

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: TEACHER AND STUDENT HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The importance of mental health and wellbeing remains at the forefront as teachers and students return to face-to-face teaching over the next few weeks. Much has been said and written about how the period of teaching at home has impacted the mental health and wellbeing of all – some positively, while others negatively.

As HPE teachers we understand the important role physical activity, particularly when linked to education, can have in this area. We understand it is not the panacea for all mental health and wellbeing issues. However, we also understand regular physical activity positively impacts many aspects of an individual's mental health and wellbeing.

Physical activity was highlighted as one of three areas, along with literacy and numeracy, to be a part of each students' day while learning at home. We heard many stories from HPE teachers where their classroom colleagues were asking for ideas on how to encourage students to be active and break up the screen time.

The HPE educative outcomes, as highlighted in our **recent** Tips of the Week HPE (TOTW), were interwoven by many HPE teachers into these activities and messages. By "educating while activating", there is a greater likelihood of students understanding why physical activity is so important, resulting in stronger adherence when they are not being "directed" to be active.

Returning to school provides an awesome opportunity to continue and build on this message – to teachers and to students!

Teacher mental health and wellbeing

Returning to school provides us an opportunity to continue to support and encourage our colleagues to practice behaviours that maintain and improve their mental health. Remind them of the importance of practicing what they want their students to practice to boost mental health and wellbeing!

Role-modeling to students and sharing how they feel, will only serve to reinforce to students the importance of building activity into their lives. It will also help our colleagues, who may not be regularly active, to reap the benefits of an active lifestyle and deal with the added stresses of returning to school.

In stating the obvious, this will be more effective if your colleagues know that you, as a HPE teacher, have an active lifestyle yourself 😊 Ask yourself and your colleagues the simple question: **"How do you feel after just a short bout of activity?"**

Highlighted in the table on next page are a few simple tips from **TOTW 19' Top Tips for Teacher Wellbeing'** written by Therese Joyce.

We encourage you to have a quick read of the 5 key tips (plus the 6th one we have added) and read the entire tip again when you make a few minutes for yourself.

Tip 1: Connect with others	The 5 second good morning with a genuine “how are you”, or taking the time for a good catch up has never been more important
Tip 2: Be active and move your body	Take every opportunity - park your car a little further away, take the stairs, move with your students when you get them to move.
Tip 3: Take notice	Note the simple things, pick one tree and observe each day how the leaves are changing, have you noticed any changes in your colleagues or students! Comment on the positive ones!
Tip 4: Keep learning	How can we build on the ICT skills we have developed, or incorporate all we have learned about our teaching and students into each day. Read TOTW 19 again.
Tip 5: Give a smile, a compliment, or give yourself a good night’s sleep	Ever noticed how a smile or hello brings one back to you and changes the mood in a room. Be the one to lead the change.
Tip 6: Step away from the computer	We have all had so much time in front of the screen these past few weeks it is important to turn it off and read (a book with paper!), have chat or go for a walk.

If we don’t take the time to look after our own mental health and wellbeing, in reality, how helpful will you be to your students in this vital facet of your life? Ask for a few minutes at the staff meeting and / or daily briefing to highlight the importance of maintaining the focus of regular activity across the day, and to take the time to check in with your colleagues. Download this TOTW and the others we have referred to, and place them in prominent areas for others to read. Just a few converts will begin and / or build the momentum.

Student mental health and wellbeing

We know all teachers understand the importance of their students’ mental health and wellbeing. During this unusual time, it is likely some students may feel uneasy, stressed and confused with the changes associated with returning to school and new measures to reduce the spread of infection. It is also likely students will want to check in with each other and debrief about the last few months before they can get onto focusing on school-work.

Let them take the time to support and listen to each other – try to avoid piling on the work to catch up in the first week or two. The following provide some resources and activity ideas for student mental health and wellbeing:

- [TOTW 37: Teaching Mental Health](#)
- [Student Wellbeing Hub website](#)
- [VCAA Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships learning materials](#) – some of the activities particularly emotional literacy, stress management and help seeking may have greater relevance under the current circumstances.
- Observe student behaviour and absences to determine whether you need to check in with specific students and keep notes to see if you can observe a pattern.

