Essential Guides for 
EARLY CAREER 
TEACHERS 

Mental Well being 
and Self Care
Essential Guides for Early Career Teachers

The Essential Guides for Early Career Teachers provide accessible, carefully researched, quick-reads for early career teachers, covering the key topics you will encounter during your training year and first two years of teaching. They complement and are fully in line with the new Early Career Framework and are intended to assist ongoing professional development by bringing together current information and thinking on each area in one convenient place. The texts are edited by Emma Hollis, Executive Director of NASBTT (the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers), who brings a wealth of experience, expertise and knowledge to the series.

There are three books in the series so far but look out for more as the series develops.

Essential Guides for Early Career Teachers: Assessment
Alys Finch

Essential Guides for Early Career Teachers: Mental Well-being and Self Care
Sally Price

Essential Guides for Early Career Teachers: Special Educational Needs and Disability
Anita Devi
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Essential Guides for EARLY CAREER TEACHERS

Mental Well being and Self-Care

Sally Price
Series editor: Emma Hollis
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Teachers who have accessed well-being coaching in their training and subsequent NQT years tend to keep in touch and report back how having experienced a safe space has helped them. The strategies within these eight chapters come largely from their inspiration and so I would like to thank them as well as my colleagues Matt Barnard and Kate Thirlwall and supervisor Nick Luxmoore. Inspiration from Hannah Wilson’s strength and vision and transformational research from Sonia Blandford have empowered me to believe in the purpose of this contribution to the Essential Guides series. In addition, I would like to thank sincerely all the writers and thinkers acknowledged in the book.

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Thanks too to Juli Beattie, Will Long and the rest of the www.atthebus.org team for their steadfast conviction on the benefits of art as therapy for whole-school communities, staff and young people and their families alike. Thanks also to Hannah Farncombe for her guiding light on both a professional and creative level. Lastly, thanks go to Will Price for reminding me of the importance of Schrödinger’s cat.
Meet the series editor

Emma Hollis
I am Executive Director of NASBTT (the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers) and my absolute passion is teacher education. After gaining a first-class degree in psychology I trained as a primary teacher, and soon became head of Initial Teacher Training for a SCITT provider. I am dedicated to ensuring teachers are given access to high-quality professional development at the early stages of and throughout their careers.

Meet the author

Sally Price
I am a well-being and support officer and am on the central training team at Oxfordshire Teacher Training. I work in schools to support early career teachers with their mental health and well-being, and in teacher training locations with trainees, their mentors and programme leaders. Drawing on over 20 years of teaching experience in secondary and primary settings, I am interested in the role and responsibility of employing schools in nourishing the developing autonomy of those new to the profession, as well as those who have been teaching for longer.
Foreword

As a passionate advocate of high-quality teacher education and continuing professional development, it has always been a source of frustration for me that beyond the ITT year, access to high-quality, structured ongoing professional development has always been something of a lottery for teachers. Access and support have been patchy, with some schools and local authorities offering fantastic opportunities for teachers throughout their careers while in other locations CPD has been given lip service at best and, at worst, is non-existent.

This series was conceived of to attempt to close some of those gaps and to offer accessible professional learning to busy teachers in the early stages of their careers. It was therefore a moment of genuine pleasure when proposals for an entitlement for all early career teachers to receive a package of support, guidance and education landed on my desk. There is now a genuine opportunity for school communities to work together to offer the very best early career development for our most precious of resources – the teachers in our schools.

The aim of this series is to distil some of the key topics which occupy the thoughts of early career teachers into digestible, informative texts which will promote discussion, contemplation and reflection and will spark further exploration into practice. In each edition, you will find a series of practical suggestions for how you can put the ‘big idea’ in each chapter into practice – now, next week and in the long term. By offering opportunities to bring the learning into the classroom in a very concrete way, we hope to help embed many of the principles we share into day-to-day teaching.

Teaching is the best job in the world. Teaching is also a very tough job. In my experience, entrants to the profession generally go in with their eyes wide open, expecting to experience the rough with the smooth – but even then, they are frequently surprised by some of the challenges they face. In too many instances, early career teachers become overwhelmed by the demands placed on them and flounder, losing sight of what attracted them to the profession in the first place. In this title on self care, Sally Price walks you through some simple, practical approaches to taking care of yourself so that you can be the best possible teacher for the pupils in your care. Her message is really quite simple – teaching really is the best job in the world, but to enjoy it to the full you need to put yourself first.

I hope you enjoy exploring this book as much as I have enjoyed editing it.

