaluating interventions visit:

<https://www.corc.uk.net/for-schools/>

For more information, advice and resources for schools visit:

mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/annafreud.org/schools-and-colleges/5-steps-to-mental-health-and-wellbeing

For self-help resources for young people visit:

annafreud.org/on-my-mind

To use Jamboard visit:

<https://jamboard.google.com/>

To use Mentimeter visit:

<https://www.mentimeter.com/>

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About EBP

The Evidence Based Practice Unit is a child and youth mental health research and innovation unit based at UCL Faculty of Brain Sciences and the Anna Freud Centre. Founded in 2006, this collaboration bridges cutting-edge research and innovative practice in children's mental health. We conduct research, develop tools, provide training, evaluate interventions and disseminate evidence across four themes:

Risk | Resilience | Change | Choice

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