

# THE KEY TO A BRIGHTER, HAPPIER, HEALTHIER CLASSROOM

A Primary Teacher's Guide to Improving Children's  
Mental Health and Wellbeing

By

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Congratulation, you have taken the first step in creating a brighter, happier healthier classroom for your children to grow and flourish.

**Total wellness** for every child in your classroom, is that possible? I believe it is, and other teachers who have embraced *learning through movement* as a concept are already achieving great things with their students. Such as improved mood and behavior, leading to longer time periods spent on task and better learning, leading to improved results in academic attainment, leading to improved confidence and motivation to learn more...PHEW! There are a lot of '*leadings to's* I know, but you can see where I'm going with this. It's a positive upward spiral where the sky is limit.

Going deeper, once you're totally convinced on the **WHY** you should do this, I'll show you **HOW** to do this **without fuss, extra training or expensive resources**. Sound good?... then read on.

The problems faced by teachers everyday around mental wellness are growing each year as we educators (and parents) develop a deeper understanding around how our children respond to the world around them. Tackling mental health issues in school for example ADHD, anxiety and depression is becoming the norm, however many teachers whom I have worked with report that they have found few ideas to manage this daily both as a group and for individuals.

So here I am on my white stallion, colours blazing, here to help educators who would like their classroom to be:

- *Stimulated and academically motivated*
- *Emotionally well*
- *Socially well*
- *Physically healthy, fit and strong*
- *Achieving their potential*

I have been passionately teaching both adults and children all kinds of activity and the benefits of activity for the past 25 years, however it is during the last 4 years I realized why activity so important to achieve Total Wellness in children and adults. Which brings me on to why I wrote this book about improving children's mental wellbeing. I'm passionate about getting children more active, both as an educator and consultant in schools and as a parent of a very active 5-year-old starting her full-time education this year.

This has led me down a road that looked at the entire school day and how inactive many children are MOST of the day. What's this got to do with mental wellbeing I hear you say; well movement and improved mental wellness are absolutely and inextricably linked.

For the past 4 years I have been super interested in studies that look at the many and varied positive ways **activity** can impact on a child's WHOLE development to achieve **TOTAL WELLNESS** for every child. There are so many I feel like I should list them all, however I've grouped them to save brain space.

- **Physically** more able to cope with everyday kids' stuff. Stronger, fitter, healthier, more coordinated and flexible.
- **Mentally** more able to cope with everyday kids' stuff. Improved resilience, confidence and motivation.
- **Emotionally** more able to cope with every kid's stuff. Improved mood management, relationship, behavior, empathy and leadership skills.

There's a study I will share with you in chapter 1 that recorded an improvement in mood and behavior by 67% in children who were active learners over the children who learned in the traditional sedentary method. Ok, so if I get my children more active during the day, I'll have happier better-behaved children – sign me up!

This proposition may seem daunting to many teachers. Groups of teachers I have worked with in the early stages of their transformation have said to me... *"the idea of being active in the classroom just isn't how things are done in our school, I mean what about the furniture"*. Err... furniture can be moved. *"What about time taken up in the curriculum, I can't just get the kids up doing star jumps every 10 minutes"*. Linking activity to your topic using my simple approach is covered in chapter 4.

There is NO evidence whatsoever ANYWHERE that states that sedentary learning is the most effect way to for a child to learn and develop. There is, however, oodles of evidence concluding that active children are not only healthier but are emotionally stronger and are better learners.

I will explore this further in chapter 1, where I'll share some super statistics and our 9 steps to creating a brighter, happier, healthier classroom.

# Chapter 1 - The Key to a Brighter, Happier, Healthier Classroom

What does TOTAL WELLNESS for every child mean to you as a teacher? It's important to understand that when you are developing your WELLNESS programme that it's not all about breathing, a spot of Yoga and a sprinkle of mindfulness. There are 9 steps to take which I will share with you in this book, to guide you on your quest for creating brighter, happier healthier children.

## Step one – Eating for energy, health and learning

Good fuel is essential for growth, energy and development. So inspiring good food choices as early as possible in a child's life can only be a good thing. Chapter 3 covers this in depth and includes ideas for classroom resources.

## Step two – Using activity for improved health, mood and behavior

Mental wellbeing is improved when REGULAR bursts of physical activity are part of our day. When children are sedentary for too long, they lose focus and can start to become agitated, moody and badly behaved. Regular bursts of activity in class, ideally linked to their topic they are studying will refocus the brain, reduce brain fog and improve their mood and behaviour.