Emma Hollis
Executive Director, NASBTT
Introduction

At 13 years of age, my friend Louise and I saw our music teacher, Mr Wallace, buying onions in Kwiksave. At the time, we thought the idea of a teacher buying onions was the most hilarious thing in the world. But, of course, teachers do buy onions just like the rest of us – and just like the rest of us, teachers have times in their lives when they don’t feel so great. It is therefore important for you (and everyone else) to realise that, sometimes, it is ok not to feel great. It is even better if you understand what to do when that happens, and ideally have access to the tools to prevent it happening (as much as can ever be possible) in the first place.

This is an interesting title to write since, in my experience, teachers who require guidance on their self care and well-being often will not allow themselves to seek help until it is far too late. All teachers need to practise self care and look after their well-being. You might choose not to call it that, you might not know that’s what you’re doing, or you may not do it until it is too late. This book is responding to the fact that there are clearly many teachers who aren’t in touch with what it is they need to do in order to stay well and happy in their jobs. This is particularly the case for those at the start of their teaching careers: ‘out of those teachers qualifying to teach in state schools in 2012, 35% were no longer in service 5 years later’ (DfE, 2018).

Self care is defined by the Brilliant Idea Studio as the maintenance of your immunity: physical, mental and spiritual. When looking at well-being, as an Early Career Teacher (ECT), you may usefully consider mental well-being as what is occurring internally as opposed to what might be externally visible to school communities. The World Health Organization defines mental well-being as the extent to which we feel cheerful, relaxed, active, rested and interested in life. MHFA England defines four stages of mental health need: whether you are coping, concerning, significant or critical in terms of your level of need; these judgements can be both subjective and objective. Having guided ECTs for many years as they find their way to the right teaching setting for them, I would argue that it is certainly worth prioritising your self care and well-being needs in a preventative capacity alongside your responsibilities as a developing teacher. The consequences of not doing so are far-reaching.

This book hopes to demonstrate that, while it may seem contradictory, seeking support from others can often be the easiest way to discovering that the best solutions lie within your own self. Just as UCET’s Schools’ Reference Group highlighted (Greer, 2018), ‘finding the balance between public and personal responsibility is complex’. But not impossible. The best way I have found to persuade those reluctant to engage with the idea of community responsibility for raised mental health awareness is to consider it not as a tool for ‘indulging learned
helplessness’ but rather as a tool for ‘enabling self-agency’ (Price, 2019). Having worked over the past 20 years within an arena of increasing school accountability and austerity, I have worked with 20 cohorts of staff, trainees and pupils. As I have listened to the frustrations of those learning to learn (both teachers and pupils) in large educational settings, two game-changing words keep cropping up – autonomy and control. I have become increasingly convinced that the frustrations faced by children in school as they struggle between needing support and paradoxically needing independence are directly comparable to the frustrations faced by adults in their early teaching career. Both pupils and new teachers are learning. Both need help. Both need to be trusted to own their learning. With careful support, both can flourish. With too much or too little support, both can flounder. In the eight chapters that follow, I present some solutions which are proving helpful to some teachers in some situations. Indeed, while community awareness and support is key, it is also useful to remember that everyone’s mental health is unique.

From my own experience of working with local primary and secondary colleagues in recruiting and selecting trainees, and in consultation with colleagues across the country, it is evident that the teacher workforce is becoming increasingly diverse, supporting and reflecting the increasingly diverse pupil populations they teach. Diversity of ethnicity, gender and physical disability is subject to regional variation. What is accepted and welcomed in large-city school settings may not so readily be the case in coastal or rural areas, mirroring social patterns. Neurodiversity, however, while being represented in all pupil populations irrespective of location, is only now starting to be welcomed, valued and discussed within the teaching profession. A trainee teacher with whom I worked closely two years ago spoke out at a local meeting on mental health and well-being and then at national level for disabled teachers’ consultation conferences. She is both brave and ground-breaking and represents the importance of the norm accepting the unique. Her pupils are extraordinarily lucky to have her as their inspiration. She has a chronic and managed mental health condition and teaches. She may be unique and she is by no means alone.

My first teaching post started just after the death of Princess Diana. Since then, I have worked with a great team of colleagues; seen many come and go; seen young people at their best and at their worst; been bereaved a few times; experienced divorce, remarriage, miscarriage, brought up kids; bought onions. My first head of department dragged me to the communal staffroom and forced me to get to know colleagues. My second head of department taught me the power of humour. She has an enviable capacity to maintain a healthy philosophical perspective even in the most challenging of times. Latterly – rather than teaching young people – my role focuses on supporting teachers who train with us and who teach across primary, secondary, special and mainstream settings within the county. I’ve also been lucky enough to travel further afield, meet truly inspirational
teachers and specialists and train and learn with many varied minds, all of whom have the same core motivation: that of giving young people the best possible start in life. With their support, these young people are therefore developing the best possible set of sustainable strategies to approach life’s inevitable challenges. Some teachers do this by facilitating a passion for knowledge and a growing confidence and competence in their subject; some do this by supporting the development of social and coping skills; some do both. Firm yet nurturing support as young people grapple with burgeoning independence and the bumps on the way seems to be working well as a strategy for many of the wonderful people I have met. One of whom, Josh Connolly, ambassador of the National Association for Children of Alcoholics (NACOA), believes young people to be ‘naturally resourceful and whole’. I agree. And if this is true, then a teacher’s role is arguably to support young people to engage with and acknowledge their resources, in order to find and enjoy a sustainable way of living and to tap into that resourcefulness. The most efficient way to do this? – active and overt role-modelling.

