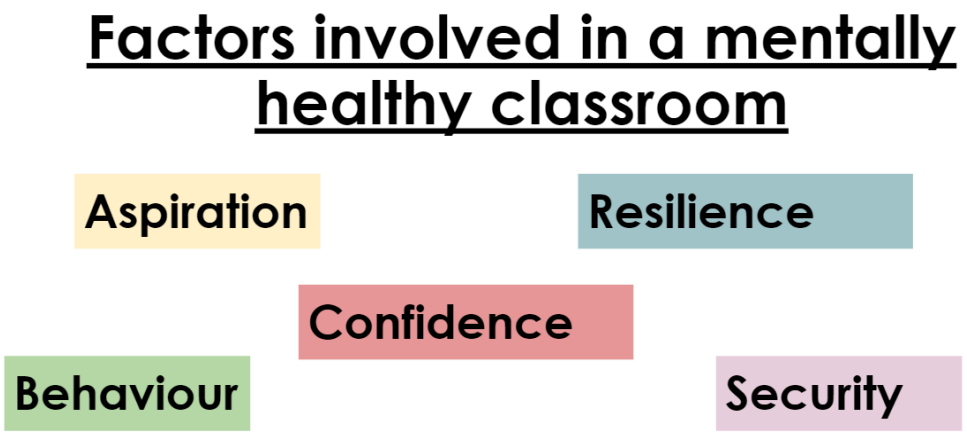
Teacher Advocates:

In the most recent TA session, we discussed ways in which to build and maintain Mentally Healthy Classrooms.

There are many factors that influence the mental health of a classroom and some of the key factors we picked out were:



With these in mind, we came up with some strategies to help develop our mentally healthy classrooms. This list is not exhaustive - if you have more ideas, please share them!

Cramlington Top 10 ways to build and maintain a Mentally Healthy Classroom

1. **There is safety in routine**: Having a set routine that students can anticipate and understand builds **security**, one of the key factors in mentally healthy classrooms. Not only does this include the start of the lesson and transitions, but also the way in which teachers 'set the learning scene' and communicate with students. Learn names as much as possible, as this also helps students feel acknowledged, building on their sense of belonging. A sense of **belonging** was something flagged up by the DfE report on mentally healthy classrooms which was released in 2018.

2. **Behaviour management:** This is an important part of maintaining a mentally healthy classroom and links back to the idea of students being able to anticipate and feel secure in their learning environment.

One key message that came up from the session was that it is important to remember that when reminding a student about how to behave, it is their behaviour we're commenting on, not the student.

3. **We're all human:** Don't be nervous to share your human side with your students. Knowing that their teachers make mistakes, have bad days and struggle with certain concepts, makes them feel more comfortable in expressing themselves. This could lead to students being more able to regulate their emotions as well as building academic **independence** and **resilience**.

4. **We are role models:** Always a good one to remember - we need to model what we want to see in our students' behaviour. We also need to be consistent in our modelling. As teachers, we can model self-regulation for students, walking and talking them through our efforts with a task.

5. **Coordinate assessments:** If it is possible to coordinate assessments across the school, this might be a good way of avoiding students becoming overwhelmed. This may not be feasible at GCSE, but at KS3, do assessment weeks make students feel more confident in their academic progress, or do they feel unable to cope with the challenge of a full week of assessments?

6. **Give students more agency:** If we can find ways to build independence in our students - for example, developing strategies for students to check answers themselves, to know where to find information aside from the teacher - we can give them **tools for success**. Can we find a balance in our classrooms between building resilience and continuing to nurture? What strategies can we come up with to create this balance? It is also worth considering how much we might 'spoon feed' some of our classes. Ask yourself - what support can I take away to build **resilience**? What scaffolds are hindering student **independence**?

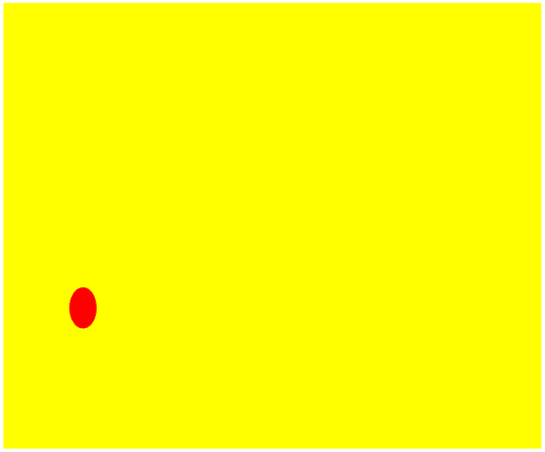
7. **Reiterate growth mindset:** Never forget that a positive growth mindset is key to confidence building. And the more confident in their learning, the happier the student.

8. **Give students the chance to win small:** We have looked at 'low stakes testing' and quizzing as a useful way to build retention - however, these activities serve a dual purpose. When students experience success, they have a more positive attitude towards learning - so give them the chance to experience lots of 'small wins'.

9. **Mental health starter/review:** At the start of the lesson, how often do we check in with students? Is there a way they can indicate, on a scale, how they're feeling today? At the end of the lesson, could they revisit that scale to see what has changed?

10. **Introduce visualisations:** The act of visualisation can be a very powerful way of putting things into perspective for students and teachers alike. One example is the square/dot visualisation.

Mentally healthy classrooms and behaviour
Red dot in a yellow square



"By focusing on the [red] dot, we are forgetting the [yellow] square. This illustrates the need to keep things in perspective."
Bill Rogers, via Tom Sherrington

Although this has previously been used as a behavioural technique for teachers, this could work for students too. Ask them to imagine that the red dot is the thing that is bothering them when they enter the classroom. Then, ask them to imagine that the yellow square is full of

everything that they enjoy in the lesson. You could even ask them to write these things down, allowing them to see a visual representation of the perspective we all seek.

Another example is the 'brain dump', a Lucy Sutton special! The idea is that a student takes a post-it at the start of the lesson, writes down all their concerns/worries/problems that have happened at break or lunchtime and then rips it up and throws it away. This is a way of students freeing their minds for the lesson ahead.