Evidence shows us that regular activity is the magic formula for whole school improvement. Regular daily activity can have a HUGELY positive impact on children's learning and academic achievement, as well as on their social and emotional wellness, in addition to all the physical health benefits. Did you know that just 30 minutes of activity every day can play a major part in achieving a child's Total Wellness and whole school improvement?

In 2017, a meta study of 10,000 children across 11 countries showed that the best results are gained when combining high quality PE with Active Learning throughout the day. It showed that attainment could be boosted by an additional year! That focus and behavior improved by an additional 15 minutes per class, and that children were happier and healthier, overall.

*(Ref: Alvarez-Bueno, Celia; Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha et al, Pediatrics, 2017)*

Another study over two years investigated the effects of physically active lessons on academic achievement of children. After the study, children experienced greater learning gains in mathematics and spelling — equating to four months! - That's like a child spending an extra year at primary school and is essentially seven years for the price of six! Who doesn't want that?

*(Ref: Mullender-Wijnsma MJ, Hartman E, de Greeff JW, et al. Pediatrics, 2016)*

So, would you like to provide your children with the opportunity to perform to a higher level, academically? How about a classroom where the children are even more focused and better behaved for longer? And, what about creating a learning environment where children love coming to your lessons, and feel healthier and happier whilst they're at school?

A recent study in Sheffield (UK) schools around active learning showed that a physically active lesson completely closed the gap between the most and least physically active child not just in a lesson but across a whole school day.

However, teachers I've worked with feel that they lack the skills, the confidence, and above all, the time to figure out how to get their children more active throughout the day without losing valuable learning

time. In chapter 4 I give you the tools to create an active learning curriculum and explore why teachers should use activity as a regular tool to learn, improve mood, behavior and social wellness.

### **Step 3 – Teaching Growth Mindset to children**

Learning how to cope in stressful situations and then being mentally strong enough able to find a way to solve a problem is a process that should be addressed as soon as a child can understand - I can't do it yet, but if I practice, I CAN. In chapter 5 I will take you through a whole raft of simple ideas that you can use in your classroom tomorrow!

### **Step 4 – Building Mental Strength in Children**

Coping with the anxieties of school life and then real life requires mental strength. Giving children the tools to cope with their feelings can positively affect a child's perception of a problem or a stressful situation. In Chapter 6 I take you on a guided meditation journey and other teaching methods to use for building resilience and confidence in children.

### **Step 5 - Teaching Mindfulness**

Mindfulness is the ability to be FULLY PRESENT and aware of WHERE we are and WHAT we are doing, and not overly reactive or OVERWHELMED by the world around us. Chapter 7 is full of ideas to try from a mindfulness walk to a Pilates session.

### **Step 6 - Social Wellness**

Building positive relationships, trust and communicating effectively is key to becoming a good and fair member of society. In Chapter 8 I will show you how to change the focus of a Physical Education lesson from skills based to teaching children about trust, listening skills, empathy and leadership.

### **Step 7 – Creating a Healthy Environment**

When children feel proud of their learning space and environment it will improve their mood, behaviour and even reduce stress. In Chapter 9 We look at how to create a healthy, respectful, considerate environment that teaches children social skills ready for adulthood

### **Step 8 – Good quality Sleep.**









A good sleep routine is key to having a happy, productive, fun school day. Deeper sleep in turn improves the ability to cope with stress, plus quality sleep can help to boost the immune system too. Chapter 10 looks at the ways to educate children to make better choices at bedtime to improve their sleep.

### **Step 9 – Total Wellness Ambassador**

Once you have totally nailed the Total Wellness concept in your classroom you can move on to helping others do the same in your school. I'll show you a comprehensive roll out programme to get the whole school on the Total Wellness Bus!

I would like to start the process with a short task. I want you to look at the areas of **total wellness** and grade where you think your children are. Please use the traffic light system and tick the appropriate coloured dots.

**RED** means *needs attention*, **AMBER** means *emerging*, and **GREEN** means *established*

<b>Stimulated</b> 		Notes...
<b>Emotionally Well</b> 	<b>Academically Motivated</b> 	
<b>Socially Well</b> 	<b>Fit and Healthy</b> 	
<b>Achieving Potential</b> 	<b>Functionally Strong</b> 	
		

It's now time to look at the steps more closely to help you decide on your own course of action based on the assessment of what your children's needs are.

I know you'll pull out all the stops to create a brighter, happier, healthier classroom to help children overcome anxiety, manage their mood and negative feelings and achieve their amazing potential.

END

Look out for the next chapter where you will learn all about **step one** which is **eating for energy, health and learning**.

If you have questions or would like to send me your feedback about this chapter, email me at [Imogen@imoves.com](mailto:Imogen@imoves.com) Ref: Book Chapter 1.

Signing off for now.

Imogen.