References


MHFA England (nd) [online] Available at: www.mhfaengland.org (accessed 17 August 2019).


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<th>Notes/links</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A&amp;E</td>
<td>Accident and Emergency</td>
<td>Department of hospital</td>
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<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Appropriate body</td>
<td>Organisation responsible for quality assurance in Newly Qualified Teacher induction at their employing school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALGEE</td>
<td>Approach; Listen; Give support and information; Encourage professional support; Encourage other support for the person, for their friends and family</td>
<td>Mental Health First Aid England guidelines for supporting someone in a mental health first aid situation <a href="http://www.mhfaengland.org">www.mhfaengland.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOB</td>
<td>Any other business</td>
<td>For example, on a meeting agenda <a href="http://www.bacp.co.uk/">www.bacp.co.uk/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>BACP</td>
<td>British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy</td>
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<td>CBT</td>
<td>Cognitive behavioural therapy</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCG</td>
<td>Clinical Commissioning Groups</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPD</td>
<td>Continuing professional development</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPSQ</td>
<td>Cambridge Personal Style Questionnaire</td>
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<tr>
<td>DBT</td>
<td>Dialectical behaviour therapy</td>
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<tr>
<td>DfE</td>
<td>Department for Education</td>
<td><a href="http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education">www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>DSA</td>
<td>Disabled Students’ Allowance</td>
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<td>DSL</td>
<td>Designated safeguarding lead</td>
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<tr>
<td>DT</td>
<td>Design and technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECF</td>
<td>Early Career Framework</td>
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<td>ECT</td>
<td>Early career teacher</td>
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<td>EHCP</td>
<td>Education and Health Care Plan</td>
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<td>GDPR</td>
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<tr>
<td>GP</td>
<td>General practitioner (doctor)</td>
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<td>HR</td>
<td>Human resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>INSET</td>
<td>In-service training</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ITT</td>
<td>Initial Teacher Training</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAC</td>
<td>Looked after child</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAT</td>
<td>Multi-academy trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBTI</td>
<td>Myers-Briggs Type Indicator</td>
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<td>MHFA</td>
<td>Mental Health First Aid</td>
<td><a href="http://www.mhfaengland.org">www.mhfaengland.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>MOT</td>
<td>Ministry of Transport</td>
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<tr>
<td>NACOA</td>
<td>National Association for Children of Alcoholics</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nacoa.org.uk">www.nacoa.org.uk</a></td>
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<td>NASBTT</td>
<td>National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers</td>
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<td>NEF</td>
<td>New Economics Foundation</td>
<td><a href="https://neweconomics.org">https://neweconomics.org</a></td>
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<td>NEU</td>
<td>National Education Union</td>
<td><a href="https://neu.org.uk">https://neu.org.uk</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>NHS</td>
<td>National Health Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>NQT</td>
<td>Newly Qualified Teacher</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>OIA</td>
<td>Office for Independent Adjudicators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONS</td>
<td>Office for National Statistics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUH</td>
<td>Oxford University Hospitals</td>
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<tr>
<td>16PF</td>
<td>16 personality factor tool</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPA</td>
<td>Planning, preparation and assessment time</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRU</td>
<td>Pupil Referral Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>PTA</td>
<td>Parent Teacher Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>QTS</td>
<td>Qualified Teacher Status</td>
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<tr>
<td>RSE</td>
<td>Relationships and sex education</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCITT</td>
<td>School-centred Initial Teacher Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDIP</td>
<td>School Development and Improvement Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDQ</td>
<td>Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SEND</td>
<td>Special Educational Needs and Disability</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLT</td>
<td>Senior leadership team</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMART</td>
<td>Specific, measurable, agreed upon, realistic, time-based</td>
<td>Usually referring to objectives/goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Teaching assistant</td>
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<tr>
<td>TES</td>
<td><em>Times Educational Supplement</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>TS</td>
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<td>UCET</td>
<td>Universities Council for the Education of Teachers</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ucet.ac.uk">www.ucet.ac.uk</a></td>
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