Student mental health and wellbeing (continued)

- Have students develop a wellbeing plan, where they provide 2-3 mental, physical and social strategies to maintain or improve their overall wellbeing. Check in after a few weeks to see if they were able to maintain these or whether they would make changes.
- Ask students to check into how they feel before and after physical activity, or at the start or end of a school day – see if they can start to notice what makes them feel happy, stressed, at ease or anything else so they can implement practices to help regulate their own emotions.
- Help make the return to school special for your students and families – some schools and teachers have been dressing up and putting balloons at the gates / classroom doors to welcome students. Others have created little welcome videos to share to students and families giving them an outline of what has happened to them in isolation and why they are excited to see their students / go back to school. It is important to ensure you remind them school is a safe place and it's a really special thing to be returning.

Physical activity as a mental health and wellbeing strategy

As indicated above, physical activity is not the panacea for all problems. We know however, just in the psychological domain, physical activity has the potential to:

- Improve mental health
- Improve emotional well being
- Increase self-esteem and self-confidence Reduce stress and anxiety
- Improve mood
- Improve motivation to be active Improve awareness of capacities

Regular physical activity will translate into students who are in a better mood, feel more confident and less anxious as they learn. There is further evidence they will be more attentive, alert and less distracted. As HPE educators, we have known this for years! When we ask principals and classroom teachers, we know they also know – they just aren't willing, able or as confident to put this into practice. Through their experiences while teaching students at-home, the time may be ripe for more of your colleagues to build this into their practice.

In last week's HPE lunchtime chat, we asked our members about what they would be doing to support students - as expected, they all gravitated towards using physical activity and movement to help improve mental health and wellbeing.

Use some of your Health and Physical Education time to brainstorm with your students:

- How they feel before, during and after activity?
- Has physical activity (or something to do with the experience, e.g.: being outdoors) changed your mood? How much activity they do during a "normal school" week and if this differed from an "remote learning" week. Explore the reasons for any differences.
- If needed, how can they be more active at home, on a weekday and on the weekend? Could you change how you use your recess or lunchtime break to be more active?

The resources and ideas on the next page are ways you can increase the amount of physical activity during the school day other than in HPE:

Physical activity as a mental health and wellbeing strategy (continued)

- [TransformUs!](#) provides some ideas around physical activity for primary which classroom teachers can engage with.
- A quick walk and talk at the start, middle or end of lesson (about lesson content or just a catch up /debrief).
- Energisers / brain breaks or 1-minute fitness on the spot activities can help get them moving regularly during a lesson ([26x Brain Break ideas for the classroom](#) or [20x 3-minute brain breaks](#) provides some ideas for primary students, and [Take a Break Teacher Toolbox](#) provides some secondary ideas).

Questions or comments?

If you have further questions regarding your situation, principals and school staff are encouraged to contact the **Coronavirus (COVID-19) phone line (1800 338 663)**.

Should you need further support during this time, have any questions or comments relating to this TOTW, a topic you'd like to learn more about or would like to contribute to a future tip please feel free to email or phone (03) 9274 8906 a member of our Professional Learning Team, [Bernie Holland](#), [Dr Trent Brown](#) or [Adriana Pinder](#).

Find all TOTWs in the series released to date [here](#) and to access all ACHPER Victoria's HPE at Home Resources please [click here >>](#)

Shifting to member-based content

Since January 2018, we have enjoyed bringing these weekly snippets of valuable content to your inbox. We know from feedback you've found them useful, informative and engaging and we look forward to continuing to provide this service. From Term 3, our members will be able to exclusively access TOTWs as part of their membership. If you are not an ACHPER member, we encourage you to consider membership ([click here](#) to find out more) and the growing suite of benefits it provides.

ACHPER Victoria's purpose is to support the teaching profession in the delivery of quality HPE, we will continue to provide this support and engagement across the entire profession as well as strengthening our suite of benefits and value exclusively to members.